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Non-Wesleyan Pentecostalism

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NON-WESLEYAN PENTECOSTALISM: A TRADITION THE INFLUENCE OF FUNDAMENTALISM

William W. Menzies

Introduction

In examining the roots of the modern Pentecostal movement, it is important to acknowledge that although it is obvious that virtually all of the earliest Pentecostal leaders were a direct product of the Wesleyan Holiness movement, other influences had a profound impact on the shaping of the values of what came to be the main stream of Pentecostalism. Among these non-Wesleyan streams of influence is fundamentalism. In the United States, Fundamentalism emerged about 1875, reaching a zenith of influence in the early 1920's. It grew out of a shared concern by Evangelical leaders, both church leaders and scholars, for a means of responding to the alarming erosion of basic Christian beliefs, beliefs that were under heavy assault from liberal theological scholarship. That form of liberalism that emerged in the late-nineteenth century came to be known as Modernism. A great struggle ensued for many years in the American denominations between the forces of Modernism and Fundamentalism. Although Modernism made a powerful impact on the main line denominations of the United States, by 1935 these errant, influential, orthodox Christian values were virtually dead. Following the infamous Scopes trial over the teaching of evolution in Dayton, Tennessee, in 1925, in which Fundamentalism was publicly humiliated, the movement retreated into a defensive posture. For the next two decades, Fundamentalism languished in the throes of internal turmoil. Denominations split and split again. Its image was defensive and divisive. Fundamentalism resurfaced with a vigorous image in the 1940s under the banner of the New Evangelicalism. There still exists a remnant of the older form of fundamentalism, but this wing of conservative Christianity has never recovered the position of great influence it had in the earlier part of the century. It is important to observe that the true home of the modern

Pentecostal movement is within the folds of the New Evangelicalism.¹ The lingering remnant of earlier fundamentalism is strongly opposed to Pentecostalism. This lecture is designed to trace the contours of the fundamentalist movement, and especially to point out ways in which the earlier phase of this movement influenced the shape of modern Pentecostal values.

As an explanatory note, it should be observed that although the contour of the struggle between orthodox Evangelical Christianity and the encroachments of nineteenth century liberal theology are sharply defined in the American experience, this same struggle also occupied the attention of Christian leaders and scholars elsewhere, particularly in Europe, howbeit in less dramatic forms. This paper views the Fundamentalist/modernist struggle from an American perspective. Let the reader assume that the basic issues in the American scene are emblematic of a world-wide engagement of core values during the period under consideration.

The Fundamentalist/Modernist Controversy

A major feature on the theological landscape of the nineteenth century was the struggle for the hearts and minds of Christians in the western world between liberals and conservatives. In the United States, this great struggle came to be known as the Fundamentalist/Modernist controversy. The Pentecostal revival began at the beginning of the twentieth century, right at the peak of the struggle. Pentecostals had their own agenda for establishing a self-identity, and did not participate in a larger struggle being fought in the mainline denominations; but it is clearly evident that Pentecostals adopted wholesale the values espoused by the Fundamentalist movement. Only when it became apparent that the fundamentalists were militantly opposed to Pentecostal teaching did the Pentecostals resign themselves to the rejection they experienced at the hands of scornful Fundamentalists. Being spurned by

¹Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California, is the primary institutional expression of the New Evangelicalism. *Christianity Today*, perhaps the most widely read journal of contemporary Christian thought, is the leading literary forum for the new Evangelism. The first editor, Carl F.H. Henry, and Billy Graham, the evangelist, are sometimes called the “inside man” and “outside man” of the New Evangelical Movement. L. Nelson Bell, the father-in-law of Billy Graham, was the founder of *Christianity Today*.

Fundamentalists did not diminish the enthusiasm with which Pentecostals adopted the fruits of the Fundamentalist labors.

The Shape of Modernism

Modernism took shape over a period of at least a century. It is primarily to be seen as a product of Enlightenment thinking, in which the rational and imperial superseded recourse to the more subjective realm of faith, revelation and miracle. The assaults on the authority of the Bible were already well-developed before the end of the eighteenth century. Rationalist religion reduced Christianity to a code of ethics, stripping away from the Scriptures reports of the miraculous. This assault centered in the attempt to discredit the biblical accounts of the resurrection of Christ, the pre-eminent miracle. The deity of Christ and the substitutionary atonement were challenged as insupportable by rational and empirical tests, therefore, rendered unbelievable. Hegel contrived a speculative philosophical theology, a view of history that rested not on revelation but on human reflection. Built into his rational worldview was optimism about the perfectibility of humanity and history. He conceived of the inevitability of progress. Hegel was an articulate spokesman for a hallmark of Modernist thought: optimism about humanity and history.

Another facet of emerging Modernism was the influence of the Romantic age. A contemporary of Hegel's in Berlin at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Friedrich Schleiermacher, emerged as an influential thinker and writer. Schleiermacher was a product of the Pietist movement in Germany. But, somewhere along the way, he lost his orthodox faith. He came to accept the notion that the Bible is not a trustworthy book, and that one must devise a different way to develop religious values. Schleiermacher, perhaps yearning for the experience of the new birth he had been taught in German Pietism, developed a novel way of speaking about Christian faith. He reached into the subjective, into the realm of feeling (very much in the tradition of Romanticism) where he felt lay the possibility of connecting with something beyond oneself. What he called "the feeling of dependence" was his starting point for the erection of a system of theology. Not founded on revelation, and not limited to the merely rational, Schleiermacher's theology rested on the shaky ground of subjective feeling. For him, Christ was a good model, but not a savior. An important component in Modernism, as it unfolded, was

sentimentalism. It is interesting to observe that Schleiermacher is considered by many to be the father of Modernist theology.

Another component in the edifice erected by Modernism was the place given to ethics. If Christianity was not the story of a God-man, Christ Jesus, who came to deal with sin at Calvary, what was left for Modernists was little more than a code of acceptable behavior, a system of ethics. Emmanuel Kant's *The Categorical Imperative and Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* is the attempt to contrive a system of religion out of the common awareness of guilt and responsibility, a well-nigh universal human consciousness. Kant felt he could argue for eternal life, for a power or being beyond humans to whom we owe allegiance, of an intelligence in the cosmos that speaks of order and justice--all put together without conscious recourse to the revelation of God in Scripture. What is significant for later Modernist thought is Kant's attention to the priority of ethics. Late Modernism, indeed, was marked by concern for society structured in an orderly way, and sin was largely defined in terms of whatever hindered the proper ordering of society. Sin, for the Modernist, became largely a matter of corporate evil, the unjust arrangements in society. One can see why, as Modernism gained in influence, liberal Christians aligned themselves increasingly with socialist political movements worldwide.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the influences of rationalism, romanticism, and the ethical concerns of Kant had flowered in what came to be known as the classical expression of Modernism. In Germany, Adolf Harnack wrote *What is Christianity?*²

The core ideas of Modernism can be summarized as follows:

- 1) A view of the Bible as a collection of interesting stories that provide an evolutionary view of the development of religion;
- 2) A view of an immanent God who is somehow intimately part of the universe and who chooses to operate by natural law rather than the miraculous;
- 3) Christ is the archetypal man, preeminent model of human goodness, but merely a man;
- 4) Sin is defined for the individual as primarily a matter of ignorance and corporately as society not structured for the best interest of humanity;

² Adolf Harnack, *What is Christianity?* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957). The original edition of this volume was published in 1900.

- 5) The concept of atonement is the notion that as one gazes at the self-giving sacrifice of Jesus, one is impressed to live a more noble life; and
- 6) Humanity and history are perfectible, with the motion toward progress inevitable.

These ideas exhibit a severe reduction of classical orthodox Christian theology, essentially stripping the supernatural from Christianity and changing the focus from God to humans. This radical reassessment of the Christian message impacted the Christian West, moving relentlessly from Germany to Britain and on to America. American seminary professors often studied in Germany. In essentially one generation, from about 1875 to 1990, the great Christian denominations in the United States were overcome with Modernism. Seminary teaching posts, influential pulpits, denominational executive offices, and publishing houses were engulfed. A great disaster had overtaken the churches, the full extent of which would not be fully understood for years to come.

The Emergence of Fundamentalism

Into this crisis, a coalition of concerned church leaders and scholars pressed their efforts to stem the erosion of orthodox Christian values. A growing sense of crisis emerged among earnest Christian believers in the face of the meteoric rise of modernism. Fundamentalism was the gathering together, in the face of a common enemy, of two unlikely clusters of Christian leaders.

1. Princeton Orthodox Scholarship

One of the key forces in the coalition was orthodox scholarship, chiefly centered in Princeton Seminary. Princeton (at least until 1929) was a rare exception to the capitulation to the blandishments of Modernism of theological seminaries in the United States in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Princeton had a long and steady reputation for faithfulness to the core values of orthodox Calvinistic Christianity. Theology was shaped along the lines of classical Calvinism, deeply influenced by the Protestant orthodoxy of Francois Turretin from Europe. Into this mold came Charles Hodge, A. A. Hodge, and later Green and Warfield. The great volumes on Christian

apologetics of these scholars still rank among the finest defenses for the deity of Christ and the truth of the resurrection of Jesus. B.B. Warfield is noted, not only for his Christological apologetics, but for his rationale for the authority of the Bible. His advocacy of the “inerrancy of the autograph” became a hallmark of the Fundamentalist doctrine of Scripture, a definition of biblical authority that is still the test of faith for membership in the American Evangelical Theological Society. The theory, known as the “citadel defense,” was to withdraw within a defensible perimeter, arguing for the faith from what was perceived to be the least assailable position.

Pentecostals, of course, remember Warfield for another of his “citadel” defenses of the Christian faith, his famous work *The Cessation of the Charismata*. Warfield, who argued persuasively for the validity of biblical miracles, such as the resurrection of Christ, chose to distance himself from arguments about the possibility of miracles in the contemporary world. He did not wish to confuse these points, so he reacted by consigning the manifestations of gifts of the Spirit to the Apostolic church alone, concluding that with the advent of the New Testament, there was no further need of these extraordinary gifts in the Church. The Warfieldian contribution, therefore, for Pentecostals is a two-edged sword. In some respects, Pentecostals readily identify with the support of orthodox theology, but in adopting the narrow defense respecting biblical miracles, this line of reasoning undercut Pentecostal values. When Fundamentalism had to make decisions about the Pentecostal movement following the great outpouring of the Spirit at the beginning of the twentieth century, sadly virtually the entire Fundamentalist movement rejected Pentecostals and their claim to the restoration of gifts of the Spirit.

On balance, however, it is evident that the key ideas of Fundamentalism were readily adopted by Pentecostals, whether the Fundamentalists were willing to accept the Pentecostals or not.

2. Evangelical Revivalism

The other leg of the Fundamentalist coalition was Evangelical Revivalism. From the days of Charles G. Finney in the mid-nineteenth century onward, a pattern of public Christian evangelistic crusades emerged, featuring many of the patterns still evident today in the public meetings of Billy Graham, now 150 years later. Concerted, well-organized citywide crusades, usually crossing denominational lines marked this era. Great meetings were instrumental in challenging

many people, especially in the rapidly-urbanizing world of that day, to make commitments to Christ as personal savior. Great crusades were conducted on both sides of the Atlantic. Great names like Dwight L. Moody, Reuben A. Torrey, and A.J. Gordon were conspicuous evangelistic leaders. Their message was clearly in line with the scholarly work of the Princeton theologians. One might say that the evangelists were the “heart” of the movement; the scholars were the “head.”

Largely through the initiative of the evangelists, concerned Christians gathered in various forums to strengthen the support base of conservative Christianity. Bible conferences abounded from the 1870s onward. Across the platforms of these conferences paraded a steady flow of popular evangelists, but also scholars who supplied armament for the defense of the faith. Gradually the Bible conferences focused increased attention to eschatological themes. A sense of urgency gripped the people; Jesus was coming soon; these were the last days of a dying age; the need for the empowering of the Spirit to equip people to be effective witnesses was sorely needed.

Among the institutional expressions of Fundamentalism that had an abiding influence was the creation of a new kind of preparatory school for entering Christian ministry, the Bible institute. Observing that the seminaries of the day were not producing either enough graduates for the task of world evangelization, nor the kind of graduates who knew how to lead people to Christ, a “crash program” was devised. D. L. Moody and A. B. Simpson were the first to develop such schools. So, respectively, Moody Bible Institute of Chicago and Nyack Missionary Training Institute in Nyack, New York, were formed in the 1870s. Their goal was quite simple: to take young people directly out of high schools, without necessarily having the classical preparation required for a seminary admission, but who had a call of God on their lives. These young people were to be put into an intense training program that combined three things: 1) study of the Bible, 2) practical, hands on ministry in real-life situations in the neighborhood of the school, and 3) exposure to various means of spiritual formation, chiefly times of prayer. The Bible institute movement proved to be an effective alternative to the prevailing—and decaying—divinity schools of the day. No, they were not intended to replace centers of scholarship that could nourish thoughtful scholars in the production of useful textbooks, but they were intended to place people in the field—around the world—with a clear, simple message that would change people’s lives. It is little wonder that the Fundamentalist

innovation of the Bible school was swiftly adopted by Pentecostals as a useful mechanism for harnessing the energies of Spirit-filled young people in many countries for effective ministries. Today the Assemblies of God operates more Bible schools around the world than any other denomination.

By 1895, the coalition of Princeton scholarship with Evangelical Revivalism was virtually complete. An important catalyst in this alliance was the hermeneutical system of C. I. Scofield. Drawn largely from the writings of J.N. Darby, the teaching of C. I. Scofield, and especially his famous Reference Bible, had a widespread influence over the entire Fundamentalist movement. The annual Bible conference that punctuated the Fundamentalist calendar was largely geared to themes centered on the Second Coming of Christ, the urgency of the hour, and the need for deeper commitment. Not all the Princeton theologians adopted pre-millennial, Scofieldian, eschatological views, but there was a substantial consensus about central values by the turn of the century. This consensus found expression in various ways in the first years of the twentieth century. The following is a brief summary of what came to be known as “the fundamentals.”

The Fundamentals

There was fairly widespread agreement about the core message of Fundamentalism. In various forms and in different settings, lists of what constituted the “fundamentals” appeared. Perhaps the most comprehensive statement of Fundamentalist convictions to appear was the publication between 1910 and 1915 of twelve paper-back volumes, collectively called *The Fundamentals*. Two wealthy laymen, Lyman and Milton Stewart, funded the free distribution of this series to three million pastors and Sunday school teachers throughout the United States. This publishing enterprise represents Fundamentalism in its finest hour—sixty four writers united in a common purpose, articulating persuasively a positive proclamation of core Christian truths.³

1. Pre-millennial Eschatology

³ Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism* (reprint, Grand Rapids:, 1978), 189.

In the wake of the French Revolution, some English Christians saw in the overthrow of long-established social order a portent of the end of the age. They sought answers for their questions about uncertain future in the study of Bible prophecy. Among those who pursued the unlocking of the mysteries of biblical prophecy was the Scottish Presbyterian, Edward Irving, who was instrumental in the establishing of an ill-fated charismatic association, The Catholic Apostolic Church. Edward Irving believed that the Second Coming was imminent, and in preparation for this great event, God was going to pour out his Holy Spirit. They were to expect not only the recovery of the charismatic gifts of the Spirit, including baptism in the Spirit with the “standing sign” of speaking in tongues, but Irving and his followers taught that there was to be a restoration of the offices of prophet and apostle. The extremes to which the Catholic Apostolic Church went quickly shunted this abortive movement into obscurity and irrelevance. However, another spokesman arose in England who was destined to have far-reaching influence, not only in England but especially in the United States. His name was John Nelson Darby.

Darby, the founder of the Plymouth Brethren, taught a view of world history that featured a pre-millennial return of Jesus Christ. He propounded a view of the Second Coming of Christ as the cataclysmic end of the present world order, a world order that was seen to be sinking into darkness. The Second Coming of Christ was pictured by Darby as a sudden, unexpected event, a dramatic moment for which earnest Christians should be preparing themselves. Important to understanding the biblical teaching about the unfolding of God’s dealings with humanity was the contriving of a system of dispensations. These dispensations were an important key to understanding the flow of biblical and world history. The Church age, the current period, was conceived to be a parenthesis in this series of epochs, an era of uncertain limits which would be terminated by the sudden, unexpected, return of Jesus. The Millennium, a literal 1000 years reign of Christ on earth, would follow the Second Coming. Crucial to Darby’s eschatology was a literalistic hermeneutic, predicated on a high view of the inspiration of the Bible. These themes—the authority of an infallible Bible, pessimism about the current world order, and a strong commitment to the imminent Second Coming of Jesus Christ—all of these were themes that eventually were adopted by Fundamentalism. It is significant at this juncture to remind ourselves that Wesley, along with most other conservative, Evangelical Christians of that era, was a post-millennialist. Not until the time of

Irving and Darby, about 1830, was there a change in the ideas about eschatology commonly held by earnest Christian believers. Wesleyan post-millennial eschatology continued to inform Holiness thinking and only quite late in the race were the pre-millennial views of Fundamentalism adopted by some of the younger Wesleyan bodies. Pre-millennialism was clearly a Fundamentalist theme. Jesus Christ was coming again, bodily and personally. This was the strong hope of the Fundamentalist movement.

2. The Inerrancy of Scripture.

A common thread running through the Fundamentalist/Modernist debate was the issue of the nature of Scripture. Liberals had largely adopted a humanistic view of the Bible, conceding much to the opinions of destructive critics who had rejected supernaturalism for a century. For Modernists in the late-nineteenth century, the Bible was perceived to be nothing but the collected history of a primitive people describing the evolution of their religious beliefs. To combat this radical concession, scholars like B. B. Warfield argued for not only the *authority* of the Bible as the very Word of God, but within that circle he drew another circle, the *infallibility* of the Bible. And to insure that the infallibility of the Bible was secured, he drew within that circle yet another circle, what he called *the inerrancy of the autograph*.⁴ This definition of the nature of Scripture made no claim for the accuracy of the transmission of the text, but relied solely on a logical defense of the original documents, documents not available for inspection. Since the documents, the autographs, were not available, it was not possible for the Modernist to assail this citadel of belief, other than to complain that it was an argument from silence.

Coupled with this high view of Scripture, Fundamentalists leaned far in the direction of advocating a literalist interpretation of Scripture. For example, the Scofieldian dispensational system was erected on a very literal interpretation of prophetic passages. The Bible institutes of the day taught the students to see the Bible through the lenses of literalism. This resulted in a generation of students able to confront the spiritual needs of the world, unencumbered with the tortured and complex debates and arguments that troubled scholars on both sides of the great debate.

⁴ B. B. Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 211, quoted in Sandeen, *op.cit.*, 127

3. The Deity of Christ

Critical to the debate was the understanding of the person of Jesus Christ. If He were indeed the divine Son of God, and not merely another man, the implications would be enormous. Fundamentalists rightly assessed the significance of the issue and addressed in persuasive ways the truth of the full deity of Jesus Christ. An example of the importance attached to this aspect of theology is that the very first volume of *The Fundamentals* begins with two articles on the person of Christ.⁵

4. The Bodily Resurrection of Christ

The Fundamentalist rightly understood that the resurrection of Christ from the dead is the touchstone of Christianity. Whether or not Jesus Christ rose again makes all the difference. Apologetic material that is still unsurpassed today was produced by astute Fundamentalist scholars.⁶

5. The Vicarious Atonement.

Modernists had reduced the concept of atonement to nothing more than “moral influence.” This is, when a person pondered the willingness of Jesus to suffer and to die as a martyr for a noble, if misguided cause, the observer would be ennobled to do better in the decisions of daily life. For the Modernist, nothing really happened at Calvary. All that happens is in the mind of the beholder. This is a subjective understanding of the atonement. For Fundamentalists, this view was a reduction of a central truth of Christianity—the truth that the death of Jesus Christ was truly an objective act of atonement for the sins of humankind. The concept of the substitutionary atonement,

⁵ See *The Fundamentals*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Testimony Publishing, 1910). James Orr wrote the first article, titled “The Virgin Birth of Christ,” 7-20, and B. B. Warfield wrote the second, “The Deity of Christ,” 21-28.

⁶ R. A. Torrey, “The Certainty and Importance of the Bodily Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the Dead,” in *The Fundamentals*, vol. V, 81-105. This is a sample of the argumentation employed by Fundamentals to support belief in the resurrection of Christ.

vicarious (“in our place”), was consistently taught by the Fundamentalists in sharp contrast to the views of the Modernists.⁷

Fundamentalism and the Pentecostal Movement

In 1919, the various entities comprising the amorphous Fundamentalist cause came together to form the World Christian Fundamentals Association. In their convention in 1928, a resolution was adopted that disavowed any connection or endorsement of the “tongues movement.”⁸ For a variety of reasons, Fundamentalism rejected the Pentecostals. Certainly one reason for this was the strong commitment of most Fundamentalists to the hermeneutic of Scofieldian dispensationalism, which made little place for the manifestation of gifts of the Spirit in the contemporary church. Stanley Frodsham, editor of the *Pentecostal Evangel*, responded with an editorial expressing disappointment at the decision of the Fundamentalists, but appealed for a loving response, trusting that the day would come when Fellowship could be restored.⁹

In spite of being totally rebuffed by Fundamentalism, nonetheless the theological affirmations of Fundamentalism (except for their rejection of the availability of the charismata in the church) were uniformly accepted and promulgated. At the height of the Fundamentalist/Modernist controversy, more than 200 titles of books by Fundamentalist/Dispensationalist authors were sold through the Gospel Publishing House in Springfield, Missouri.¹⁰

Even more significant is the shaping of Pentecostal eschatology. The classical Holiness movement was grounded in Wesleyan postmillennialism. Pre-millennialism, adopted tardily by most Holiness-Pentecostal bodies which emerged from the Pentecostal revival, was almost an afterthought. For groups like the Assemblies of

⁷ For a sample of the Fundamentalist support for the vicarious atonement, see Franklin Johnson, “The Atonement,” in *The Fundamentals*, vol. VI, 50-63.

⁸ William W. Menzies, *Anointed to Serve* (Springfield, Mo: Gospel Publishing House, 1971), 180.

⁹ William W. Menzies, “Non-Wesleyan Origins of the Pentecostal Movement,” In *Aspects of Pentecostal-Charismatic Origins*, ed. Vinson Synan (Plainfield, N.J., Logos, 1975), 85.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

God that were formed around shared Pentecostal experience and values but whose constituents came from a variety of backgrounds, the articulating of a theology that expressed the beliefs of the group required some creativity. Assemblies of God spokespersons clearly expressed identity with the teachings promulgated by the Fundamentalists, in nearly, every detail. When it came to eschatology, Frank Boyd and Ralph Riggs, respected Assemblies of God Theologians, accepted Fundamentalist dispensationalism wholesale, making it fit the needs of Pentecostalism by standing Scofieldian eschatology on its head. Instead of the church age being a hiatus in which the gifts of the Spirit are not to be expected, Boyd, for example, makes the church age the age of the Spirit! The promises of Charismatic activity that are consigned to the Millennium are brought right into the contemporary world.¹¹

There is no question about the strong influence of Fundamentalism in the shaping of the values of the modern Pentecostal movement. This factor must be taken into account by those who wish to truly understand the origins of the Pentecostal movement.

¹¹See William W. Menzies, *Anointed to Serve*, 39 for a discussion of giving a “Pentecostal baptism” to Scofieldian dispensationalism.