

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 4

Missions and Education

Kevin T. Bauder

Proto-fundamentalism, the parent movement out of which Fundamentalism emerged around 1920, was characterized by an interest in evangelism. This interest led to massive evangelistic campaigns that were spearheaded by celebrity evangelists. It led to pastors who emphasized evangelism in their congregations. It led to the establishment of rescue missions and other forms of social programs as mechanisms to gain a hearing for the gospel.

The interest in evangelism also resulted in a fresh outpouring of involvement in worldwide missions. Among the early proto-fundamentalists were many who had heard Adoniram Judson during the 1840s. Judson had communicated a burden for missions that had never entirely gone away. This enthusiasm had been suppressed during the years surrounding the Civil War. It had also become institutionalized under the denominational mission boards. During the 1870s, however, interest in missions began to grow again.

The renewed vision for world evangelism gained urgency from the new premillennialism. The version of premillennialism that dominated proto-fundamentalism was one that stressed an imminent rapture. Many American evangelicals developed a sense that the time of the Lord's return could be near and that the opportunity to evangelize the world might be drawing to a close. The sense of urgency seems to have been infectious, and in the long run it was shared even by Christians who rejected the new eschatology.

An example of missionary enthusiasm is Oliver W. Van Osdel. Van Osdel was a veteran of the Union army who entered ministry during the 1870s. A postmillennialist, he did not adopt premillennial views until some time in the 1890s (he credited W. B. Riley with persuading him). By that time,

however, he had already become widely known as an organizer of missionary work among the Baptists of Illinois and Kansas. In later life, he appealed to the imminence of Jesus' return as a motivation for missions, but his own commitment to missions antedated his acceptance of premillennialism and pretribulationism.

Christian young people began turning to missions as never before. An important event occurred in 1886 when, at Moody's Northfield Conference grounds, 100 young people dedicated their lives to missions. Out of this event emerged the Student Volunteer Movement. By the 1920s, the movement had become institutionalized and was plagued with liberal theology. Nevertheless, it was responsible for sending some 20,000 young people to the mission field.

Somehow the work of all these missionaries had to be coordinated. Denominational missions at the time were either poorly equipped or otherwise unable to handle the task. Therefore, new missions had to be formed. A model had already been provided by J. Hudson Taylor, who had started the China Inland Mission in 1865. In 1887, A. B. Simpson oversaw the establishment of the Christian and Missionary Alliance. C. I. Scofield organized the Central American Mission in 1890. Other similar organizations sprang up around the country.

These missions together developed into what became known as the Faith Missions Movement. Where the older denominational missions tended to rely upon budgeted support from their parent bodies, faith missions were structured to remain dependent upon deliberate giving from individual churches and Christians. Where some older denominational missions seemed more interested in transmitting civilization, education, and culture, the faith missions were most interested in communicating the gospel. They had no illusions about winning the world, but they longed to preach the gospel around the entire earth.

The faith missions also had a different set of criteria for missionary candidates. The older, denominational missions wanted candidates that were liberally educated and then seminary trained. For the faith missions, however, complete college and seminary training was unnecessary. A candidate only needed to have a pretty good grasp of the English Bible, a fairly sound knowledge of Bible doctrine, and some practical experience in Christian work.

What the faith missions required was really a different kind of training. Traditionally, preparation for ministers and missionaries had begun with a four-year liberal arts degree. By the time he graduated from college, a future minister would have mastered the Trivium (grammar, rhetoric, and logic). He would also have his Greek and his Latin. When he reached seminary, he would spend an additional three years learning Hebrew, exegesis, theology, and critical issues. Most seminaries offered little by way of practical training, so a graduate might apprentice himself to a senior minister for some years after commencement. In sum, it was not unusual for a minister to spend the better part of a decade in preparation.

This process was ill-matched to the temper of proto-fundamentalists. Their sense of urgency militated against seven years of formal preparation, and their populism militated against intellectual attainment. What they wanted was a course of preparation that would emphasize the English Bible, the basic doctrines of the Christian faith, and that would above all be short.

The result was the Bible institute. Students entered Bible institutes directly out of high school (if they went to high school). The curriculum emphasized personal piety, ministry skills, teaching the English Bible, and immersion in the system of dispensationalism. Best of all, it took only three years, after which the graduate was ready to serve under the auspices of a faith mission.

For many proto-fundamentalists, the Bible institutes became an alternative educational universe. These schools completely took over the place of colleges and seminaries in preparing Christian leaders. They also provided training for average Christian workers in churches. As time progressed, they became centers of pastoral placement. They also served a very practical purpose by offering propinquity for young, single Christians.

As denominational schools began to succumb to liberal theology, the Bible institutes became extremely important centers of proto-fundamentalism. Noteworthy institutions included the Missionary Training Institute, founded by A. B. Simpson in 1882 (Later Nyack College); Moody Bible Institute (1886); Practical Bible Training School (1900); Northwestern Bible Institute (1902); and the Bible Institute of Los Angeles (1908). These were joined by a host of lesser-known institutes. These schools together constituted the foundation upon which Fundamentalists rebuilt their educational enterprise after losing the battle for their denominations.

The success of the Bible institute movement was that it put a large number of enthusiastic workers into ministry within a very short period of time. These workers were well prepared to preach the plan of salvation, to teach basic English Bible, and to lead souls to Christ. Secondly, the movement provided an important option when the denominational colleges and seminaries were subverted. They also became important hubs around which much of the infrastructure of Fundamentalism revolved.

Their success, however, came at a price. Driven by a sense of urgency, the Bible institutes provided only a truncated version of ministerial training. When the rapture did not occur as expected, Fundamentalism ended up with a generation or more of leaders who were poorly prepared for reflection and critical thinking, whose exegetical skills were often marginal, and whose theological acumen was restricted to those areas (mainly dispensationalism) that were emphasized in Bible school training.

These deficiencies became most marked at the very period when American civilization was passing through significant cultural change. Fundamentalist leaders were often unprepared to meet and evaluate this change or to articulate a thoughtful response. The damage has never been repaired.

Fundamentalists themselves evidently felt the need for something more than the Bible institutes could offer. By the middle of the Twentieth Century, many of the old Bible institutes had been transformed into colleges. Fundamentalists had also opened a number of baccalaureate institutions devoted to liberal arts. By 1960, Fundamentalists were operating seminaries, signaling a return to the more traditional pattern of training for pastors and missionaries.

The creation of these institutions was not entirely a return to the *status quo ante*, however. By opting for the Bible institute movement rather than traditional higher education, Fundamentalists cut themselves off from the academic world. As they began to create their own institutions, they attempted to maintain an entirely separate and distinct intellectual world. Since few of their leaders had been trained in *bona fide* institutions of higher learning, they tended to make up their own rules as they went. To this day, most (though not all) Fundamentalist institutions resist being held to the same academic standards by which other institutions are measured. ✘

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.

The Second Hymn for Advent; or Christs coming to Jerusalem in triumph.

Jeremy Taylor (1613-1667)

Lord come away,
Why dost thou stay?
Thy rode is ready; and thy paths made strait
With longing expectation wait
The Consecration of thy beauteous feet.
Ride on triumphantly, behold we lay
Our lusts and proud wills in thy way.
Hosanna! welcome to our hearts.

Lord here
Thou hast a Temple too, and full as dear
As that of Sion; and as full of sin,
Nothing but Thieves and Robbers dwell therein;
Enter, and chase them forth & cleanse the floore;
Crucifie them, that they may never more
Profane that holy place
Where thou hast chose to set thy face.
And then if our stiff tongues shall be
Mute in the praises of thy Deity,
The stones out of the Temple wall
Shall cry aloud and call
Hosanna! and thy glorious footsteps greet. Amen. ✠

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