

ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

IN THE NICK OF TIME

Occasional Essays and Other Stuff for Christian Students Presented by the President of
Central Baptist Theological Seminary of Minneapolis

American Christianity needs leaders. American Christianity needs *Christian* leaders. Christian leaders explain the Scriptures, bringing them to bear upon life's urgent questions. Christian leaders exemplify the life of faith, finding their ultimate satisfaction in God alone. They unite intellectual discipline with ordinate affection, turning their entire being toward the love of God. These essays are dedicated to the task of inviting Christian students to become tomorrow's Christian leaders.

—Kevin T. Bauder

"...Be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine."

August 14, 2009

Fundamentalism: Whence? Where? Whither? Part 1 Things Have Changed

Kevin T. Bauder

The last sustained history of fundamentalism to be published by a fundamentalist was David Beale's *In Pursuit of Purity*.¹ Nearly a generation has passed since Beale finished writing his book. During that time the landscape of fundamentalism has altered significantly.

The period when Beale was writing was a time of intense struggle within fundamentalism. Segments of the movement were denouncing other segments as "neo" this or "pseudo" that. One wing of fundamentalism (led by Jerry Falwell, Ed Dobson, Ed Hindson, and Jack Van Impe) was attempting to forge links with mainstream evangelicalism. From the opposite wing, Bob Jones Jr. was attacking John MacArthur's views on the blood of Christ and declaring that "MacArthur's position is heresy."² The King James Only movement, pioneered by David Otis Fuller and D. A. Waite, was in its infancy, barely a cloud the size of a man's hand.

Many of the events that define present-day fundamentalism were yet future. Robert Sumner had not yet published his exposé of Jack Hyles's (alleged) affair, and Hyles himself was regarded as a prominent leader within mainstream fundamentalism. Cornerstone College was still Grand Rapids Baptist College, an approved agency of the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches, and the GARBC was still approving agencies. Bob Jones University, smarting from its recent rebuff by the United States Supreme Court, continued to defend its ban on

interracial dating and marriage as “based on its understanding of the Bible.”³ Perhaps most significantly, the conservative resurgence within the Southern Baptist Convention was still in its infancy. Conservatives controlled no Southern Baptist institutions yet, and most fundamentalists doubted that they ever would.

In 1986, neither Dave Doran nor Tim Jordan held the pastorates that have come to be associated with their names. Dan Davey and Mark Minnick were associate pastors in Virginia Beach and Greenville, respectively. Matt Olson was just a few years into the planting of Tri-City Baptist Church near Denver. John Hartog III was a college student, and Stephen Jones was still in high school.

Certain figures within fundamentalism had become gray eminences.⁴ An inquisitive student could still hold a conversation with B. Myron Cedarholm, Bob Jones Jr., Richard V. Clearwaters, Joseph Stowell II, Monroe Parker, Arno Weniger, Sr., David Otis Fuller, W. E. Dowell, Sr., Carl McIntire, or Victor Sears. Though mostly retired, these leaders still cast a long shadow over the institutions that they had shaped.

In 1986, clear fissures were already evident within the fundamentalist movement. One version of fundamentalism could be found in the Fundamental Baptist Fellowship, which was led by men like Rod Bell, Don Jasmin, Ed Nelson, Marion Fast, Chester McCullough, James Singleton, and Frank Bumpus. Close kin to the FBF was the New Testament Association of Independent Baptist Churches, led by Virgil Arrowood, Richard Weeks, Clark Poorman, and Earl E. Matteson. The General Association of Regular Baptist Churches represented a different version of fundamentalism, but it was in the middle of a controversy. The leaders who eventually carried the day included Paul Tassell, Wendell Kempton, Dan Gellatt, and Paul Dixon, while Ernest Pickering, Ralph Colas, L. Duane Brown, and Richard Harris were key figures on the losing side. A third version of fundamentalism was evident in the Baptist Bible Fellowship, the World Baptist Fellowship, Independent Baptist Fellowship International, and the Southwide Baptist Fellowship. Significant names in those movements included John W. Rawlings, Jack Hyles, Raymond Barber, Lee Roberson, Bob Gray, Al Janney, Wally Beebe, E. L. Bynum, Gary Coleman, A. V. Henderson, Curtis Hutson, and Jerry Falwell.

Further divisions could be found in inter-, non-, and multi-denominational fundamentalism. The Independent Fundamental Churches of America bridged the gap between fundamentalism and moderate evangelicalism. A breakaway group, the Ohio Bible Fellowship, positioned itself on the opposite end of fundamentalism and looked primarily to Bob Jones University for influence. The International Council of Christian Churches was characterized mainly by its loyalty to Carl McIntire, while the American Council of Christian Churches was still seeking an identity after breaking with him. The World Congress of Fundamentalists, under the effective leadership of Bob Jones Jr. and Bob Jones III, was beginning to pick up significant influence.

Things have changed for fundamentalism. Indeed, they still are. Rapidly. For a generation there has been no comprehensive attempt to summarize the changes and directions within

fundamentalism, to link them to the past, and to draw out the trajectories along which they may carry fundamentalist churches and institutions in the future. A genuine need exists for an overview of fundamentalism that will link its present problems to the choices of the past and will seek to understand those problems in terms of the choices that they present for the future.

The task will require careful research and sustained argument. At the moment, no one is stepping forward who has the skills, the resources, and especially the interest to pursue the project. Therefore, something else must be done.

A series of popular essays will not meet that need, but it will provide an opportunity to retell the story of fundamentalism. This short retelling will serve three purposes. First, it will present a history of fundamentalism that reflects the awareness of a fundamentalist. Second, it will offer the opportunity to fill in a generation of history which has gone largely unwritten. Third, it is an occasion for critical self-examination and evaluation of both the strengths and weaknesses of fundamentalism from a fundamentalist point of view.

Beginning with the present essay, I plan to tell that story. This series of essays will be rather lengthy. For that reason, I will make no attempt to maintain week-by-week rigor in offering the subsequent essays. Other topics will intrude here and there. Nevertheless, *In the Nick of Time* will return to these essays until the story has been told.

I wish to make two points especially clear from the very beginning. First, I intend to write neither propaganda nor polemic. These essays will neither defend nor denounce fundamentalism. I am saying this now because there will be times when some readers will be sure that I am doing one or the other. On the contrary, what I want to do is to tell the truth, whether or not it flatters those who wear the label (including me).

Second, I do not intend to try to persuade anyone—least of all young leaders—that they must remain in the fundamentalist movement. I love the idea of fundamentalism, and I would like to persuade people of its beauty and utility. The fundamentalist movement, however, is at best an imperfect embodiment of the idea. Those who can find a better incarnation of the idea ought to pursue it. Ideas ought to command our allegiance, not party or institutional loyalties.

Having said that, one underlying thesis of this series is that the fundamentalist movement no longer exists. The unraveling of the movement began in the 1960s and has continued virtually without interruption. At the present, little coherence remains among self-identified fundamentalists. The result is that no one can choose to be a fundamentalist *simpliciter*. In order to be a fundamentalist at all, one must choose among fundamentalist influences and institutions. The inevitable result is that all contemporary fundamentalists are modified fundamentalists, in the sense that they all require some modifier or qualifier to be attached to the name.

Before proceeding, expressions of gratitude are in order. Certain individuals shaped my vision of fundamentalism in powerful ways. George Houghton gave me my first lessons as a student of fundamentalism, and to his analysis I remain deeply indebted. David Nettleton showed me that a fundamentalist could be both cultured and compassionate—and, more importantly, could lead as a statesman rather than a politician. Robert Delnay demonstrated that a fundamentalist could exhibit both broad learning and deep piety. William Fusco exhibited a version of fundamentalist leadership that was wrapped in gentleness and love. Myron Houghton modeled a fundamentalism that was devoted to the life of the mind. Needless to say, these people are not liable for the faults of this project, but without their perspectives I would be unable to pursue it.✘

¹David O. Beale, *In Pursuit of Purity: American Fundamentalism Since 1850* (Greenville, S.C.: BJU Press, 1986).

²Bob Jones, “Observations: News of Interest to Christians,” in *Faith for the Family* (April 1986), 29.

³*The Bomb and Its Fallout: Bob Jones University v. United States* (Greenville, S.C.: Bob Jones University, 1983), 3.

⁴This expression comes from Robert Delnay.

This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, president of Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses. New subscriptions to this electronic newsletter can be requested at inthenickoftime@centralseminary.edu.

To the Rev. Dr. Thomas Amory on Reading His Sermons on Daily Devotion, in which that Duty is Recommended and Assisted

Phillis Wheatley (1753-1784)

To cultivate in ev'ry noble mind
Habitual grace, and sentiments refin'd,
Thus while you strive to mend the human heart,
Thus while the heav'nly precepts you impart,
O may each bosom catch the sacred fire,
And youthful minds to Virtue's throne aspire!

When God's eternal ways you set in sight,
And Virtue shines in all her native light,
In vain would Vice her works in night conceal,
For Wisdom's eye pervades the sable veil.

Artists may paint the sun's effulgent rays,
But Amory's pen the brighter God displays:
While his great works in Amory's pages shine,
And while he proves his essence all divine,
The Atheist sure no more can boast aloud
Of chance, or nature, and exclude the God;
As if the clay without the potter's aid
Should rise in various forms, and shapes self-made,
Or worlds above with orb o'er orb profound
Self-mov'd could run the everlasting round.
It cannot be—unerring Wisdom guides
With eye propitious, and o'er all presides.

Still prosper, Amory! still may'st thou receive
The warmest blessings which a muse can give,
And when this transitory state is o'er,
When kingdoms fall, and fleeting Fame's no more,
May Amory triumph in immortal fame,
A nobler title, and superior name! ✕

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