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The Fundamentalist Controversy in America

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THE FUNDAMENTALIST CONTROVERSY IN AMERICA.

SINCE the war there has arisen in American Protestant thought, a sharp controversy concerning what is called Fundamentalism. The daily newspapers have devoted many columns of space to theological discussion, public debates have attracted much attention and these differences have assumed political importance because of the pressure exerted upon state legislatures to pass laws forbidding the teaching of evolution. The Ku Klux Klan is believed by some to promote the religious ideas advocated by the Fundamentalists.

There are differences among the Fundamentalists, but in general they stand for a strongly conservative position, including the verbal inspiration of Scripture, the Virgin Birth, the substitutionary atonement and the bodily resurrection. All hold to "a personal, visible return" of Jesus and many of them are premillenarians. These doctrines are held not only by what Roosevelt called "the lunatic fringe" but also by many noble Christians. To them these doctrines appear as the faith once for all delivered to the saints. In general, they regard Christianity as a static deposit of doctrine.

The movement is propagated through Bible Institutes, notably the Moody Institute in Chicago and the school at Los Angeles. Their academic standards are low and they send out many graduates who prefer the "short cut" training to the more rigorous education of the standard colleges and theological seminaries. So-called "prophetic conferences" are used to spread these ideas. It is said \$300,000 has been spent in distributing a series of 10 volumes, called Fundamentals."

The enterprise has spread to China where the "Bible Union" attempts to separate the so-called orthodox missionaries and native Christians from the modernists.

William Jennings Bryan, a prominent figure in American political life, has urged that it be made a statutory offence to teach anything contrary to the Genesis account of man's origin, in the schools and colleges of Florida. A bill of this nature failed by only one vote to pass the Kentucky legislature. Bryan has called the President of the University of Wisconsin—a lifelong and

loyal Congregationalist—an atheist because his institution does nothing to counteract the modern view of the Bible.

In general, the Fundamentalists strongly oppose colleges, modern science, liberal Christians, the social gospel and the Federal Council of Churches of Christ. Extremists attack Prohibition, Peace Conferences and other efforts to make this world better.

While this movement affects various denominations, it is particularly strong among Baptists. One association in Michigan has withdrawn its 14 Baptist churches from the denomination and calls itself an Orthodox Baptist Association. Many of the Fundamentalists desire a creed but at every Northern Baptist Convention when this proposal has come to a vote, it has been decisively beaten. There has been much controversy as to the acceptance of gifts with credal conditions. There have been bitter attacks on the denominational educational institutions. The New World Movement was seriously handicapped by the attitude of extreme Fundamentalists who opposed contributing to our colleges and to the Foreign Mission Society. The Society has been under fire for some time and at Milwaukee in 1924 a committee was appointed to investigate the doctrinal soundness of its policies.

One of the leading Fundamentalists is reported to have said: "We can never consent to stop short of seeing the denominational machinery in control of the great Conservative constituency which makes up at least three fourths of the denomination. We must therefore eliminate from our Boards and offices of responsibility all those men who have put in jeopardy the spiritual life and purpose of the denomination and who wink at the subversion of our schools to the propaganda of a modernistic program."

The controversy has not been acute among the Southern Baptist where there are but few liberals. The general temper is strongly conservative and opposed to "entangling alliances" with other denominations.

The liberals or modernists range from pretty conservative men to a few very radical thinkers. This group includes many of the denominational leaders and educators besides a large number of the younger educated ministers and laymen. Their first fundamental is loyalty to the spirit and purpose of Jesus. They regard Christianity as

a living, growing, changing, thing. It is a life, rather than a doctrine. They reject the doctrine of the infallibility of the Bible as a bondage to the letter which restrains the life giving spirit. They accept the results of modern historical and critical study of Scripture, which they regard as the record of a progressive divine revelation. They believe that the Fundamentalist view of the Bible would ultimately alienate educated people from the church.

The liberals accept modern science and see in evolution God's method. They believe in freedom and in this emphasis, count themselves truly loyal to the Baptist tradition. Most of them believe in the application of the teaching of Jesus to industrial, social, political, racial and international relations. They heartily co-operate with other Christian communions and look forward to a larger measure of unity.

Some have predicted a split in the denomination with resultant deplorable hard feeling, confusion and litigation, but the likelihood of this seems remote. The liberals are being strengthened by the influence of Dr. Fosdick and others who hold educated men to the church and "the middle of the roaders" tend to follow progressive guidance.

KENNETH C MACARTHUR, M.A.

BAPTIST MINISTERS' FRATERNAL UNION.

Very successful meetings were held in the Church House on Thursday, April 30, At the business meeting, in Kingsgate Chapel, a statement of the work of the year was made by the secretary (the Rev. A. J. Payne), which showed that the membership is steadily increasing and the financial position quite satisfactory. The library has been brought up to date, new books having been purchased and old books withdrawn from circulation. It is confidently hoped that four numbers of "The Fraternal" will be issued for 1925 to the five hundred or more actual members. The following elections were made, viz.:—President, the Rev. F. Goldsmith French; vice-president, the Rev. J. E. Martin; treasurer, the Rev. E. W. Gibbons, F.R.G.S.;