

Foundations Under Attack: Liberalism, Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism

Overview

Have you ever seen a beach house under attack by a hurricane? Wind tears at the roof as water smashes through plate glass windows. The relentless tide churns the water into a sandy maelstrom. Huge waves repeatedly slam into the foundations of the building. It appears inevitable that the whole structure will fall. It is an emotionally draining, sobering experience.

Believers in the last half of the 19th and early 20th century may have had similar feelings in watching the waves of modernism—a secular worldview, rejection of the supernatural, trust in human reason and belief in evolution—undermine their core beliefs. Even theological leaders seemed to be capitulating to this new way of thinking. Would the historic faith upon which Christians had built their lives for 1800 years stand? Would the foundation hold?

Believers faced enormous challenges during these times. Two waves of response became evident—modern liberalism and conservative evangelicalism—as they confronted the following questions:

- Should beliefs based on revelation adapt to new scientific discovery, or is adaptation the first step to capitulation?
- How do we interpret scripture in light of modern science and scholarship?
- What is the proper balance between faith and intellect?
- Should Christians engage an intellectual world that questions core beliefs, or should they separate from that world?
- Should Christians engage other Christians who may not agree with them on every doctrinal point, or should they remain separate?

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Understanding the Setting

- 1700
1768-1834 Friedrich Schleiermacher, “Father of Modern Religious Liberalism”
- 1800
1822-89 Albrecht Ritschl
1859 Darwin, *Origin of Species*
1871 Darwin, *Descent of Man*
1881-1937 J. Gresham Machen
1881 Warfield and Hodge, *Inspiration* (defends inerrancy of Scripture)
1889 Moody Bible Institute founded
1892 Abbott, *The Evolution of Christianity*
- 1900
1910-15 *The Fundamentals* published
1923 Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*
1924, 29 New seminaries founded by fundamentalists
1925 Scopes “Monkey Trial”
1941 National Association of Evangelicals formed
1947 Henry, *Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*
1948 Billy Graham crusade in Los Angeles
1956 *Christianity Today* founded

Step 1: Grasp the Issue

Sound Bites

“Once again I must say that God, by the discoveries of science, has revealed more fresh truth respecting His own glory than all theology has declared for us since the last of the apostles.” – Clergyman Frederic William Farrar

“It might be helpful to think of liberal theology as a suspension bridge. The footing of one tower is planted upon ‘modern thought’ and the foundation of the other rests upon ‘Christian experience.’ Unfortunately, the ground around both towers is shifting soil, and those who take the bridge disagree over which is the safer side.” – Bruce Shelley

“In liberalism a God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross.” – H. Richard Niebuhr

“Indeed, memory loss was one of fundamentalism’s biggest defects. The fundamentalist movement often seemed to think that the history of the ‘real’ church jumped from the early church to a quick stop at Martin Luther and then on to the fundamentalist-modernist controversies of the early twentieth century. . . . Traces of this kind of spiritual and theological amnesia can still be detected in the evangelical movement.” – Richard Mouw

“Evangelicalism, if it is to differ from fundamentalism, has to work out and assert boldly a theological and biblical position that fully abandons the fundamentalist ideas. The classic fundamentalist thinkers were logically right: you have to accept the entire fundamentalist system, down to every detail. The system is by its nature, tied to extremism. Any substantial deviation or admission of weakness, and, logically, the whole thing must collapse.”

– James Barr

Case Studies

As you visit your daughter, Beth, at school, you hear her discussing a recent lecture from her “History of Religions” class. Her friend Stephanie says, “Every religion has powerful stories which convey truth. We attach to each story the meaning that is important. They are true, but not necessarily literally true or scientifically accurate.” Immediately, Beth answers, “Unlike Greek myths, the stories in the Bible are all true, not just in their meaning but also literally and historically. The Christian faith is based on the reality of miracles, accuracy of details in stories, and a literal understanding of the creation account. Once you abandon

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literal truth you are left with nothing but subjective interpretation. You rely on the worldview of the reader—not the revelation of God.” Somewhat to your surprise, they turn to you for your thoughts.

What would you say? Do you agree with your daughter’s defense of the gospel?

When discussing an article written about evolution in a leading magazine, your friend explodes. “They are all a bunch of liars or idiots. I think we should ignore these intellectual eggheads who teach evolution and don’t accept the literal teaching of scriptures. This is what happens when people think they are so smart. We just need to believe and obey Jesus. Anything else will just confuse us.” You find yourself taken back by the intensity of your friend’s statements, but wonder if he doesn’t have a point.

Do you agree? If not, what would you say?

The debate at the elder’s meeting has become surprisingly hot. “We have to draw lines over doctrine or we lose who we are. I came from a church that was so open and liberal they lost all sense of the gospel. History teaches us that without lines we slide down a slope from which there is no return.” As he emphatically sits down, another elder arises, “Although clarifying core beliefs is important, I sometimes think this church thinks that was the Great Commission, not spreading the gospel. It keeps listing new doctrines that must be believed to be Christian. It’s like we have a bunker mentality in which we try to defend ourselves from any intellectual inquiry.” As the moderator of the discussion, the room looks to you for your thoughts.

How open should the church be to intellectual inquiry? What are the risks? What are the risks of overly defining the faith?

What are some questions we need to explore as we seek to gain a better understanding of this issue?

Step 2: Study the Scriptures

Acts 17:16-23

- What can we learn about intellectual discussion from Paul’s Athens experience?

Romans 14:1-13

- In what spirit are Christians to cooperate with each other?
- Who decides what is a “disputable” matter on which we can disagree? Who decides what issues—the fundamentals—we all must agree on?

1 Corinthians 3:18-23

Paul openly addresses the issue of human wisdom devoid of God’s revelation.

- What is Paul’s concern?
- Is he distrustful of intellectual exploration and reason?

Step 3: Consult Other Sources

“A Bridge for Intelligent Moderns,” by Bruce Shelley.

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“Conservative Theology Hardens Traditional Categories,” by Roger Olson.

Excerpts from chapter thirty-three of *The Story of Christian Theology*.

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“The Struggle Continues,” by Timothy Clark.

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A Bridge for Intelligent Moderns

by Bruce Shelley

On his eighty-fifth birthday in 1920, Lyman Abbott, who had been one of America's most influential ministers in the 1890s, looked back three-quarters of a century to his staunch Puritan upbringing. He recalled his youthful view of God as "a kind of awful and omnipresent police justice" and his own self-image as "a scared culprit who knows he is liable to punishment but does not clearly know why."

Long before 1920, however, along with many other Americans and Europeans, Abbott had ceased to think of God as an "omnipresent policeman" and man as a "scared culprit." The Western world had undergone too many changes and adopted too many new ideas in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

Abbott was typical of a large number of American ministers whose background included a pious Protestant home, but who had studied in Germany or in an American seminary where continental scholarship was treasured, and who had adopted "liberal" religious convictions.

The events of the twentieth century have been unkind to the liberal creed, but every major Protestant denomination continues to reflect the impact of liberal theology. It is hard to argue with Professor Sydney E. Ahlstrom's judgment when he says the liberals "precipitated the most fundamental controversy to wrack the churches since the age of the Reformation." The reason lies in their ambitious objective. They tried to lead the Protestant churches into the new world of modern science, modern philosophy, and modern history. In his autobiography *The Living of These Days*, Harry Emerson

Fosdick, minister at the influential Riverside Church in New York City, put it well when he said the central aim of liberal theology was to make it possible for a man "to be both an intelligent modern and a serious Christian."

The Aims of Protestant Liberalism

Protestant liberalism, then, engaged a problem as old as Christianity itself: how do Christians make their faith meaningful in a new world of thought without distorting or destroying the gospel? The apostle Paul tried and succeeded. The early Gnostics tried and failed. The jury is still out on liberalism but Christian public opinion tilts heavily in the direction of failure. No one expressed the irony of liberalism better than H. Richard Niebuhr when he said in liberalism "a God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a Cross."

Beyond its rather clear goal, definitions of religious liberalism are no easier than those of political liberalism. Many deny that Protestant liberalism is "a theology" They prefer an "outlook," or an "approach," or a "spirit." Thus, Henry Sloane Coffin at New York's Union Seminary once said liberalism is that "spirit" that reveres truth supremely and therefore craves freedom to discuss, to publish, and to pursue what it believes to be true.

No doubt this is the outlook of liberals, but is that all? Doesn't this "spirit" lead to identifiable "convictions"? I think so. And that "spirit" and those "convictions" together constitute Protestant liberalism.

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It might be helpful to think of liberal theology as a suspension bridge. The footing of one tower is planted upon “modern thought” and the foundation of the other rests upon “Christian experience.” Unfortunately, the ground around both towers is shifting soil, and those who take the bridge disagree over which is the safer side. That is why Professor Kenneth Cauthen finds two fundamental types of liberalism. He calls them “evangelical liberalism” and “modernistic liberalism.”

Cauthen suggests that the evangelical liberals were “serious Christians”—to borrow Fosdick’s terms—who were searching for a theology which could serve “intelligent moderns.” Evangelical liberals, then, took greater confidence in the tower resting on Christian experience.

On the other side of the bridge were modernistic liberals who were “intelligent moderns” hoping to be considered “serious Christians” in some sense. They found greater support in the tower resting on “modern thought.”

Perhaps the best way to explore theological liberalism, then, is to take a close look at “modern thought” and then at “Christian experience.”

Liberals believed that Christian theology had to come to terms with modern science if it ever hoped to claim and hold the allegiance of intelligent men of the day. They refused, therefore, to accept religious beliefs on authority alone. They insisted that faith had to pass the tests of reason and experience. Man’s mind, they believed, was capable of thinking God’s thoughts after him, and the best clues to the nature of God were human intuition and reason.

The Christian, they said, should keep his mind open to truth from any source. New facts may well change traditional beliefs that rest on

no more than custom and time, but unexamined faith is not worth having.

By surrendering so completely to the “modern mind” liberals accepted the assumption that the universe was one grand, harmonious machine or perhaps an extremely complex growing organism. Whatever the image—a watch or a plant—the point is unity, harmony, coherence.

The biblical account of creation, however, recognizes certain important “orders” in the universe: inanimate matter, plants, animals, man, and God. That didn’t bother liberal theology. It pressed on for unity or continuity. It reduced distinctions between revelation and natural religion, between Christianity and other religions, between saved and lost, between Christ and other men, between man and God.

Two technical theological terms are crucial here—“immanence” and “transcendence.” Immanence carries the idea of God dwelling in the world and working through nature. Extreme immanence is pantheism, which says that God is the world and the world is God. Transcendence implies the reality of God apart from the world. Extreme transcendence is found in the faith of the deists, for whom God is as separate from the world as a watchmaker from his watch.

Liberals felt that the old orthodox Christian idea of a God somewhere beyond the universe was unacceptable to modern men. So they tended to identify the supernatural and the spiritual and then to link the spiritual with human consciousness, the intellectual and emotive side of man. This allowed them to consider man and nature in a kind of fundamental harmony. The life coursing through nature and man they called “God.”

This immanent view of God seemed to fit the results of scientific studies. Instead of suddenly breaking through the clouds to create

the world, God, they said, had been working for ages through natural law, slowly building the universe as we find it today. Most liberals agreed with the poet who said, “Some call it evolution, and others call it God.”

Evolution was the theory that held that all complex living things have developed from simple forms through the operation of natural selection. Thus, no species is fixed and changeless. In 1785 James Hutton had attributed the earth’s development to natural rather than supernatural causes. Confirmation of the view came in Sir Charles Lyell’s epoch-making *Principles of Geology* (1830). Lyell showed that the earth’s surface had been formed by natural causes operating over a vast period of time. Such a conception of geologic time was essential for any theory of evolution based on changes in species over many thousands of generations.

Enter Charles Darwin

The scientist whose name became synonymous with evolution was Charles Darwin (1809-1882). After studying medicine and preparing at Cambridge University for the ministry, Darwin became a naturalist. From 1831 to 1836 he studied the specimens he had collected while on a surveying expedition with the ship *Beagle* along the coast of South America.

In 1859 Darwin’s views appeared in his *Origin of Species*. He contended “that species have been modified during a long course of descent . . . chiefly through the normal selection of numerous successive, slight, favourable variations.” *The Origin of Species*, the most important book of the century; revolutionized the concepts about the origin and evolution of life on planet earth. Darwin followed his first bombshell by a second. In 1871 his *Descent of Man* applied the natural

selection to human beings and reached the controversial conclusion that man’s ancestors were probably monkeylike animals.

Such conclusions threw many religious people on the defensive. Some vigorously rejected the new scientific views. If man is not specially created by God and “fallen” from God’s favor, where is the need for Christ’s salvation? Others attempted to reconcile their religious beliefs with evolution. As time went on liberals came to believe that the evolutionary theory supplemented rather than contradicted the basics of Christianity. They considered growth and development as God’s way of revealing himself to man. In 1892 Lyman Abbott, then minister at the Plymouth Church in Brooklyn, New York, wrote *The Evolution of Christianity* and attempted to show that “in the spiritual, as in the physical, God is the secret and source of light.” He spoke of the evolution of the Bible, of the church, and even of the soul.

As serious as the challenge of science was to orthodox Christianity it was clearly secondary to the new views of history. Science could only question God’s rule in the physical world, but historical criticism advanced directly to the domain of the Christian faith, to the revelation of God in the Bible.

The term for the application of the principles of history to the Bible is “biblical criticism.” The term *criticism* is somewhat misleading. Its primary purpose is not to tear the Bible to pieces, although to many an orthodox Christian that is what seemed to be happening. Actually, the Bible critic is simply a scholar who studies the Bible to find its more exact meaning. He is critical in the sense that he tries to find rational or scientific reasons for his conclusions rather than to accept the dogmas of the church.

Biblical criticism came to be expressed in

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two forms, what is sometimes called “lower” and “higher” criticism. The lower critic dealt with problems of the text, and tried to weigh the merits of the many manuscripts of the Bible to find the earliest and most reliable text of Scripture. Lower criticism produced little that troubled the orthodox.

Higher criticism, however, proved another matter. The higher critic is not primarily interested in the accuracy of the text; he is interested in the meaning of the words. He wants to read between the lines and get behind the text to the events as they really happened. To do so, he must find out when each passage of Scripture was written, who wrote it, and to whom and why it was written. The higher critic believes that we can only understand the Bible if we see it against its background. For example, a Psalm takes on quite a different meaning when the critic concludes it was not written by David, as tradition believed, but that it was a folk song that grew out of the sufferings of the Jews while in exile.

The methods of higher criticism were not entirely new, but they had been limited to writings other than Scripture. In the nineteenth century the method was applied to the Bible as if the Bible were any other ancient book whose credentials had to pass the standards of historical methods. This did result in conclusions that shook orthodoxy.

Critics generally agreed that Moses did not write the first five books of the Bible, as Christians had always believed. Instead they were written by at least four different writers. Among other things, this meant we have two different stories of the Creation in Genesis. Critics also thought that those books and passages that seem to tell the future were not prophecy at all but were written not before but after the events mentioned. Scholars also generally concluded that the Gospel of John, long the favorite Gospel of the orthodox, was

not written by the apostle John and that it was not good history. The first three Gospels, called the Synoptics, were dated much earlier than John’s and were considered more reliable.

One of the central concerns of higher criticism was the search for the “historical Jesus.” The critics assumed that Jesus, as he lived in history, was different from the Jesus whom we find portrayed in the Gospels. They tried to read between the lines and discover what Jesus had really been like. They assumed that the early church and the Gospel writers had added many things to the biblical account so that the problem was to sift the authentic sayings and doings of Jesus from the later additions.

Scores of lives of Jesus were written during the nineteenth century, each claiming that it portrayed the true Jesus. Two of the best known are *The Life of Jesus* by David Friedrich Strauss (1835-1836) and Ernest Renan’s *The Life of Jesus* (1863). Although the various “lives” contradicted each other at many points, they did agree in removing the miraculous elements. They all assumed that science had proved miracles impossible. And they agreed Jesus had not taught he was the Messiah or that the world was coming to an end when he would return to set up the kingdom of God.

The Impact of Biblical Criticism

More important, however, than any of these details of biblical criticism was the fact that criticism threw doubt upon the belief the Bible is an infallible authority for Christian faith and practice.

Liberals welcomed higher criticism because they recognized a radically different view of the Bible was necessary for “intelligent moderns.” They were happy to be

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freed from the need to apologize for the whole Bible as the infallible Word of God. They no longer had to defend a God who ordered the Israelites to kill their enemies to the last woman and child or who sent bears to eat children who poked fun at a prophet.

The studies of the higher critics, said the liberals, make it clear that God has revealed himself through an evolutionary process, just as he created the world. Beginning with primitive, bloodthirsty ideas, the Bible traces how the Jews slowly came to grasp the idea of a righteous God who can be served only by one who does justly, loves mercy, and walks humbly with his God. This progressive revelation of God finds its fulfillment in Jesus, where God is portrayed as the loving Father of all men.

When liberals could no longer rest in the traditional doctrines of orthodoxy—which they felt science and history had destroyed—they found their needed assurance in the other pillar of their bridge: “Christian experience.”

In the early nineteenth century an artistic and intellectual movement arose called Romanticism. This was a way of looking at life through feelings. Romanticism insisted that man was no cog in human society; he was a vibrant part of nature. Revolting against society’s rules, human reason, and traditional authority; Romanticism stressed the

individual, his spirit, and his longing for the ultimate.

Romanticism swept through Christian circles and spoke often of “the living Christ” within human spirits. Why trouble about formal and external creeds when so intimate and so undeniable a certainty ruled every soul? As Tennyson wrote:

Speak to Him, thou, for He hears,
and Spirit can meet—
Closer is He than breathing, and
nearer than hands and feet.

When he was asked to interpret the American situation before the International Congregational Council in London in 1891, Dr. Lewis F. Stearns of Bangor Seminary in Maine, said, “We are coming to understand that it is the recognition of the invincible reality of spiritual Christianity which is going to give our theology its great power in the future. . . . Criticism may assail the historical facts of revelation: rationalism may urge objections to its doctrines; but the surf on our coast of Maine might as easily overthrow the granite cliffs against which it breaks as criticism and rationalism disturb the Christian realities which stand firm in the experience of the individual believer and the church.”



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Conservative Theology Hardens Traditional Categories

by Roger Olson

Once the full impact of liberal Protestant theology was felt, a stern reaction erupted from theologians committed to forms of Protestant orthodoxy. Around 1910 the great Dutch theologian and statesman Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) declared,

There is no doubt . . . that Christianity is imperilled by great and serious dangers. Two life systems are wrestling with one another, in mortal combat. Modernism is bound to build a world of its own from the data of the natural man, and to construct man himself from the data of nature; while, on the other hand, all those who reverently bend the knee to Christ and worship Him as the Son of the living God, and God himself, are bent upon saving the “Christian Heritage.” This is the struggle in Europe, this is the struggle in America, and this also, is the struggle for principles in which my own country is engaged, and in which I myself have been spending all my energy for nearly forty years.¹

Many other Protestant thinkers and leaders felt the same way: that liberal theology was threatening to destroy authentic Christianity and even the “Christian heritage” in Western culture.

Out of Protestant orthodoxy arose a militant theology of reaction against liberal theology and modern thought in general that

came to be called fundamentalism. While seeking simply to preserve classical Protestant theology and defeat liberal accommodation to modern thought, fundamentalism ended up developing a new form of Protestant theology that was rationalistic, separatistic and absolutistic. That is, full-blown fundamentalist theology tended to develop absolute systems of internally coherent doctrinal propositions that must either be accepted entirely without question or rejected totally. Anyone who questioned even one point of a fundamentalist Protestant doctrinal system could be accused of heresy if not apostasy. This was characteristic of extreme fundamentalism’s overreaction to liberal theology’s doctrinal relativism.

Fundamentalism—A Contested Term and Category

We have already noted how many theological labels and categories are imprecise and often stretched, misused and abused. The same is true of *fundamentalism* and *fundamentalist*. What began as a label for a theological movement defending Protestant orthodoxy against the “acids of modernity” and dissolution by liberal theology is frequently used as a term of derision and ridicule toward any fanatical, militant form of religion. Scholars of religion have spent thousands of hours and dollars attempting to pin down the essence of fundamentalism because of that term’s almost universal misuse

¹ Abraham Kuyper, quoted in Alan P. R. Sell, *Theology in Turmoil: The Roots, Course and Significance of the Conservative-Liberal Debate in Modern Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1986), p. 108.

in the mass media and by people in the street.² Here the term will be used in its historical-theological sense. Every attempt will be made to avoid using the label as journalists often do—to describe and marginalize ardent, passionate religious belief. Many people—Christian and non-Christian—are strong, passionate believers in religion and spirituality without being fundamentalists. True fundamentalism is a particular twentieth-century form of Protestant orthodoxy largely defined by its reaction against liberal and modernist theologies such as we discussed in the last chapter.³

If the essence of liberal Protestant theology was maximal acknowledgment of the claims of modernity within Christian thought, the essence of fundamentalist theology may be described as maximal acknowledgment of the claims of Protestant orthodoxy against modernity and liberal theology. Its core attitude and approach is what has been called “maximal conservatism” in Christian theology. Its passion is to defend the verbal inspiration and absolute infallibility (inerrancy) of the Bible as well as all traditional doctrines of Protestant orthodox theology perceived as under attack by modern thought and liberal theology. Over the decades from about 1910 to 1960, this fundamentalist

project became increasingly intense and militantly separatistic as different fundamentalist leaders disagreed among themselves about the “fundamentals of the faith” and degrees of separation from secular and modernistic religion. In the beginning of the movement the fundamentals of the faith needing a defense were fairly few and obvious. By the 1940s and 1950s many acknowledged fundamentalist leaders had added premillennialism (belief in a literal one-thousand-year reign of Christ on earth after the second coming) and young-earth creationism (belief that God created all of nature and everything in it less than ten thousand years ago in a literal week of twenty-four-hour days) to the list of essential doctrines.

Historically and theologically, it is wrong to label anything before the rise to dominance of liberal Protestant theology fundamentalism. The latter movement is a twentieth-century reaction against the former. It is tied to it as its counterpoint. Without liberal theology there would be Protestant orthodoxy, but not fundamentalism per se. In addition, it is historically and theologically wrong to label as “fundamentalist” anyone who believes strongly and passionately in religious doctrines or promotes them through evangelism. Finally, it is a false stereotype that depicts all fundamentalists as uneducated, socially and economically disadvantaged persons on the fringes of modern society. Many fundamentalists are educated, affluent people, and that’s always been the case.

Historically and theologically, then, fundamentalists are those Protestant Christians who defend entire, detailed systems of very conservative doctrines against perceived modernist, liberal encroachments and dilutions, and they often call for and practice separation from Christians who are guilty of

² A major scholarly study of fundamentalism that focuses on its sociological aspects and tends to use the label very broadly is the series of five volumes by Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, ed., *The Fundamentalism Project* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991-1995).

³ The most accurate and insightful scholarly accounts of Protestant fundamentalism are those written by historian George Marsden. See his two excellent volumes: *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); and *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991).

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participating in or condoning modernism in theology. More often than not, fundamentalists insist on belief in the supernatural, verbal inspiration of the Bible, absolute biblical inerrancy with regard to historical and natural as well as theological matters, a literalistic biblical hermeneutic, and strong opposition to any and all deviations from these principles or fundamental beliefs of conservative Protestantism. One late-twentieth-century fundamentalist historian of the movement defines it this way: “Historic fundamentalism is the literal exposition of all the affirmations and attitudes of the Bible and the militant exposure of all non-Biblical affirmations and attitudes.”⁴

The Fundamentalist Movement

As a distinct movement of Protestant Christianity, fundamentalism began around 1910. Scholars debate endlessly the exact time and nature of its birth and even the origin of the label “fundamentalism.” Nearly all agree, however, that the publication of a series of booklets called *The Fundamentals* beginning in 1910 was a crucial catalyst and a possible source of the movement’s name. Inspired by the great revivals of evangelist Dwight Lyman Moody (1837-1899), dismayed and appalled by the growing influence of liberal theology, and energized by the resurgent Protestant orthodoxy of Warfield and others, two wealthy Christian businessmen sponsored the publication and free distribution of twelve collections of essays by leading conservative Protestant scholars. *The Fundamentals* were sent free of charge to thousands of pastors, denominational leaders, professors and even

YMCA directors all over the United States. The first volume contained defenses of the virgin birth by Scottish theologian James Orr and of the deity of Christ by Warfield, as well as a critique of higher criticism of the Bible by a Canadian Anglican canon.⁵

The Fundamentals tapped into a reservoir of conservative Protestant anxiety and helped to galvanize a conservative response to liberal theology and the increasingly popular and influential social gospel. Throughout the following decade several groups of antiliberal Christians formulated lists of fundamentals of the faith. Often these lists of essential doctrines were conditioned by liberalism in that they placed at the heart of Christian belief doctrines perceived as threatened by that theology. Even more to the point, some of the lists included beliefs never before considered essential Christian doctrines by any significant group of Christians. An example is belief in the premillennial return of Christ. Along with biblical inerrancy; the Trinity; the virgin birth of Christ; the fall of humans into sin; Christ’s substitutionary atonement, bodily resurrection and ascension; the belief that Christ would return visibly and bodily to rule and reign on earth for one thousand years before the final resurrection and judgment was elevated from an opinion held by some Christians to a “fundamental of the faith” by the World’s Christian Fundamentals Association founded by leading fundamentalist minister W B. Riley (1861-1947) in 1919. Even some other very conservative Protestants were shocked by this because Protestant orthodoxy generally and Princeton theology in particular never held to premillennialism. One may be forgiven for suspecting that Riley and certain other fundamentalists were simply elevating to

⁴ George W. Dollar, *A History of Fundamentalism in America* (Greenville, S.C.: Bob Jones University Press, 1973), n.p.

⁵ *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Testimony, 1910).

essential status pet doctrines that they knew no one with even moderately liberal or progressive views could or ever would affirm. Already emerging from within fundamentalism as early as 1919, then, was a tendency within the movement toward sectarian divisiveness and the use of shibboleths (tricky tests) to determine whether Christians were perfectly sound and pure in doctrine.

The first group of any size or significance to label its members “fundamentalists” was the Fundamentalist Fellowship founded in 1920 by the editor of a leading conservative Baptist magazine known as the *Watchman-Examiner*. Curtis Lee Laws was at first more moderate than W. B. Riley and tried to maintain fundamentalism as a movement within the broader church for the preservation and defense of true fundamentals of the faith. Throughout the decades of the 1920s and 1930s, however, moderate fundamentalists and more militant fundamentalists grew closer together as they perceived their common enemy—liberal theology—growing in strength. In fact, liberal Protestant theology of the classical Ritschlian type was waning during these decades and being replaced by neo-orthodoxy and a chastened form of liberalism. Nevertheless, fundamentalists tended to see all but their own movement as “liberal,” and even neo-orthodoxy was labeled a “new modernism” by some of them because most of its proponents rejected the inerrancy of the Bible.

During the heyday of early fundamentalism in the 1920s, the leading scholarly theologian embraced by the movement who embraced it in return was J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937). Machen studied under Warfield at Princeton Seminary and taught New Testament there from 1906 to 1929. After Warfield’s death in 1921, the

mantle of leadership of the Princeton school of theology fell upon Machen’s shoulders, and he engaged in theological and ecclesiastical battles against what he perceived as the rising tide of liberal theology in his own Presbyterian denomination and in American mainstream Protestantism generally. Machen was a genuine scholar who studied New Testament and theology at German universities before beginning his career at Princeton. Even his liberal theological opponents could not fault his scholarship or dismiss him as a raving obscurantist, as many of them tended to do with other fundamentalists. Machen’s book *Christianity and Liberalism* was published in 1923 and created a furor.⁶ In it the Princeton theologian argued that liberal Protestant theology represented a different religion from Christianity and that its proponents ought to be honest enough to admit that. He asserted, “If a condition could be conceived in which all the preaching of the Church should be controlled by the liberalism which in many quarters has already become preponderant, then, we believe, Christianity would at last have perished from the earth and the gospel would have sounded forth for the last time.”⁷ But Machen went beyond merely *asserting* that polemical thesis to *arguing* for it with strong arguments based on his thorough knowledge of biblical studies—including modern higher-critical methods—and the history of Christian theology.

One reason that Machen’s book created such a stir was that a leading secular commentator, Walter Lippmann, agreed with its basic argument and called upon liberal Protestants such as the influential New York

⁶ J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1985).

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

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minister Harry Emerson Fosdick (1878-1969) to respond to it. Fundamentalists looked upon Machen as a hero and regarded his book and its reception by Lippmann as a great triumph. Machen allowed the fundamentalists to embrace him as their scholarly spokesman even though he did not completely fit their mold. While an ardent defender of Protestant orthodoxy and biblical inerrancy, he was not sympathetic with 1920s fundamentalism's increasingly narrow antievolution and premillennial views. He agreed with Hodge and Warfield about evolution and completely rejected premillennialism in favor of a traditional Reformed amillennial view of the kingdom of God⁸ at a time when many leading spokesmen for the movement were singling out Darwin and evolution as the great enemies of the true faith and including premillennialism as one of Christianity's fundamentals. Machen's prestige among fundamentalists increased as he gradually separated from the mainstream of Presbyterianism under tremendous pressure from its more liberal hierarchy. In 1929 he was forced out of his own denomination for "insubordination" at an infamous ecclesiastical trial where he was not allowed even to defend himself. After that he was considered a martyr even by fundamentalists who disagreed with his particular views on evolution and the end times.

A turning point for fundamentalism came in 1925 during the famous "Scopes monkey trial" in Dayton, Tennessee, which has been immortalized by the Broadway play *Inherit the Wind* and two movies based on it. One of

⁸ A fascinating account of Machen's relationship with fundamentalism is contained in D. G. Hart, *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994). Hart points out the ironies of that relationship.

the emerging leaders of fundamentalism was Nebraska politician and statesman William Jennings Bryan (1860-1925), a former candidate for president and President Wilson's secretary of state. After his political career ended, the folk hero of prairie populism became a leading spokesman for fundamentalism and tireless campaigner against "godless evolution." In 1925 the newly founded American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) manipulated the arrest of a high-school biology teacher named John Scopes for allegedly teaching evolution against Tennessee state law. Scopes was not sure he had taught evolution, but he agreed that the state law was unconstitutional and the entire purpose of his arrest and trial was to test that in court. Fundamentalists by and large supported such laws and arranged for Bryan to be the visiting celebrity prosecutor of the case. The ACLU hired famous Chicago trial lawyer and agnostic Clarence Darrow to defend Scopes. The trial turned into a media circus as the first-ever live coast-to-coast broadcast on radio. Nationally famous antifundamentalist journalist H. L. Mencken reported the trial blow by blow in his newspaper columns. The trial's result was the conviction of Scopes but also the humiliation of fundamentalism. Bryan's answers to Darrow's questions on the witness stand were embarrassingly naive, and Darrow and Mencken together made Bryan and the forces of fundamentalism arrayed against evolution look like obscurantist fools bent on turning back the cultural clock to premodern and prescientific days. Five days after the trial, Bryan died in humiliation, and eventually the antievolution laws were struck down by higher courts.⁹

⁹ People who know of the Scopes trial only through the play (or the movies) *Inherit the Wind* know little about it. The true story is told in any historical book about the

Before 1925 fundamentalism was a cultural and theological force to be reckoned with. It had a serious chance of turning back the tide of liberal theology and returning at least some of the mainstream Protestant denominations to Protestant orthodoxy. Many scholars, however, believe that by allowing antievolutionism to become its rallying point, and by adding relatively minor views such as premillennialism to its theological agenda, and by insisting on absolute inerrancy combined with a literalistic hermeneutic, fundamentalism doomed itself to theological obscurity. Be that as it may, there is no doubt that after 1925 and especially after Machen's departure from the Presbyterian Church and Princeton in 1929 to found a rival denomination and seminary, fundamentalism went into a lengthy period of retreat. Fundamentalist leaders bickered among themselves not only about strategy but also about minor doctrinal matters and fine points of lifestyle, church polity and degrees of separation. Emerging as major voices within the movement were men like John R. Rice, Bob Jones and Carl McIntire, who insisted on the practice of "biblical separation"—the refusal to fellowship or cooperate with other conservative Christians who fellowshipped or cooperated with nonfundamentalist Christians. During the 1940s and 1950s, when young evangelist Billy Graham was a rising star, these and other extreme fundamentalists—his

trial, and many have been written. An excellent collection of scholarly historical treatments of the event is contained in chapter six of Willard B. Gatewood Jr., ed., *Controversy in the Twenties: Fundamentalism, Modernism and Evolution* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1969), pp. 331-67. While it is true that the trial represented a defeat for fundamentalism in the court of public opinion, that was in part because of H. L. Mencken's biased reporting, which has sadly become the basis of much misrepresentation of Bryan and other opponents of evolution.

own mentors—rejected him and his revivals because of Graham's friendly relations with nonfundamentalist Protestant ministers and Roman Catholics.¹⁰

Some scholars of twentieth-century American Christianity would argue that Rice, Jones, McIntire and other separatistic and hyperconservative fundamentalists represent a departure from true fundamentalism, which is best represented by Machen and the scholarly authors of the essays contained in *The Fundamentals*, most of whom were simply following traditional Protestant orthodoxy. The fact of the matter is that by the 1950s and 1960s the narrow, separatistic factions of conservative American Protestantism led by Rice, Jones and McIntire were almost the only ones calling themselves "fundamentalists." The more moderate defenders of Protestant orthodoxy and heirs of orthodox Pietism adopted the label "evangelical" to describe their movement. A definitive break within conservative theology took place in the early 1940s when Carl McIntire, a self-proclaimed "Bible Presbyterian" of New Jersey who accused other conservative Protestants of defecting from true fundamentalism, formed the American Council of Christian Churches (ACCC) as an umbrella organization for pure, separated fundamentalist churches and denominations. The following year, the rival National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) was founded by Boston conservative minister Harold John Ockenga and other evangelical Protestants who were fed up with the hairsplitting negativism and separationist mentality of the leading fundamentals. The NAE went on to embrace a large segment of

¹⁰ See Billy Graham, *Just As I Am: The Autobiography of Billy Graham* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997). On pages 302-3 the evangelist describes his early associations with Bob Jones, John R. Rice and Carl McIntire and his own painful rejection by them.

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conservative American Protestant Christianity, from Pentecostals to Baptists to Christian Reformed, whereas the ACCC dropped into obscurity.

The basic beliefs of most evangelicals were the same as those of most leaders of early fundamentalism. McIntire and Ockenga, for example, did not quarrel over the essentials of Christian doctrine. The points of conflict between the two parties—which overlapped one another considerably—had to do with attitudes toward nonconservative Christians and Roman Catholics and toward culture, education, science and biblical interpretation. Whereas most self-identified fundamentalists came to reject any fellowship with Roman Catholics and even moderate conservatives, evangelicals became more and more willing to dialog and cooperate with them in sociopolitical and even evangelistic endeavors. Whereas leading fundamentalists insisted on the most literal interpretation of scriptural passages dealing with origins and end times (Genesis and Revelation), evangelicals allowed more latitude of interpretation. The statements of faith of the ACCC and the NAE reveal the differences. The ACCC's is much longer and more detailed. Little room is left for opinion or interpretation. All true Christians will think exactly alike on virtually every point of doctrine, lifestyle, sociopolitical thought and virtually everything else. The NAE's statement of faith is a basic affirmation of conservative Protestant doctrine that says little or nothing about specifics over which conservative Protestants have traditionally disagreed.¹¹

¹¹ While liberal theologians and most secular religious scholars use the term *fundamentalism* to label all twentieth-century conservative Protestants—especially all who affirm the inerrancy of the Bible—many conservative Protestants in the United States and Great

Common Features of Fundamentalism in Theology

As the preceding historical sketch of the fundamentalist movement indicates, pinning down its common features is bound to be a difficult enterprise. All depends on which phase of fundamentalism is under consideration and which fundamentalist leaders are being considered as paradigmatic for the entire movement. Here I will discuss the movement's common features in two phases, using 1925 as the watershed. I will also make a distinction between moderate and extreme fundamentalism. Before 1925 fundamentalism was virtually synonymous with a reassertion and defense of Protestant orthodoxy as interpreted by Princeton theology and people under its influence. Machen's *Christianity and Liberalism* and the essays in *The Fundamentals* best represent that relatively moderate first phase. After 1925 the movement has no single outstanding theologian and becomes increasingly focused on side issues of Protestant orthodoxy such as campaigns against evolution, communism and ecumenism, and for dispensationalism (a particular brand of premillennial eschatology) and separationism. In other words, in its second phase an extreme fundamentalism

Britain insist on a distinction between those who are fundamentalists and those who are postfundamentalist evangelicals. The latter generally agree with early fundamentalism (Machen, *The Fundamentals*) on basic doctrines and the dangers of liberal theology while rejecting later, extreme fundamentalism's ethos of separationism and literalistic biblical hermeneutic. Excellent sources on this distinction are George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1987); and Joel Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

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emerged and succeeded in capturing the movement and its label.

Early fundamentalism (pre-1925) was marked by belief that the ills of modern theology stem from defections from strong belief in supernatural, verbal inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible. Under the influence of Warfield and Machen, fundamentalists traced the disease of modernism right back to this single infection and blamed Schleiermacher for introducing it into Protestant theology. Conveniently ignored was the fact that in spite of strong affirmation of *sola scriptura*, many early Protestant Reformers as well as the Pietists did not teach anything like verbal inspiration or meticulous inerrancy of Scripture.¹² According to later fundamentalists, it took the rise of liberal Protestant theology to clarify the necessity of these doctrines, which were implicit and latent within classical Protestant theology all along. There was no need to highlight and emphasize these crucial doctrines until liberals openly challenged Scripture's authority. Once liberal theology became a force to be reckoned with, fundamentalists averred, verbal, plenary inspiration and meticulous inerrancy became necessary safeguards against a total loss of biblical authority.

This point brings out early fundamentalism's second major common theme: militant opposition to liberal, modernist Protestant theology in all its forms. *Militant* does not mean "terrorist" or "violent," of course. It only means "stringent, vocal and unrelenting" and also "without compromise." Machen expressed this attitude clearly when he wrote in *Christianity and Liberalism*,

¹² Jack Rogers and Donald McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979).

If we are to be truly Christians, then, it does make a vast difference what our teachings are, and it is by no means aside from the point to set forth the teachings of Christianity in contrast with the teachings of the chief modern rival of Christianity.

The chief modern rival of Christianity is "liberalism." An examination of the teachings of liberalism in comparison with those of Christianity will show that at every point the two movements are in direct opposition. That examination will now be undertaken.¹³

The third and final common feature of early fundamentalism was the identification of authentic Christianity with a coherent system of doctrinal propositions called Protestant orthodoxy. Early fundamentalists did not deny that personal experience of repentance and conversion is important. But because of the threat they saw in liberal theology, they tended to emphasize assent to unrevisable doctrinal propositions as the essential and timeless core of Christianity. Whereas the motto of many pietists had become "If your heart is warm, give me your hand," fundamentalists would say, "If beliefs are correct, give me your hand." They distrusted religious experience and affections because liberals could claim to have them, and there was no objective test for orthopathy. Orthodoxy, on the other hand, could be measured. Since no liberal theologian would affirm belief in the literal virgin birth, the substitutionary atonement, the literal second coming of Christ and so on, fundamentalists tended to focus on these doctrinal tests of authentic Christianity. Those who were not sure these sufficed to root out liberalism first added premillennialism and then belief in a

¹³ Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, p. 53.

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literal week of creation that occurred just a few thousand years before Christ. Other points of doctrine quite extraneous to classical Protestant orthodoxy were also added.

At least one common feature was added during fundamentalism's second phase (post-1925). In addition to belief in strict inerrancy of the Bible, antiliberal activism and strong affirmation of Protestant orthodoxy, many later fundamentalists insisted on biblical separationism. This is the belief that genuine Christians ought to have as little as possible to do with "false Christians" and their organizations (churches, ministries, societies). This separation even includes persons who call themselves "fundamentalist" or "evangelical" but engage in fellowship, dialogue or cooperation with doctrinally impure Christians, because "it is clear that the Bible commands separation from those who aid and encourage any kind of compromise with infidelity."¹⁴ Fundamentalists such as McIntire, Rice and Jones debated the exact nature and extent of separation and came to somewhat differing conclusions, which led to mutual rejection. Some insisted on "secondary separation," by which they meant "a severance of relations even with other fundamentalists who were not militant enough in their own separation."¹⁵

Legacy of Fundamentalism

Fundamentalism has been and is a powerful force in American Christianity in spite of repeated announcements of its demise. That is especially true if one characterizes fundamentalism as encompassing all

Protestant Christians who seek to defend traditional tenets and viewpoints of Protestant orthodoxy against modernism in all its forms, and who insist that authentic biblical Christianity includes belief in the supernatural verbal inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture and a literalistic hermeneutic. If one narrows the definition to include only those who practice some form of "biblical separation" as well, then the movement's influence has weakened and declined over the decades since 1925. This is the distinction between moderate and extreme fundamentalism mentioned earlier. While the former seems to be gaining strength, the latter seems to be stagnant and even in retreat.

Without any doubt fundamentalism's main appeal has been at the level of grassroots Christianity. Literally thousands of pastors and congregations and hundreds of national ministries of various kinds are fundamentalist to some degree. Almost every city of any size has large, active fundamentalist congregations, flourishing fundamentalist bookstores and often relatively small but established fundamentalist Bible colleges or institutes. More often than not, in the last decades of the twentieth century these churches and institutions dropped the word *fundamentalist* from their names and from their advertising. Many of them began backing away from strict separationism and entered into conservative social political activism together with other conservative Protestants and occasionally with Roman Catholics, especially in prolife campaigns. Many such militantly conservative churches and institutions began preferring the label "conservative evangelical" during the 1980s—much to the chagrin of more irenic evangelicals who emerged from fundamentalism in the 1940s under the influence of moderates such as Ockenga.

¹⁴ Dollar, *History of Fundamentalism*, p. 281.

¹⁵ Mark Taylor Dalhouse, *Bob Jones University and the Shaping of Twentieth Century Separating, 1926-1991* (Ph.D. dissertation, Miami University, 1991).

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In the 1990s only those conservative Protestants who still practice “biblical separation” from other Christians continued to identify themselves as fundamentalists. The true heirs of Machen, *The Fundamentals* and the early fundamentalist movement are numerous, influential and quickly becoming part of the mainstream of American Christianity. More often than not they call themselves conservative evangelicals. While they have virtually no influence in the hierarchies of the mainstream Protestant denominations,¹⁶ they exercise tremendous influence on American social, political and religious life through their own institutions such as Liberty University founded by fundamentalist media evangelist Jerry Falwell and the Focus on the Family ministry of

conservative-evangelical psychologist, author and radio speaker James Dobson. Very few professional theologians of standing and stature in Europe, Britain or North America call themselves fundamentalists, but the spirit of early fundamentalism lives on wherever theologians consider the true essence of Christianity to be a system of detailed and precise unrevisable doctrinal propositions (Protestant orthodoxy), see their primary mission as defending that true Christian faith against liberal theology and higher criticism, and teach that strict biblical inerrancy is the cornerstone doctrine of evangelical Christianity. In other words, fundamentalism lives on to some extent wherever theological “maximal conservatism” holds sway.



¹⁶ Eight denominations are generally identified by sociologists of religion as constituting the Protestant “mainstream” in the United States: the Episcopal Church, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the United Methodist Church, the United Church of Christ, the American Baptist Churches/U.S.A., the Reformed Church in America, the Christian Church/Disciples of Christ. These eight denominations are most often identified as “mainstream” simply because of their social histories as influential religious organizations in United States political and economic life. For the most part the leadership of these denominations is dominated by forms of liberal, neo-liberal or neo-orthodox theology. Fundamentalists have by and large abandoned them and are now excluded from their core leadership.

The Struggle Continues

Timothy Clark

Why does everything have to be a war? Culture wars. Battle for the Bible. Fundamentalists vs. liberals. Conservatives vs. progressives. Evolution vs. creationism. It sometimes feels like all we are doing is arguing. It seems like everyone is afraid to give an inch for fear that they will give the opposition any legitimacy. Like World War I troops, we seem stuck in the mud filled trenches for months unable to move forward but unwilling to retreat. And the casualties mount.

Perhaps it is inevitable. After all, scripture refers to life as spiritual warfare. Bigger issues are being addressed in the daily battles of our lives. And conflict is part of human nature—even for Christians. Paul’s story contains several episodes of conflict with other believers. The great church councils attempted, often unsuccessfully, to resolve deep disagreements regarding who God is and how He works in the world. The hundreds of denominations reflect a compromise to keep the faith with people who have different beliefs. Every local church has felt this conflict over who should be on the board of elders, selection a new pastor, and of course the mother of all conflicts—what music and worship style is used on Sunday morning.

But the conflict that arose with Darwinism, the rise of liberalism and the Fundamentalist reaction almost 100 years ago continues to be played out in denominations and local churches. Several key questions must be addressed by believers today:

- How do we build bridges and communicate the message of Christ

effectively to an always changing modern culture? How do we focus the message to the concerns of the culture?

- How do we stay pure with a clear Biblical vision yet stay deeply involved in the culture around us?
- How do we integrate a constantly changing and growing view of the world from science with that revealed in scripture?
- How do we decide what in scripture is teaching us today? What is a reflection of truth for a specific culture rather than an eternal pattern of action commanded by God?

The language of these discussions has changed. In an attempt to deal with the challenges of Post Modernism, a philosophy that questions our ability to ever really know truth, young dynamic leaders have attempted to explain the faith in new terms and with new methods. They are trying to capture the vitality of the early church for non-Christians who don’t know anything about the Jesus story or are hostile to it. Concepts like the Emergent church, and “seeker sensitive” churches are reflections of this desire. Yet other Christians have raised concerns that in this process, the truth of Scripture is being watered down. They worry that new believers get a sweet and light version of the Gospel that appeals to their consumer mentality. They worry that we begin to see the Christian life as a plan for self improvement or enrichment, not a life of obedience being changed in Christ’s image for his purpose. They fear that the

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church will become such a part of the culture that it loses its potency.

Christians also try to deal with culture in various ways. Many Christians see their 21st century culture as a ship sinking fast sucking everyone into its vortex. They respond with Christian schools for their children, Christian radio stations, Christian colleges, Christian youth groups. They join Christian lobbying groups to help stop the slide. Yet other Christians worry about the body of Christ becoming so isolated that it is just another subculture. They worry about Christians who are not comfortable with non-Christians and non-Christian environments. They are concerned that the Christians start just talking to Christians. They worry about losing our ability to effectively build relationships and communicate as peers in our universities, literary societies, scientific boards, arts associations, business, and entertainment industry.

But why is there so much heat even between evangelical Christians? Perhaps it is because we believe passionately and we feel the stakes are high.

Perhaps the perspectives of last 12 lessons of this study can assist us in this process. First, God is sovereign and He will work His will. Second, God's will is accomplished in and

through cultures that have rejected Him. Third, the debates that seem desperately important in one moment seem incredibly irrelevant with the passage of time. Fourth, the world may forget acts of grace but seems to have a long memory for Christians who do not live up to the teaching of their leader. Persons who know very little of the sacrifice of the martyrs or the deep charity of many monastic orders will remember the Crusades and the Inquisition. Fifth, God has chosen to revitalize his church over and over not through Popes and charismatic evangelists alone, but through everyday believers who listen to Him and act boldly in obedience.

Finally, any discussion or conflict needs to be carried out with God's big picture in mind. As he prayed for his followers Jesus said, "May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." (John 17:23). The apostle Paul also captured this idea when he wrote to a church racked with division and selfish ambition, "And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love." (I Cor. 13:13).



Step 4: Form a Response

1. Having studied the scriptures and read the articles, summarize your response to the elder group described in the third case study.

2. Reflect on the history of your church as well as your own experience as a Christian. What effects (positive and/or negative) of liberalism, fundamentalism or evangelicalism do you see?

3. As you reflect on this course as a whole, what key learnings stand out to you most?

Step 5: Discuss the Issue

1. In your spiritual journey, have you seen evidence of the fundamentalist response to modernism? Has this impact been positive or negative?
2. Does the church continue to be under assault by a secularism in which faith is rejected for reasons and science? Or, is it under assault to an emotional faith that abandons reason? Give examples.
3. Liberals attempted to make faith congruent with new philosophies, science, and historical discoveries. Was this attempt wrong in and of itself? If not, what led to some of its marked failings?
4. At the heart of the fundamentalist response was the assertion that scripture should be accepted as accurate and authoritative. Try to articulate your belief regarding the authority of scripture. Is it always literally true? Is it always historically and scientifically accurate? How should it be interpreted?
5. Define fundamentalism. Define evangelical. Identify similarities and differences.
6. In discussing the history of the Western church, a Nigerian believer says, “The West worries about what is the right doctrine. We want to know about spiritual power to confront Satan.” What guidelines do you have for balancing experience with knowledge?
7. Court battles and school districts continue to debate the issue of evolution and creation science. How did the fundamentalist movement shape this discussion? What alternatives might there be?
8. What arenas exist in which Christians can influence a postmodern culture? How well do we do this? What prevents or hinders our action?
9. Having completed this course, how have your views on studying church history changed or deepened? What would you say are the benefits of studying church history?

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Step 6: Take Steps to Obey

1. In light of any effects of modernism, fundamentalism or evangelicalism you see in your own life, is there anything you sense God leading you to do? If so, what and how?

2. Spend time in prayer, thanking God for his sovereign working in history, both in the church and in your personal life.

Issue Evaluation Form

Name: _____

Please make brief comments on any of the following aspects of this issue:

Sound Bites and Case Studies (Were any of these particularly helpful or unhelpful? Are there any quotes or scenarios you think we should add?):

Study the Scriptures (Were the passages selected appropriate? Are there other passages you might have added?):

Consult Other Sources (What were your overall impressions of the articles? Did they hold your interest? Were they instructive? Are there any you would drop or add?):

Form a Response & Take Steps to Obey (Were the exercises helpful and meaningful? Are there any you would drop or add?):

Discuss the Issue (Were any of the questions particularly unhelpful or especially helpful? Were they clear? Did your group discuss any issues that could be added to our list of questions?):

Overall Impression of this Issue (Please rate the issue 5= Outstanding, 1= Poor. Also include any general impressions or comments regarding this issue.):

1 2 3 4 5

Corrections (typos, grammatical errors, wrong passages, etc.):