

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."

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Proto-Fundamentalism, Part 1

Eschatology

Kevin T. Bauder

American Fundamentalism burst on the scene as an identifiable movement in 1920. It first became visible at the Buffalo, New York, meeting of the American Baptist Convention. Something unheard of occurred at that convention. People prepared to take measures that they had never taken before. Reflecting upon those people and their measures, Curtis Lee Laws coined the name "Fundamentalist."

Both Laws and the Northern Baptist Convention deserve extended discussion, and they will receive it later in this series. What must be remarked now, however, is that Fundamentalism did not appear out of thin air. While it represented a new coalition with a new arrangement of ideas and a new agenda, it grew out of an older and broader movement.

The people who called themselves "Fundamentalists" owed a great deal to that older movement. In fact, it is impossible to understand Fundamentalism without understanding the movement out of which it developed. Sometimes (as in George Dollar's *A History of Fundamentalism in America*), the older, broader movement is regarded as the first stage in the historical development of Fundamentalism. Whether it was or not, its influence continued to be felt for decades.

Perhaps the older movement should be labeled *Proto-Fundamentalism*. This term appears in the title of David Rausch's "Proto-Fundamentalism's Attitude toward Zionism, 1878-1918" (Ph.D. dissertation, Kent State University, 1987), and has been scattered through the subsequent literature.¹ It both denotes and connotes the right thing.

Proto-Fundamentalism represents the realignment of American Christianity in the years following the Civil War. The Proto-Fundamentalist movement became distinguishable somewhere between 1870 and 1875. Its most important leaders died around the turn of the century, but Proto-Fundamentalism survived and even flourished. It found its voice in the collection of essays known as *The Fundamentals*. It was the most dominant segment of American Christianity until the end of the First World War. Proto-Fundamentalism is the shape that most of American Christianity took between the Civil War and the War to End All Wars.

The Civil War affected American Christianity profoundly. Both sides experienced the conflict as a kind of Holy War. The North was propelled by a version of postmillennialism, hoping that the world could be perfected and the kingdom brought in by the abolition of slavery. The South fought, not to save the “peculiar institution,” but to preserve what southerners viewed as the best remnant of Christian civilization.

For the Confederacy, the defeat was shattering. The Southern Nation (as it saw itself) was overthrown, but it neither abandoned its ideals nor vanished. Instead, it retreated—arguably into the Southern Baptist Convention. For a century to come, the South and the North would develop differently theologically. Proto-Fundamentalism (later known as *evangelicalism*) was dominantly a northern movement. Only recently have SBC conservatives begun to think of themselves as “evangelicals.”

For the Union, the war produced rather different results. The expected Kingdom did not materialize. Society did not become noticeably better. On the contrary, industrialization and urbanization led to a host of new problems for which northern churches were unprepared. Even the freed slaves were scattered in what has been called the “black diaspora.” This was exactly the milieu out of which Walter Rauschenbush developed and articulated his theology of the social gospel.

During the years immediately after the war, northern Christians experienced a sense of dissatisfaction and uneasiness. The time was ripe for change. The final two or three decades of the century proved to be years of great transformation.

Over the next several essays, I hope to tell a bit of the story of Proto-Fundamentalism. Some of the groundwork for this discussion has already been laid in my exposition of the intellectual and social location of Fundamentalism. Those discussions need to be kept in mind, but now I want to focus more explicitly on theological and ecclesiastical concerns.

Before I begin that discussion, however, I wish to bracket one item. That item is the notion of fundamental doctrines. Obviously, the discussion of fundamental doctrines is of vast importance in any treatment of Fundamentalism. For that reason, I want to delay my examination of the topic so that it will become the subject of focused discussion in its own right. For the moment, let me simply state that Proto-Fundamentalism inherited and upheld a general, biblical orthodoxy, and that it accepted the notion of fundamental doctrines. How the people of this period came to believe in fundamentals, and what they thought the fundamentals were, are questions to which we shall return.

Interestingly enough, the Proto-Fundamentalists did not have a particular focus on fundamental doctrines. The fundamentals were assumed but rarely singled out for exposition and defense. If we were able to ask the Christians of that period what their main emphases were, they would likely have pointed us to other areas of faith and practice.

They might have pointed to eschatology. The fifty years from 1870 to 1920 were indeed years of eschatological fascination. The articulation of eschatology was enhanced (or obscured, depending upon one's point of view) by a new major eschatological option.

They might also have pointed to evangelism. Indeed, these were decades of great evangelistic campaigns. Big-name evangelists spoke to crowded halls and tents. Thousands of people professed faith and lived transformed lives.

The Proto-Fundamentalist period was also one that emphasized personal piety. Christians and churches came to reject formalism in favor of what they saw as a personal walk with the Lord Jesus Christ. This emphasis was propelled at least partly by new ways of viewing sanctification.

One matter that received less emphasis than it had in the past was denominational distinctiveness. To be sure, Proto-Fundamentalists did not abandon their denominations. Nevertheless, they evidenced a desire to step outside of denominational structures for cooperation based upon their great commonalities.

The de-emphasis on denominationalism led to a corresponding increase in non- or inter-denominational efforts. These efforts evidenced themselves most clearly in two new institutions: the faith mission and the Bible school. By the end of the period, at least the beginnings of an interdenominational network were visible.

Of course, Proto-Fundamentalists also found themselves reacting against certain phenomena. They warned against the perceived worldliness of Christians. They saw, but did not quite understand, the new phenomenon of secularization. They wrestled with the problems posed by Darwinism. They became aware, dimly at first, of the challenges posed by theological liberalism in its modernistic form.

All of these are factors that shaped the two generations of Proto-Fundamentalists. Before examining Fundamentalism proper, it is necessary to inspect these factors briefly. Without an understanding of them, much of later Fundamentalist history will remain a blank. ✖

¹Jeff Straub points this out in "George William Lasher—Baptist Proto-Fundamentalist," *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 11 (2006): 135.

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.

Stricken, Smitten, and Afflicted

Thomas Kelly 1804-[1872]

Stricken, smitten, and afflicted,
See Him dying on the tree!
'Tis the Christ by man rejected;
Yes, my soul, 'tis He, 'tis He!
Many hands were raised to wound Him,
None would interpose to save;
But the deepest stroke that pierced Him
Was the stroke that Justice gave.

Ye who think of sin but lightly,
Nor suppose the evil great,
Here may view its nature rightly,
Here its guilt may estimate.
Mark the Sacrifice appointed!
See who bears the awful load!
'Tis the Word, the Lord's Anointed,
Son of Man, and Son of God.

Here we have a firm foundation,
Here the refuge of the lost:
Christ the Rock of our salvation:
Christ the Name of which we boast:
Lamb of God for sinners wounded!
Sacrifice to cancel guilt!
None shall ever be confounded
Who on Him their hope have built. ✠

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