

# Notes on the Modernist-Fundamentalist Controversy

---

[Taken from the class syllabus for the American Church, by Christopher K. Lensch, S.T.M.]

## The growing Modernist-Fundamentalist Dispute

### Definitions

1. Modernism: a progressive wing of Christianity using science and philosophy to discern the central values of the Christian tradition in order to meet the world's needs.
  - Worldview: rationalism (product of optimistic modernity)
  - *Christian Century* was the unofficial organ of modernism
2. Fundamentalism: an organized attempt to preserve historic Christianity vs. modernism based on the authority of the Bible
  - Worldview: spiritual obedience to God's revelation

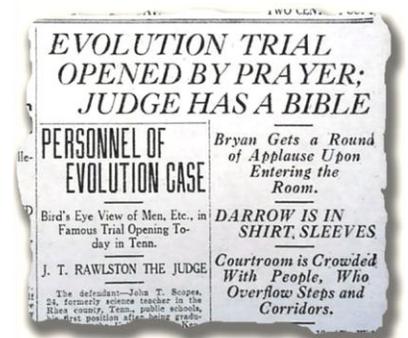
Harry Emerson Fosdick carries the banner for the Modernists

1. Baptist professor at Union Seminary who takes First Presbyterian Church of NYC; moves to Baptist Riverside Church when presbytery applies pressure
2. Famous 1922 sermon, "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?"
3. Accused by student, John Sung, of being a "devil" for stealing Sung's faith



Watershed event in the public eye: Scopes Monkey Trial of 1925

1. After Tennessee anti-evolution law passed in 1925, teacher John Scopes became the focus of a court challenge
2. Outcome
  - a. Scopes was found guilty



b. Fundamentalists are discredited as anti-intellectual.

(1) After a thrashing in the press

(a) satirical pen of H.L. Mencken of Baltimore leads the attack

(b) pietistic-fundamentalist Christianity drew into itself until it re-emerged behind Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority, 1976

(2) 1926, Aimee Semple McPherson stages her own kidnapping, scandalizing fundamentalism

c. W.J. Bryan dies within a matter of weeks

### Growing Ecumenical Movement

1. Weariness of fighting after WWI

2. Objections to perpetuating "unimportant differences" within and between denominations

3. Many church unions from 1920-1940

a. 1906, northern Cumberland Presbyterians join PCUSA

b. 1911, Northern Baptists merge with Free Baptists

c. 1917, three Lutheran bodies form Norwegian-based "Lutheran Church of America"

d. 1931, Ohio + Iowa + Buffalo Synods form "American Lutheran Church"

e. 1920, Welsh Calvinist Methodist Church joins PCUSA

f. 1922, two Evangelical groups form United Evangelical Church

g. 1924, Congregationalists + Evangelical Protestant churches

h. 1931, Congregationalists + Christian Churches = New Light Movement

i. 1939, Methodist Protestant Church + Methodist Episcopal Church (South) + Methodist Episcopal Church = Methodist Church

j. 1950, Evangelical + United Brethren = Evangelical United Brethren

### Broadening Presbyterian Church

#### Doctrinal reforms

1. Crux: growing democratic antipathy toward predestination of strict Calvinism

2. Early attempts

a. Some, like Briggs in 1892, want to scrap the Westminster Standards

“The Westminster System has been virtually displaced by the teaching of the dogmatic divines. It is no longer practically the standard of faith of the Presbyterian Church. The Catechisms are not taught in our churches, the Confession is not expounded in our theological seminaries. The Presbyterian Church is not orthodox by its own Standards. It has neither the old orthodoxy or the new orthodoxy. It is no perplexity. It is drifting toward an unknown and mysterious future.” —C.A. Briggs, *Whither*, p. 223

b. 1889, fifteen presbyteries overture for creedal revision

c. 1892, revision proposals fail despite ratification by a majority of presbyteries (super-majority was needed)

3. 1903 Revisions of the Westminster Standards

a. Five amendments to the Confession

(1) Included two new chapters

- (a) “On the Holy Spirit”
- (b) “On the Love of God and Missions”

(2) Three textual changes

- (a) XVI:7 “good deeds of men **are sinful** —> *fall short of what God requires*
- (b) XXII:3 OMIT “...it is a sin to refuse to take oath ... imposed by lawful oath”
- (c) XXV:6 OMIT “...the pope is the antichrist”

b. “Declaratory Statement” of 1903

(1) God loves all mankind

(2) Qualifying remark: “We believe that all dying in infancy are included in the election of grace, and are regenerated and saved...”

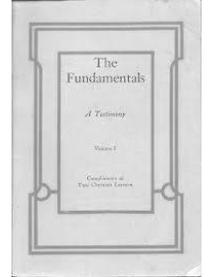
c. Changes were opposed by Warfield and Princeton since the statements go beyond the scope of Scripture

4. Alarm at growing toleration for modernism in the church

a. 1909, “Modernism” and “Fundamentals” were terms used early in Presbyterianism

b. 1910, *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*

- (1) 12 Volumes, 31 contributors, 90 articles
- (2) Apologetical, polemical: anti-evolution, anti-higher criticism, defense of scripture authority
- (3) Cost of publishing/dissemination of million sets to pastors across the country was borne by Lyman and Milton Stewart of L.A.
- (4) This was an early attempt to galvanize a fundamentalist movement of orthodoxy
  - (a) Emphasized five fundamentals
    - i) Inspiration of Scripture
    - ii) Christ's virgin birth
    - iii) Christ's supernatural miracles
    - iv) Christ's substitutionary atonement
    - v) Christ's bodily resurrection
  - (b) Call for prayer bands



c. "Essential doctrines" (fundamentals), especially for ordination, were delineated and reaffirmed by Presbyterian General Assembly in 1910, 1916, and 1923

More Presbyterian mergers/cooperatives

1. 1906, PCUSA Union with the Cumberland Presbyterians
  - a. Minority of Cumberlands remain independent
  - b. Constitution amended to allow racially segregated Presbyteries till 1967
2. 1908, PCUSA and UPCNA cooperate in the Federal Council of Churches
3. 1920, Welsh Calvinists absorbed by PCUSA

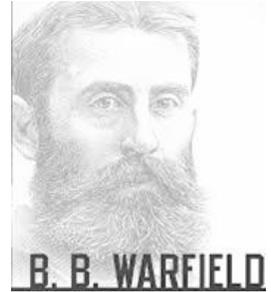
Princeton Tensions

1. 1909, student rebellion against anti-practical intellectualism

2. 1914, J. Ross Stevenson (practical theologian) replaces Francis L. Patton as President

3. Benjamin B. Warfield, (1851-1921)

- a. Prof. of Didactic and Polemical Theology (1887-1921)
- b. Staunch defender of biblical inerrancy and the Reformed Faith
- c. Prolific and cogent writer



4. 1929 - Princeton's Government reorganized by general assembly

- a. Rug pulled on conservative "Board of Directors" who are left in control of the grounds
- b. New liberal "Board of Trustees" given total control of the school; two board members are signers of infamous Auburn Affirmation

Bald-faced liberalism and deliberate accommodation

1. \* Auburn Affirmation, 1924 (for text, see Rian's Appendix I of *The Presbyterian Conflict*)

- a. Prompted by 1923 weak reaffirmation (vote of 439-359) for the Fundamentals
- b. Affirmation ascribed by 1,274 ministers/elders meeting at Auburn, NY (site of 1830s New School "Auburn Declaration")

(1) Professed allegiance to the Confession

(2) Alleged that the 5 fundamentals were only "theories" of interpretation

(3) Denied general assembly's right of laying down any essentials

c. 1925 Constitutional Committee to investigate subscriptionism

(1) Headed by broad churchmen

(2) 1927 Upshot: The General Assembly cannot establish "essential and necessary" articles of belief for ordination, but may examine individual cases on appeal. The inclusivistic

position of tolerance under the Auburn Affirmation became the official position of the church.

d. Liberal/inclusivist momentum from 1924: no more conservative moderators after 1925

e. 1929 - Demise of Princeton

f. Declension in foreign missions

(1) 1921 - Robert Speer sweeps under the rug charges of missions heresy

(2) 1932 - Rethinking Missions

(a) Interdenominational reassessment of missions in an age of isolationism and modernism: essentially a syncretistic view of Christianity with the world religions

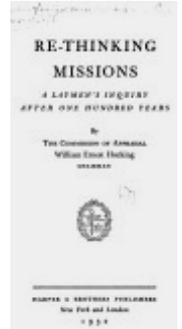
—However, note Christianity’s claims of exclusivity: John 14:7; Acts 4:12; Isa 43:10-

12

(b) The foreign missions board coddled Pearl Buck

g. Ultimately, ecclesiastical utilitarianism leads to intolerance for the conservative minority

“There will be liberty in the Presbyterian Church for Modernists, but none for conservatives; and those who hold the conservative view will have to go elsewhere for the maintenance of those convictions that are dearer than life itself.” —Machen in Hutchinson, p. 206



2. John Gresham Machen, (1881-1937)

a. Exposed to higher criticism at Marburg and Göttingen, Germany

b. Princeton Professor of NT, 1906-29

c. Staunch defender of classic Reformed Theology in particular and historic Christianity in general

(1) *Christianity and Liberalism*, 1923

While other pietistic fundamentalists were isolating themselves against the attack of modernism, Machen engaged the critics on a scholarly level

(2) Insisted on separatist ecclesiology



“According to Machen, it is not enough to be a fundamentalist in doctrine generally without being a fundamentalist in one’s doctrine of the Church. In fact, one cannot be a true fundamentalist without a separatist view of the Church. For to endorse unbelief is itself unbelief. Those ‘conservatives’ who can tolerate liberalism in the Church are themselves unsound.” —Hutchinson, p. 201

(3) 1923 - called for a “New Reformation”

d. Founded Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia, 1929

“A really evangelical seminary might be the beginning of a really evangelical Presbyterian Church.” —Machen

(1) Inherited some conservative faculty from Princeton

(2) Turbulent early years

(a) 1935,36 - majority of the seminary board, unwilling to separate from the old church, resigns with Prof. O.T. Allis

(b) 1937 - OT Prof. A.A. MacRae resigns Westminster to serve the BP Church

e. Founded the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions, 1933

(1) After overtures to clean up the church’s Foreign Mission Board were thwarted

(2) G.A.’s Mandate of 1934: dissociate from and dissolve IBPFM or else face defrocking

(a) \* The conservatives’ refusal to support the approved FMB was considered tantamount to refusing to partake of the Lord’s Supper

(b) Obedience to the constitutional powers was made obedience to Christ

(c) The PCUSA purges itself of its conscience: Machen, McIntire, Buswell, R.S. Laird, Paul Wooley, et.al. (see Hutchinson, p. 216 note, for charges vs. Machen)



f. Established Constitutional Covenant Union, 1935

(1) Alliance of conservatives to attempt internal reforms, or if all else failed, to break from the church in order to continue on as its “true spiritual succession”

(2) Official organ: *The Presbyterian Guardian*

g. Established the Presbyterian Church of America, June 11, 1936

(1) PCUSA was declared “officially and judicially apostate”

“We withdrew from the Presbyterian Church USA in order that we might continue to be Presbyterians.” —Machen

(2) The Successors adopt the Westminster Confession and PCUSA Constitution of 1934, with the proviso that the 1903 amendments could be dropped

h. Machen dies of pneumonia and a broken heart, January 1, 1937

### Separating and Reformed: Conservative Presbyterianism

1. Presbyterian Church of America divides and multiplies, spawning the Bible Presbyterian Church in 1937

a. Vacuum of strong diplomatic leadership after loss of Machen

b. Two schools of thought struggle for dominance in the womb of development

(1) Old School majority

(a) Strict confessionalism

(b) Insistence on a continental Reformed heritage

(c) Roots in Princeton

(2) New School minority (led by Allan A. MacRae, Carl McIntire)

(a) Simple biblical literalism

(b) “American” Presbyterianism vs. continental reformed approach

i) Nationalistic/patriotic

ii) Less centralized—more democratic

iii) Personal piety emphasized



Carl McIntire

- (c) Identified with broad fundamentalist movement
  - i) Roots in Princeton and late 19th century Bible Conference Movement
  - ii) Revivalism: emphasis on the individual in the presence of God

(3) Three Issues of division

- (a) Eschatology
  - i) Two variant schemes of theology? (Quasi-dispensational vs. covenantal)
  - ii) Tolerance of premillennialism or parity?
- (b) Total abstinence vs. Christian liberty
- (c) Independent agencies or synod controlled agencies?

2. PCofA forced by 1939 PCUSA court action to change its name: takes the name Orthodox Presbyterian

Other Church disruptions

Christian Reformed Church (founded 1857)

1. Continuing tensions and alliances in the 1900s among varying parties originating in Holland
  - a. Pietists out of anti-establishment Dutch conventicles
  - b. Confessionalists like Louis Berkhof
  - c. Antitheticals like Herman Hoeksema who want to insulate the elect from the seed of the serpent
  - d. Neo-Calvinists influenced by Abraham Kuyper's progressive views on the church and culture
2. Identity Crisis during and after WWI: the Americanization of the ethnic CRC

### 3. Watershed issue: “Common Grace”

- a. Preceded by conservative purge of higher criticism at Calvin College, 1920-22
- b. Promoted by Neo-Calvinists in an effort to relate to their world and salvage cultural institutions for the glory of God
- c. Resisted by Antitheticals and some pietists

“It is utterly inconceivable that God can show any grace at all [except] in the blood of Christ Jesus”

“God’s general goodnesses are actually curses on the reprobate who consume these graces upon their lusts” —Herman Hoeksema

- d. Confessionalists abandon Antitheticals as too close to Anabaptists

Can one say “that the marriage between two non-Christians can be nothing more than bestiality and the sort of love that devils have for each other!! This is nonsense. It conflicts with Scripture and experience” —J.K. Van Baalen in Bratt, p. 111

- e. 1924, “Common Grace Synod” commands Hoeksema, et.al., to desist

(1) 1926, Hoeksema helps establish the Protestant Reformed Church

(2) 1928, CRC hedges its common grace doctrine by legislating against worldliness: dancing, gambling, and the theater are discouraged

### 4. Dutch contributions to the Princeton tradition

- a. 1893 Geerhardus Vos joins the Princeton faculty
- b. early 1900s, Abraham Kuyper’s “Lectures on Calvinism” during the Stone Lecture Series at Princeton Seminary
- c. R.B. Kuiper and Cornelius Van Til at Westminster bring continental perspective to American Presbyterianism

### Northern Baptist upheavals over higher criticism and the social gospel

- 1. 1933, the General Association of Regular Baptists forms

- a. Robert T. Ketcham (b. 1889) was a founder and key representative in the midwest
  - b. Separatist in orientation until recent years
  - c. Cedarville University in Ohio has been a key training center, as is Grand Rapids Baptist Bible College and Seminary
2. 1947, the Conservative Baptist Convention split from the Northern Baptists

#### Other Modernist/Orthodox church splits

- 1. 1927, North American Christian Convention of Disciples secedes from DoC
- 2. 1936, Machen's Presbyterian Church of America breaks from northern PCUSA to spawn the Orthodox Presbyterians and the Bible Presbyterians
- 3. 1973, the Presbyterian Church in America breaks from the southern PCUS
- 4. 1976, the modernist "Association of Evangelical Lutherans" broke from the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod in the midst of a conservative-led purge of the church's schools. The Association eventually joined the broader merger of Lutheran churches in 1988, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America that also brought together the ALC and the LCA. The conservative Missouri and Wisconsin synods stayed out of the merger.
- 5. Early 80's purge of so-called moderates (quasi-modernists) from the schools of the Southern Baptist Convention

#### The Broadening Church in the second half of the 1900s: Cooperative measures and mergers

The Broad Church grew out of Modernism that emerged in the 1880s, triumphed in the 1920-30s, and declined in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

#### 1941, conservative American Council of Christian Churches

- 1. Brought together by fundamentalist leaders to present a united front in challenging the common opponent of modernism in the mainline churches
- 2. Founded by Carl McIntire with Baptist and conservative Methodist allies
- 3. Supported for a time by men as Francis Schaeffer of the BPs and Paul Wooley of the OPs

#### New Evangelicalism

- 1. 1942, National Association of Evangelicals becomes the flagship of Neo-Evangelicalism
  - a. founded by Harold Okenga who coined the phrase, "New Evangelicalism"

- b. Brought together by fundamentalist leaders whose aim was to win back the mainline denominations rather than declare them apostate.

## 2. Distinctives of New Evangelicalism as represented by the NAE

- Cooperative Evangelism
- Desire for intellectual respectability vs. orthodox tradition

### a. Cooperative Evangelism

Okenga summarized the modus operandi for this movement in his statement: "The New Evangelicalism has changed its strategy from one of separation to infiltration." (cited in Woodbridge, *The New Evangelicalism*, p. 14)

- (1) Dual membership in NCC (and WCC) allowed by NAE. In the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the new model charismatic leaders of the NAE have regularly been dialoguing with and encouraging the NCC
- (2) Evangelistic crusades often have blended Bible-believers, humanistic Christians, Roman Catholics, and cults
- (3) Biblical concerns for purity as opposed to cooperative evangelism

### II Cor. 6:14-7:1

"14 Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? 15 And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? 16 And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people." 17 Therefore "Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you." 18 "I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty." 7:1 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

### II John 10,11; Eph. 5:11

10 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; 11 for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.

Eph. 5:11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.

### II Chron. 19:2

2 And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, and said to King Jehoshaphat, "Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD? Therefore the wrath of the LORD is upon you.

### Jude 3,4

3 Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. 4 For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

b. Desire for intellectual respectability from elitist quarters vs. orthodox tradition (John 12:43)

(1) Neo-Evangelicalism of Fuller Seminary, founded in 1947 by Charles Fuller and Harold Okenga

(a) See Marsden's *Reforming Fundamentalism*

(b) Fuller is the flagship school of New Evangelicalism along with Gordon-Conwell Seminary

(c) A 1996 Fuller brochure (as cited in the June 1996 *ACCC Report*) explains why the school has given up the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture:

“Where inerrancy refers to what the Holy Spirit is saying to the churches through the Biblical writers we support its use. Where the focus switches to an undue emphasis on matters like chronological details, precise sequence of events, and numerical allusions, we would consider the term misleading and inappropriate. A danger is that it implies a precision alien to the minds of the Bible writers and their own use of the Scriptures and it leads those who think there is one proven error in the Bible (however minor), to regard its whole teaching as subject to doubt.”

(2) Bible “Infallibility” vs. “Inerrancy”

(3) Theistic evolution: God is the first cause in creation, initiating on-going evolution

c. Positive social activism in recent years

3. \* William Franklin Graham (b. 1918)

a. Began ministry working for Youth for Christ

b. Launched into national attention after Wm. Randolph Hearst touted Graham's 1949 evangelistic tent meetings in L.A.

c. Abandoned by fundamentalists in 1957 after Graham invited mainline denominations to help organize and reap his New York crusade

d. Seen personally by more people than anyone in history



4. 1951, Campus Crusade

a. Founded by Bill Bright at UCLA

- (1) 1945 disciple of Henrietta Mears (Hollywood Presbyterian Church)
- (2) Trained at Princeton Seminary and Fuller Seminary (1947)

b. Purpose: to evangelize and organize college youth to reach their generation for Christ

c. Biblical Concerns regarding Campus Crusade

(1) Weak and aberrant theology

- (a) “Four spiritual laws” leading to conversion focus on God’s “wonderful plan for your life...” rather than on God’s claims upon His sinful creatures (for the Four Spiritual Laws, see final appendix of *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* by McDowell)
- (b) Second Blessing for carnal Christians who took Jesus as Savior but never as Lord

(2) Ecumenical and interfaith operations

- (a) Roman Catholics and charismatics are used on staff and crusade meetings
- (b) Billy Graham is the Honorary chairman of Campus Crusade and of the ambitious “New Life 2000” crusade to evangelize the world
- (c) Bill Bright has endorsed the “Evangelicals and Catholics Together” movement

## 5. Summary of Neo-Evangelicalism

Woodbridge critiques the movement:

“The New Evangelicalism is exerting tremendous pressure upon believers to forget the biblical principle of separation [2Cor 6:14-7:1], to join hands with the enemies of the Lord [2Chron 19:2], and to minimize the holy distinctives which separate God’s people from unbelievers [John 17: 11,16].

“Orthodoxy enjoins biblical separation from error.

“The New Evangelicalism advocates toleration of error. It is following the downward path of accommodation to error, cooperation with error, contamination by error, and ultimate capitulation to error!

“Precisely at this point the issue is joined. Either one obeys God or he disobeys. There is no third alternative” (p. 15).

In the late 1990s, the National Association of Evangelicals had been led by leaders from charismatic churches, like Donald Argue of the Assemblies of God, and discredited (2007) Ted Haggard of New Life Church.