

# 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 29, 2010

### Proto-Fundamentalism, Part 8

#### Leadership in Transition

The proto-fundamentalist period (roughly 1870 to 1920) was a time of rapid change in American culture. When this period opened, the memory of the Civil War was still fresh. The Old West was still being settled. Indian wars were being fought. Most armies equipped their troops with single-shot rifles (often muzzle-loaders) and cap-and-ball revolvers. Ironclad steamships were in their infancy. The ordinary modes of daily transportation still employed livestock. John Philip Sousa was just composing his first marches. Southerners, especially those of African descent, were migrating toward northern cities.

By 1920, Americans had a different war burned into their consciousness, a war of worldwide consequence. The Old West lived on only in Hollywood film. Weaponry in the recent war had included bolt-action rifles, automatic pistols, machine guns, tanks, lethal gas, and aerial bombs. Mammoth ocean liners and battleships had been constructed and (as with the *Titanic*, the *Empress of Ireland*, and the *Lusitania*) sunk. Scott Joplin had introduced a new "jass" musical idiom with his rags, slow drags, and two-steps, and by the 1920s it had become fully-developed jazz. Most households either owned or aspired to own an automobile, and air travel had become a reality. The children of former slaves had begun a kind of renaissance in Harlem.

The transition from 1870 to 1920 includes a significant generational shift. Nowhere is this shift more clearly seen than within proto-fundamentalism. The prominent leaders of the early years were mostly dead by or shortly after the turn of the century. A. J. Gordon died in 1895, James H. Brooks in 1897, D. L. Moody in 1899, George C. Needham in 1902, Nathaniel West in 1906, and A. T. Pierson in 1911. In most cases, their public ministries had ceased well before they died. Such men were the most

vigorous organizers of early proto-fundamentalism, and their departure left a decided vacuum of leadership within the movement.

Indeed, these men probably did not see themselves as comprising a movement. Proto-fundamentalism is a retrospective category, not a self-aware phenomenon. Since these leaders were not trying to build a movement, it is not surprising that they gave little thought to preparing the next generation to lead it.

In a few cases, leaders who had become somewhat prominent before the turn of the century continued to increase in influence afterwards. For example, Oliver W. Van Osdel had been a well-known Baptist leader in Illinois, Kansas, and Washington. After 1909, he became a kind of patriarch for orthodox Baptists in Michigan. Likewise, I. M. Haldeman had pastored the prestigious First Baptist Church of New York City since 1884. This church became a national center for preaching during the early decades of the Twentieth Century.

As older leaders dropped away during the 1890s and 1910s, younger leaders took time to emerge and to establish themselves. One of the most visible of the next generation was W. B. Riley, who became pastor at First Baptist Church of Minneapolis in 1897. Moody's younger protégé R. A. Torrey took the leadership of Moody Bible Institute in 1899. During the next twenty-odd years he achieved something like celebrity as an educator (especially at the Bible Institute of Los Angeles), pastor (at the Church of the Open Door in Los Angeles), author and editor (among other things, of *The Fundamentals*), and evangelist.

Still younger leaders were just beginning their ministries. J. Gresham Machen joined the faculty at Princeton Seminary as a junior professor in 1906. J. Frank Norris went to First Baptist Church of Ft. Worth in 1909. T. T. Shields took the pastorate of Jarvis Street Baptist in Toronto in 1910. Robert T. Ketcham accepted his first pastorate as a very young man in 1912. Curtis Lee Laws became editor of the *Watchman Examiner* (a Baptist paper) in 1913. J. C. Masee, later of Tremont Temple in Boston, built a national reputation ministering in Brooklyn during the 1910s. These were the men who would become the most visible representatives of Fundamentalism proper after World War I.

During the first decade or so of the Twentieth Century, the younger men were not yet prominent enough to exert vigorous leadership. By the time that they had consolidated their leadership, the eyes of the nation were focused elsewhere. In the middle of 1914, war burst upon Europe. From the beginning, Americans could sense the forces that would eventually draw them into the conflict. Proto-fundamentalist leaders generally advocated a dovish policy of isolationism and non-involvement in the war. For this they were roundly criticized by theological liberals, whose progressivism led them to see the Great War as the War to End All Wars. Not until the armistice was signed did theology return to the center of focus for American Christians.

To summarize, from roughly 1900 to 1914, proto-fundamentalist Christianity lacked aggressive leadership. From 1914 until the "eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month" of 1918, proto-fundamentalists joined other Americans in their occupation with what was going on "over there." Not until 1919 were proto-fundamentalists again poised to pursue a vigorous agenda.

By that time, however, religious liberalism had reappeared. This time, it was showing itself for what it really was: a rejection of foundational Christian ideas. More than that, it was discovered to be firmly entrenched within mainstream Christian organizations. Therefore, the new leadership of proto-fundamentalism found itself on the defensive almost immediately. A genuine threat to the Faith had shown itself, and the new leaders felt the responsibility to answer it.

The story of their response and of the various forms that it took is the story of Fundamentalism proper. It is a large and complicated story that needs to be told piece by piece. The telling will take many words. Before those words are printed, it may be well to divert our attention to other topics for a while. ✕

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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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## A Colloquy with God

Sir Thomas Browne (1605-1682)

The night is come, like to the day;  
Depart not Thou, great God, away.  
Let not my sins, black as the night,  
Eclipse the lustre of Thy light.  
Keep still in my horizon, for to me  
The sun makes not the day, but Thee.  
Thou whose nature cannot sleep,  
On my temples sentry keep;  
Guard me 'gainst those watchful foes  
Whose eyes are open while mine close,  
Let no dreams my head infest  
But such as Jacob's temples blest.  
While I do rest, my soul advance,  
Make my sleep a holy trance;  
That I may, my rest being wrought,  
Awake into some holy thought.  
And with as active vigour run  
My course, as doth the nimble sun.  
Sleep is a death, O make me try  
By sleeping what it is to die,  
And as gently lay my head  
On my grave, as now my bed.  
Now ere I rest, great God, let me  
Awake again at last with Thee.  
And thus assured, behold I lie  
Securely, or to wake or die.  
These are my drowsy days, in vain  
I do now wake to sleep again.  
O come that hour, when I shall never  
Sleep again, but wake for ever! ✕

