

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 3

Evangelism

Kevin T. Bauder

Proto-fundamentalism was the broad movement of American evangelicalism out of which Fundamentalism emerged in about 1920. The proto-fundamentalist period began after the American Civil War, and it ended with the eruption of the Modernist-Fundamentalist Conflict. A correct perspective on proto-fundamentalism is necessary in order to understand the origin, nature, and direction of the Fundamentalist movement to which it gave birth.

Proto-fundamentalism was strongly influenced by a renaissance of chiliastic eschatology. Proto-fundamentalist theology saw a dramatic shift away from post- and amillennialism and toward a premillennial understanding of Jesus' second coming. While not initially distinguishable, the theology that became known as *dispensationalism* was increasingly evident during this period. The eschatological shift brought with it a strong emphasis upon the imminence of Jesus' return, which in turn sent a shock-wave of spiritual urgency across American evangelicalism.

One manifestation of that urgency was an increased focus upon evangelism. America had already seen two periods of remarkable evangelistic fervor: the Great Awakening (during the 1730s and 1740s) and the Second Great Awakening (from roughly 1790 into the 1840s). In the years leading to the Civil War, however, attention had been diverted from evangelism into church controversies. Of course, the greatest controversy was over slavery, but controversies also raged over the New Haven theology, missions, Freemasonry, Landmarkism, Stone-Campbell Restorationism, temperance, and even Bible versions. Many American denominations split during this period.

It would be untrue to suggest that no evangelism occurred from 1840 until 1870. Particularly on the frontiers souls were being reached, and churches were being organized. Nevertheless, the perspective of most American Christians was not strongly dominated by a concern for the lost.

That began to change during the 1870s as the attention of proto-fundamentalists was drawn to the need to evangelize. The shift in perspective manifested itself in a variety of ways. The proto-fundamentalist period was a time of big-name evangelists. It was also a period during which evangelistic pastors made their churches into great soul-winning stations. The concern for evangelism led directly to an increased concern for the material and social needs of the poor. Furthermore, it increased awareness of and enthusiasm for world missions.

Perhaps the best-remembered feature of the proto-fundamentalist period is the prevalence of celebrity evangelists. One of the biggest was B. Fay Mills, whom the *New York Times* credited with over 500,000 conversions during a single decade of his ministry.¹ Even bigger was Sam Jones, a former drunkard who preached the gospel across the entire country. With a converted river boat captain, Thomas Ryman, Jones founded the Union Gospel Tabernacle in Nashville (the tabernacle was later renamed the Ryman Auditorium and became the original home of the Grand Ole Opry). When he died, 30,000 came to view his body as he lay in state in the rotunda of the capitol in Atlanta.

Of course, no one was more popular than Dwight L. Moody. Moody was a shoe salesman who became a Sunday school teacher and, after 1870, an evangelist. He met musician Ira Sankey in 1872, and the two ministered together to hundreds of thousands on both sides of the Atlantic. When Moody died in 1899, he had also founded the Northfield Conference Center, the Chicago Avenue Church (now called the Moody Memorial Church), and the Moody Bible Institute.

Younger men continued the work. Gypsy Smith began preaching during the closing years of the Nineteenth Century, but continued his work well into the Twentieth. R. A. Torrey had already been installed at the Chicago Avenue Church before Moody's death. In a sense, he became Moody's successor and a noteworthy evangelist in his own right. Billy Sunday became the most important evangelist during the first half of the Twentieth Century.

The evangelists would preach in churches, but more often they would conduct crusades in buildings erected specifically for that purpose (Ryman Auditorium was one such facility). They relied upon extensive cooperation from a wide range of pastors and churches, contributing to the growing inter- and non-denominationalism of the period. Indeed, many current day undenominational churches and institutions trace their roots to these evangelists.

The churches themselves were swept into the evangelistic fervor. Across the country, preachers aimed to reinvigorate their congregations with a concern for the lost, and they often succeeded. Among the most notable centers for preaching and evangelism were Clarendon Street Baptist Church in Boston (A. J. Gordon), First Baptist Church of New York City (I. M. Haldeman), Walnut Street Presbyterian Church in St. Louis (James H. Brooks), and Bethany Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia (A. T. Pierson). One noteworthy pastor, C. I. Scofield, served two significant congregations: First Congregational Church in Dallas (now Scofield Memorial Church) and Trinitarian Congregational Church of East Northfield, Massachusetts (the church that Moody attended).

These pastors adapted both their preaching style and the church's order to facilitate evangelism. They also changed their target audience. The combined forces of industrialization, urbanization, and immigration had resulted in cities that were filled with the unemployed, dislocated, and poor. Drunkenness and prostitution were reaching alarming proportions. These were the people whom evangelists and pastors set out to reach.

An important tool of evangelism was social work. Christians discovered that they could feed a hungry man or provide food and shelter for a drunkard or a prostitute, and by doing so they could gain an opportunity to preach the gospel. Rescue missions and soup kitchens flourished, and the

people who frequented them did respond. Clinics and hospitals also provided a venue for presenting the gospel to the poor.

As the population of newly-converted sinners entered the assemblies of the faithful, the churches found themselves faced with new situations. For example, most of them had to abandon their old pew rental system—the new converts had trouble paying rent for their homes, let alone their pews. Fermented wine in the communion service created a special temptation for converted drunkards. Many churches substituted unfermented grape juice, which Thomas Welch had discovered the means of preserving in 1869 (Welch understood his product as a form of wine and specifically intended it to be used for communion services).

The late 1800s are often remembered as a time when American evangelicals were intensely involved in social work. That picture is accurate, but it is incomplete. Churches such as Holy Trinity Episcopal in New York City (Stephen H. Tyng), Bethany Presbyterian in Philadelphia (pastored by both A. T. Pierson and Wilbur Chapman, with John Wanamaker providing financing), and Grace Baptist Temple in Philadelphia (Russell Conwell) became famous for their social work. That work, however, was not an end in itself, nor was it merely a display of compassion. Proto-fundamentalists had no social gospel. Rather, they saw an opportunity in social involvement to gain a hearing for the gospel of personal salvation.

The evangelistic fervor of the day had one other consequence. It lent a powerful impetus to the foreign missions movement. Since the growth of that movement is closely tied to the growth of the Bible school movement, however, the two will be discussed together in a separate essay.

One thing is clear: the evangelistic intensity of proto-fundamentalism left its mark on the Fundamentalist movement. Even when Fundamentalists have not been evangelistic, they have almost always thought that they should be. A Fundamentalist who is not witnessing is a Fundamentalist who probably feels guilty. As a movement, Fundamentalism has not built itself on scholarly attainment or cultural recognition. It has built itself on reaching the lost with the gospel of Jesus Christ. When evangelism wanes, Fundamentalism wanes.

Unfortunately, Fundamentalists have sometimes been so fascinated with evangelism that soul-winning has covered a multitude of sins. Effective soul-winners have often been considered to be paragons of spiritual maturity, regardless of their other qualifications. Manifold and even scandalous sins have been ignored or even excused in some great evangelistic preachers. While a perversion of genuine evangelistic fervor, the tendency to make soul-winning the touchstone of spiritual standing is nevertheless an evidence of the importance that Fundamentalism has attributed to evangelism. That is an emphasis that we owe to our forebears of a century past. ✘

¹“Rev. Benj. Fay Mills Dead,” *New York Times* (May 2, 1916), 13.

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.

Hymns for Advent, or the weeks immediately before the Birth of our blessed Saviour

Jeremy Taylor (1613-1667)

When Lord, O when shall we
Our dear Salvation see?
Arise, arise,
Our fainting eyes
Have long'd all night, and 'twas a long one too.
Man never yet could say
He saw more then one day,
One day of Edens seven:
The guilty hours there blasted with the breath
Of sin and death,
Have ever since worn a nocturnal hue.
But thou hast given us hopes that we
At length another day shall see,
Wherein each vile neglected place,
Gilt with the aspect of thy face,
Shall be like that, the porch and gate of Heaven.
How long, dear God, how long!
See how the Nations throng:
All humane kinde
Knit and combin'd
Into one body, look for thee their Head.
Pity our multitude,
Lord, we are vile and rude,
Headless and senseless without thee,
Of all things but the want of thy blest face,
O haste apace;
And thy bright self to this our body wed,
That through the influx of thy power,
Each part that erst confusion wore
May put on order, and appear
Spruce as the childhood of the year,
When thou to it shalt so united be. Amen. ✠

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