

Dilleberger + Welch,  
Protestant Christianity.

2) Fundamentalism also took its rise in self-conscious reaction to liberalism, but in a quite different sense, without the dialectical openness to liberal emphases that the critically orthodox possessed. In a strange way, fundamentalism shared the view of Rationalism and scientism, all assuming that Christianity is essentially incompatible with modern thought. Instead of giving up the tradition, however, fundamentalism sought to preserve Christian doctrine intact from all the attacks of science and modernity. It set itself consciously and rigidly against the spirit of compromise and adjustment that prevailed in liberal theology. In this respect, the fundamentalist attitude needs to be sharply distinguished from that of other conservative Protestants. Apart from the critically conservative, there were many Protestant thinkers of the

late nineteenth century who sought to maintain the classical tradition and were not basically affected by the liberal theological formulations, but who had no fear of the liberal spirit or of science and modern thought generally. Also, we should recall the conservatism of the common people (the nontheologians), which was only very gradually influenced by the spread of liberalism. In sheer numbers, this was probably the most important nineteenth-century viewpoint. But it was not a self-conscious theological movement.

Fundamentalism is to be distinguished from these other forms of conservatism by its self-conscious and inflexible resistance to the entire liberal development. It took its stand on certain specific doctrinal formulations (and on a legalistic view of Christian ethics), insisting that without these Christianity could not be true to the Bible or to the historic faith. The name *fundamentalism* is taken from a series of tracts published in 1910–1915, called *The Fundamentals*, which sought to state these fundamental truths essential to Christianity.

At the center of the fundamentalist opposition to liberalism was the question of the authority and inspiration of the Bible. For the fundamentalist, Christianity is irrevocably committed to the inerrancy of the Bible. Of course, it may be allowed that there have been certain minor errors in the process of transmission of the Scriptures, but no such concession can be made regarding the "original autographs." The writers of the Bible were inspired by God in such manner that they were preserved from any distortion or error whatsoever in recording the divine Word. Therefore the Bible is in detail an absolutely reliable and authoritative source of knowledge of God and God's activity. To admit even the slightest amount of "higher criticism" is to cast doubt on everything in the Bible. (To say that we can have only a little bit of criticism, which will leave intact the essentials, would be to the fundamentalist mind like saying that a woman can be "just a wee bit pregnant.") As soon as we have questioned the authenticity of any of the recorded sayings of Jesus, or the validity of Paul's theology; as soon as we have said that the Bible is in part a result of the natural working of the human mind, without the full inspiration of the Holy Spirit; then we have left the solid rock of truth and embarked upon a hopeless sea of uncertainty. Either the words of the Bible are infallibly the words of God or we have no basis for our faith. It is all or none.

Moreover, the fundamentalist saw in biblical criticism a denial of the uniqueness of Christianity, for the indisputable proof of Christianity lies in the miracles and the fulfillment of prophecy as recorded in the Bible. To deny that the prophets foretold in detail the coming of Christ, or to deny the historicity of the biblical miracles, is to reject the signs by which God's activity is recognized. If these be not accepted, then Christianity has no claim to final truth.

This line of argument reveals a basic cleavage between the funda-

mentalist and the liberal conception of divine activity. For the liberal, God works primarily through natural processes; for the fundamentalist, God acts by supernatural intervention in nature. This is most vividly seen in another of the "fundamentals," the virgin birth of Christ. To deny the virgin birth, or to say that it is unimportant, is, according to the fundamentalist, to deny the incarnation and the deity of Christ. The virgin birth (no less than Christ's miracles and his resurrection) is the necessary proof that Christ was the Son of God.

At least two other fundamentals were of primary importance: the "deity" of Christ, and the atonement for sin by his crucifixion. By the deity of Christ was meant his divine (i.e., complete and infallible) knowledge and his divine power as shown in the miracles (as well as, of course, his moral perfection). With this was associated an insistence upon the physical resurrection and the ultimate return of Christ in the flesh to judge the world. The doctrine of atonement, as understood by fundamentalism, meant Christ's offering of himself on the cross as a sacrifice in place of sinners, substituting for humanity in receiving punishment for sin, thereby making it possible for God to forgive without compromising justice (which demands that sin be punished).

Together with the assertion of these "essentials" of Christianity, fundamentalism was characterized by vigorous opposition to the theory of evolution because of its conflict with the Genesis story of creation. It was the questions of evolution, biblical criticism, and the deity of Christ which occupied the center of the conflict between liberals and fundamentalists. This debate, which was particularly vigorous in the United States, was carried on mainly in the early twentieth century. Properly speaking, fundamentalism as a definite and self-conscious movement appeared first in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. During the early years of the present century, fundamentalist groups in each of the major denominations made determined efforts to stop the tide of liberalism in their respective churches, whether by securing positions of administrative leadership, or by the elimination of "liberal" professors from the seminaries, or by the adoption of doctrinal tests for ministers. By about 1925, however, the height of the controversy had passed in most of the denominations, and thereafter the influence of the fundamentalist wing declined markedly.

We are not suggesting that fundamentalism is dead. Far from it. On the European continent, some Protestant churches have seen a resurgence of uncritical biblicism and "orthodoxy" which has much in common with American fundamentalism. Some of the most rapidly growing American sects are fundamentalist. In these groups, characteristic fundamentalist tenets are often bound up with the expectation of the imminent return of Christ (the "premillennial" sects) or with the insistence on radical and overt signs of the working of the Holy Spirit, especially in conversion (the "Pentecostal" sects). Even within

the "liberal" denominations, significant minorities continued to be fundamentalist in outlook. The cleavage between liberalism and fundamentalism (with a correlative division between social liberalism and social conservatism) is still in numerical terms the basic division in Protestant thinking in America, though such judgments must be qualified by recognition of the large numbers of "conservatives" who ought not to be considered fundamentalist.

The strength of the fundamentalist refusal to compromise with liberalism was not simply a resistance to change. It lay also in a valid apprehension of the difficulties which the liberal views created (and at this point fundamentalism had much in common with more moderate conservatism). For it was certainly true that liberalism involved fundamental alterations in the form at least of traditional Christian doctrines, and it was a valid question whether it had not also violated the intention of the classical affirmations. Even more important, by giving up the infallibility of the Bible, liberalism did seem to abandon all except the most subjective claims to religious certainty; nothing was absolute, all dogmas, all Scripture, and even the gospel itself were made relative. No sure, objective ground for faith seemed left. And liberalism was indeed to lead to other vigorous reaction (which, however, took quite different lines from fundamentalism — see Ch. XII).

But at the same time, fundamentalism was from the beginning a lost cause, theologically speaking. It was an intellectual rearguard action. It was not simply an attempt to be faithful to the Christian tradition; it was an effort, in the face of the perplexities and shifting currents of a changing world, to fix Christianity in the mold of a particular doctrinal complex and worldview. The doctrinal complex to which fundamentalism clung so tenaciously was not that of the ancient church, or of the Reformation, or of the Protestant development in general. It was essentially akin to the hardened framework of Lutheran and especially Calvinistic scholasticism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (see Ch. IV). Only in that scholasticism had the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture been carried to such extremes; and in such doctrines as the atonement and the deity of Christ, fundamentalism (often unconsciously) assumed that the Protestant scholastics spoke for the entire tradition. Moreover, in its insistence that doctrine is irreformable, fundamentalism shared the scholastic equation of "faith" with "correct articles of belief." And especially in its notion of "miracle," fundamentalism took over the seventeenth-century view of the relation of Christian faith to science and philosophy. In its own day that view represented a significant attempt to bring religious, philosophical, and scientific thought into harmony; but the effort to perpetuate that adjustment in the world of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was not only hopeless but violated the intent of scholasticism itself.

At root, fundamentalism sought to preserve a kind of certainty in

a world of apparent confusion and flux — a kind of certainty which was simply no longer possible. The movement was part of a general resistance to social change. This was particularly evident in fundamentalism's commitment to legalistic views of personal morality (mostly of the nineteenth-century pattern) and its hostility to the "social gospel." The fundamentalists' bitter opposition to the Federal Council of Churches (and subsequently to the National Council of Churches) was focused as much on the social as on the theological liberalism of those organizations. And the extreme social conservatism was often paralleled by a suspicion of modern education because of its "scientific, sceptical, and secular influences." Here, too, was an attempt to hold on to the familiar, the simple and safe patterns, in the face of new and bewildering problems which the old patterns were not designed to meet.

Insofar as fundamentalism is committed to this sort of program, it is hard to see how the movement can claim the allegiance of thoughtful persons. In the post-World War II period, however, there emerged important signs that in some quarters the fundamentalist position was being modified — by reinterpretations of biblical infallibility, by a more liberal social outlook, and by a more ecumenical attitude (see Ch. XIV).

---