

# 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."

January 22, 2010

### Proto-Fundamentalism, Part 7

#### "The Fundamentals"

Before Fundamentalism became identifiable as a self-aware movement, American evangelicalism passed through a period of transition that could be labeled *proto-fundamentalism*. Stretching from just after 1870 until nearly 1920, the proto-fundamentalist period combined a number of important influences. Several of those influences found expression in what may be the most typical representation of the proto-fundamentalist decades, a series of volumes called *The Fundamentals*.

Eventually *The Fundamentals* comprised ninety essays in twelve volumes. The project was financed by Lyman and Milton Stewart, founders of Union Oil. The original editor was A. C. Dixon, who was later succeeded by Louis Meyer and then by R. A. Torrey. Initially published between 1910 and 1915, the books were sent free of charge to pastors, missionaries, and Christian workers. They are still being reprinted and read a century later.

The essays in *The Fundamentals* covered a variety of topics. The most frequent topic—more than a quarter of the articles—had to do with the doctrine of Scripture. Especially emphasized were issues related to inspiration and biblical criticism.

A second large bloc of essays dealt with the person and work of Christ. Several more covered issues in apologetics such as evolution or the existence of God. A handful of essays addressed current "isms" such as Romanism and Christian Science. The remainder consisted of personal testimonies, exhortations to Christian service, and studies in ministry methods.

Taken together, the essays of *The Fundamentals* provide a glimpse into the concerns of proto-fundamentalists in the early Twentieth Century. As the name of the series implies, they were disturbed primarily about opposition to core doctrines of the Christian faith. Uppermost was their

concern for the veracity of the Bible, followed by the person and work of Christ. These were precisely the areas of doctrine that were most challenged by the rise of liberal theology.

The notion of fundamental doctrines was not new. Arguably, it had been reflected in the multiform articulations of the *Regula Fidei*. It was expanded successively in the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and (at least in the West) the Athanasian Creed. Fundamental doctrines had been a major concern of the Reformers and their successors. The middle third of the Nineteenth Century had seen extensive discussion of the fundamentals, particularly by the Princeton theologians.

What *The Fundamentals* did was to begin re-articulating this notion in the face of a new threat—liberalism. Of course, other, lesser threats also existed (hence the essays against “isms”). The bulk of *The Fundamentals*, however, bears testimony to the increasing uneasiness of proto-fundamentalists toward the emerging religious liberalism. The series was effectively a restatement of the Christian core against such threats as were perceived to be most ominous.

Understood in this way, *The Fundamentals* certainly proved to be a success. The series brought together the best thinkers of proto-fundamentalism. These writers together shone a light, not upon the threat itself, and much less upon the source of that threat, but rather upon the thing that was being threatened. The series served to refocus attention upon the fundamental doctrines in general, and upon the doctrine of Scripture in particular. This was an important step in laying the foundation for the emergence of Fundamentalism after the Great War.

The publication of *The Fundamentals* both reflected and furthered a rising tide of interest in the protection of biblical orthodoxy. If Providence had moved other than it did, then the Fundamentalist movement might have emerged earlier than it did, and might have witnessed different results. As it was, the war intervened, and by 1914 everyone's eyes were focused upon Europe. American theology would not occupy the spotlight again until after the Armistice.

Fundamentalism was built upon the foundation laid by the publication of *The Fundamentals*. Nevertheless, the series was not a statement of Fundamentalism. It was a statement of orthodoxy. It does not articulate the *sine qua non* of Fundamentalism but of the Christian faith itself.

In other words, it is a mistake to define Fundamentalism (either the idea or the movement) by reference only to *The Fundamentals*. Reading *The Fundamentals* will not tell you what a Fundamentalist is. It will tell you what a Christian is. That is one element in being a Fundamentalist, but other elements are present as well.

What are those elements? Answering that question is a topic for an entirely separate discussion. For the moment, it is sufficient to note that a “classical Fundamentalist” or “historic Fundamentalist” who wishes to claim the name only because of agreement with *The Fundamentals* may be no Fundamentalist at all.

*The Fundamentals* was one of those works whose influence has grown over the years. While statistics are not available, interest in *The Fundamentals* seems to have increased almost decade by decade until some time around the 1970s or 1980s. The series is still in print, and it is now available in electronic format over the Internet. For a hundred-year-old publication, it continues to attract a significant readership. Deservedly so. ✖

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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](mailto:inthenickoftime@centralseminary.edu).

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## Of Hell.

Jeremy Taylor (1613-1667)

Horrid darkness, sad and fore,  
And an eternal Night,  
Groans and shrieks, and thousands more  
In the want of glorious light:  
Every corner hath a Snake  
In the accursed lake:  
Seas of fire, beds of snow  
Are the best delights below,  
A Viper from the fire  
Is his hire  
That knows not moments from Eternity.  
Glorious God of Day and Night,  
Spring of eternal Light,  
Allelujahs, Hymns and Psalms,  
And Coronets of Palms  
Fill thy Temple evermore.  
O mighty God,  
Let not thy bruising rod  
Crush our loins with an eternal pressure;  
O let thy mercy be the measure,  
For if thou keepest wrath in store  
We all shall die,  
And none be left to glorifie  
Thy Name, and tell  
How thou hast sav'd our souls from Hell.  
Mercy. ✠

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