

The Significance of Fundamentalism in the Doctrinal Development of the Universal Church

Robert A. Snyder

American Protestantism changed due to the fundamentalist-modernist controversy of the 1920s. Before the controversy, Protestant denominations often worked together. At times, they cooperated well, as in the united efforts of the Second Great Awakening. At other times, they cooperated poorly, as in the sectarian and sectional divisions before the Civil War. Overall, whether cooperating well or poorly, these denominations considered themselves to be united in core doctrine—in the Trinity and the Incarnation, in the final and sufficient authority of the Bible, and in the need for personal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

This unity was challenged when more and more German-trained theologians and preachers returned to America, armed with theological liberalism and claiming that the essence of Christianity did not include doctrine at all. By the twentieth century, the internal theological differences became so severe that most of the great Protestant denominations split. Because liberals often retained the denominational “furniture” of missions and education, traditional believers were forced to build new institutions from scratch, thereby creating a conglomerate eventually known as “evangelicalism.” Among the traditional believers were many *fundamentalists*, leaders who were willing to fight for the faith within the press and within denominational meetings. In time, this legacy of fighting became a movement in its own right, which separated from the so-called “new evangelicals” of the 1950s and formed an isolated church culture known as “fundamentalism.”

This article explores the significance of fundamentalism within the Christian tradition as a whole. Specifically, *what does fundamentalism contribute to the doctrinal development of the universal church?* To some theologians, the very idea of fundamentalism may seem opposed to any concept of doctrinal development; to others, the movement of fundamentalism itself may seem opposed to any concept of a universal church. Therefore, before proposing an answer to my question, let me first explain some premises pertaining to what I mean by a Christian tradition and how I hope to ascertain some of the significance of fundamentalism in particular. In doing so, let us first examine the very practical and biblical concept of *humble pride*.¹

Humble Pride and the Christian Tradition

As Christians, we are quite familiar with denominational labels, but how proper are they? Is it right to identify another Christian as “Lutheran” or “Wesleyan,” when such labels are absent from the Bible and carry the name of mere men? Going further, is it right to identify another Christian as “Evangelical” or “Fundamentalist,” when such labels can give the impression that somehow, we are not all on the same team? In other words, do labels do more harm than good?

Labels come from movements, and movements come from men; therefore, the question of labels is inextricably tied to the role of influential men in the Christian tradition. *How should we feel towards these men that God used so mightily?* If we are proud of them, are we thereby diminishing our worship of God? If we forget them, are we displaying our ingratitude? Even

¹ The following chapter presents the substance of a lecture I was asked to give on humility and love in pastoral leadership with respect to the history of fundamentalism. The lecture was given on 6 March 2007 in Simi Valley, California to a gathering of friends within fundamentalism. Because the gathering involved pastors actively overseeing fundamentalist churches, the lecture included both counsel and exhortation along with information. I have chosen to retain that brotherly feel by writing this chapter in the first and second person.

more, if we are ashamed of them, are we indicating a secret desire to start our own movement, to make a name for ourselves? We must have some attitude towards these men, especially those of our own denomination. What should our attitude be?

Thankfully, as in all matters of Christian spirituality, the apostles have supplied the principles we need. In correcting the unhealthy pride of the Corinthians, Paul left us the following three principles for the role of humble pride in maintaining the Christian tradition.

First, we should eschew all self-labels, but not necessarily all labels. In some sense, labels are unavoidable. The early Christians were called “Christians” presumably by outsiders, perhaps in much the same way that early adherents to believer-baptism in England were called “Anabaptists” or “Baptists” (cf. Acts 11:26). To the extent that such labels speak the truth, especially a theological truth, we should accept them without shame or a fuss. Peter counseled, “If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf” (1 Peter 4:16).² For our discussion here, the pertinent question is: How do we internally and verbally label ourselves? That is our *self-label*.

The Corinthians were a divided church with many self-labels. Some were saying, “I am of Paul,” while others were claiming Apollos or Peter or even Christ, interestingly enough (1 Corinthians 1:12). In response, Paul challenged them, “Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?” (1:13). There is only one Christ, and there is only one church; therefore, there should be no divisions in the church due to self-labels. After all, it was not a fundamentalist who died for us, nor were we baptized as a Baptist, but as a Christian. We are all Christians, and our boast should be in Christ alone (1:31).

Granted, the situation today varies somewhat from the situation then. For example, as R. C. Sproul once pointed out, our current labels often express substantial theological differences, in contrast to the doctrinal unity of the apostles. If we truly wish to remove all labels and to identify ourselves as simply Christian, then, *in order to be truthful*, we should strive to be better united in doctrine. It may be that some of the divisions in Corinth had stemmed from a misrepresentation of the various apostles’ doctrines, for Paul first told them to be of “the same mind” and “the same judgment,” statements that may refer to doctrine and not strictly to attitude (1:10). Even so, it is the *last* label that warns us that more than doctrine is involved here. *How could it be wrong to say, “I am of Christ”?* Obviously, if I put forth any other name, I deny the fundamental priority of Christ, and open myself up to a possible identification with another man’s sin (see Matthew 23:8-10, 29-31); but what is wrong with claiming Christ?

The problem is not with the words “of Christ,” but with the words “I am.” Instead of saying, “We are of Christ,” the singular pronoun distances other brothers, as if this *ego* has more spirituality than other egos. It is an ironic quirk of church history that groups separating themselves as being merely “Christian” end up becoming a new denomination. The solution to disunity will never be the self-assertion of a new label, even if that label is Christ Himself. We should accept the label that we have already received in the Christian tradition. We should not try to assert that we are *this* or that we are *not that*, in contradistinction to other Christian groups, for in so doing we become the “This” denomination or the “Not-That” denomination. All such self-assertions are foolish. Self-made titles are a quick road to pride (Matthew 23:8-12). In contrast, if we accept the label we currently have, it will grow more and more invisible in time, as long as our good deeds keep pace with the glory of Christ’s cause (1 Peter 2:12). Eventually, the label may fade away and be dropped altogether.

² Unless otherwise specified, all biblical quotations are either from the Authorized Version or from *The Holy Bible, New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982).

Second, we should recognize that all Christian leaders belong to us. In addressing the issue of disunity, Paul urged the Corinthians: “Let no one glory in men. For all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, of life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and you are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s” (1 Corinthians 3:21-23). In other words, Martin Luther belongs just as much to me as to the Lutherans; John Wesley belongs just as much to me as to the Wesleyans.

According to Paul, recognition of this universal ownership is necessary to counteract the wrongful boasting in men that leads to disunity. Instead of boasting in one man, in obvious rivalry to Christ and in contrast to the recognition of all Christians, we should embrace the entire Body of Christ as our own. Furthermore, instead of boasting in no man, which in essence means that we adhere to ourselves alone in blind pride, we should recognize that Christ gave men to us as gifts, refusing to furnish us with all the grace-gifts we need (Ephesians 4:7ff). In truth, we belong to them, and they belong to us. Unhealthy pride is eradicated through interdependence. It makes so much sense. How can there be a party spirit without exclusive ownership? A Christian teacher is no more the sole possession of one group than a community park is the sole property of one citizen.

In practical terms, preachers should regularly read outside their particular denominational tradition, and then express the greater unity of the church through quotations from that reading.³ Granted, theological differences should be noted; but if the teacher was a Christian, quote him as a brother. Furthermore, in today’s context, fundamentalists should reckon evangelical leaders as their own, and evangelicals should reckon fundamentalist leaders as their own. The old should recognize the young, and the young should recognize the old. We are one in Christ, so let us glory in our mutual possession of diverse denominational traditions within the one Christian tradition.

Third, we should also recognize that there is a time to boast in Christian leaders. In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul told them, “You have acknowledged us in part, that we are your rejoicing, even as you also are ours in the day of the Lord Jesus” (2 Corinthians 1:14). Paul was their boast, and he wrote to give them opportunity to glory in him in order to “answer them which glory in appearance, and not in heart” (5:12). At first, this may appear to contradict Paul’s first letter, for he had urged the Corinthians not to boast in men. It is only an appearance. In the first letter, Paul had attacked the personal pride that hid behind the self-labels; here in the second letter, Paul argued for taking pride in true Christian leaders as *symbols of Christ*. To be ashamed of a true Gospel preacher is parallel to being ashamed of the Gospel itself (2 Timothy 1:8; cf. 2 Corinthians 5:20). Therefore, when a Christian leader is being attacked for the faith, we should stand with him and own his name, regardless of his denominational label; for in so doing, we boast in Christ Himself (e.g. 2 Timothy 1:16-17). This injunction is especially obligatory towards those who have led us, who have fathered us in the faith, even if we should now disagree with them on certain particulars (cf. 1 Corinthians 4:15).

This boasting is the *humble pride* God favors. It is pride, because we are boasting in Christ through unashamedly identifying with His servants. It is humble, because we are not boasting in ourselves nor in our denomination’s leaders alone, but in all the servants of Christ

³ Habits in reading and quoting are often strong indicators of pride. For example, an absence of quotations may indicate a proud desire to originate ideas, just as Jesus said, “He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory” (John 7:18). Even if we quote within a tradition, pride often ignores the father near us to boast in a distant grandfather. Whether due to pride or simply good judgment, American critic Russell Kirk exhibited a similar tendency: “Although Kirk almost always professed to honor his ancestors, he rarely professed honoring the generation immediately preceding his own” (Bradley J. Birzer, *Russell Kirk: American Conservative* [Lexington: University Press for Kentucky, 2015], 51).

and in Christ Himself, who alone gave them to us. With these three principles in mind, what does humble pride imply for those among us who are heirs of fundamentalism?

Ascertaining the Significance of Fundamentalism

The concept of humble pride helps us to ascertain the significance of fundamentalism within the Christian tradition. In particular, the three principles of humble pride give us the following guiding principles.

First, we should concentrate on the doctrine of fundamentalism more than the name or the movement of fundamentalism.⁴ The name “fundamentalism” is ultimately inconsequential and so is the movement, for we are already Christians and Jesus has guaranteed that our true movement—the universal church—will succeed despite the gates of hell (Matt 16:18). If we are to reform Christianity at all, it must be done *incognito*, not starting a movement with a new name, because Jesus told us to do our good deeds in secret (Matt 6:1). Consequently, the only thing left for us to do is to ascertain the *meaning* of fundamentalism as a concrete reality within the history of the church. If that meaning has validity, then it is valid for all Christians and should be adopted by all, regardless of whether they presently carry the name “Fundamentalist” or not. In a sense, this is similar to the baptistic groups, who hold to believer baptism by immersion but without the name “Baptist.” If our aim is strictly to obey Christ, then we will focus on a doctrine or a practice regardless of its name.

All Christians should know what fundamentalism is and why it arose, for controversies arise in the history of the church for her maturity. Ever since God has a people, He has been training them through various circumstances to realize the truth about His character. For instance, in the wilderness, God purposely afflicted His people with hunger and fed them with manna in order that they might know, “Man does not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD” (Deut 8:3). Similarly, in the New Testament, the circumcision controversy established the legitimacy of Gentile and Jew within the church once and for all time. Through His ministers, Christ was training His church. Although we no longer have apostles giving us an infallible interpretation of current events, we do have their example. I believe that Christ is still training His church through controversies to grasp more of the already-revealed faith and to show who is truly approved of Him (1 Cor. 11:19; cf. 1 Jn 2:19). Christ will sustain this training until the church is mature and united in “the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God” (Eph 4:11-13). This, I believe, is true doctrinal development.

This form of doctrinal development does not involve an expansion of the faith, of what we must believe. According to the New Testament, the faith has been “once for all [time] delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). The Bible stands complete as our only infallible, sufficient, and final rule of faith and practice. The Bible does not change. Even so, our understanding of the Bible does change. In other words, our *creed* is fixed, but our *confession* grows as the church experiences new theological environments. By analogy, just as a believer grows through trials, which provoke him to ask different questions of the Book he already believes, so also the church grows in corporate understanding as she faces new challenges to the faith. The Scripture says with good reason, “Solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason

⁴ A similar point was made before a symposium at Beeson Divinity School by Kevin Bauder, president of Central Seminary in Plymouth, Minnesota: “The term *fundamentalism* does not merely denote the movements, or even the movement as a whole. Fundamentalism is not primarily a social phenomenon, but an *idea*” (Kevin T. Bauder, “What’s That You Smell? A Fundamentalist Response to *The Smell of Sawdust*,” in *Pilgrims on the Sawdust Trail: Evangelical Ecumenism and the Quest for Christian Identity*, ed. Timothy George, Beeson Divinity Series [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004], 58).

of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Heb 5:14).⁵ Hence it is important for us to consider closely the controversies of the church. When an individual Christian learns something the hard way about what is true and what is right, he feels the importance of never forgetting what he has learned from the unchanging Book. Why should the church act differently? Just as a believer can grow dull and forget (Heb 5:11-12), so can the church. Specifically, why should we rethink the entire doctrine of the Trinity when the Arian controversy taught us so much? Why should we rethink the doctrine of justification when the Reformation did that so well? Similarly now, what are we to learn from the fact that fundamentalism arose in the church during the twentieth century? What does the doctrine of fundamentalism mean to us today?

Second, to understand the doctrine of fundamentalism, we should listen to the early fundamentalists themselves. While this approach may seem obvious, it has not always been done. For example, according to William Bell Riley, co-founder with A. C. Dixon of the interdenominational World’s Christian Fundamentals Association, the secular press often sought to explain fundamentalism without consulting a fundamentalist. In response, he claimed that fundamentalism concerned the Christian creed, the Christian character, and the Christian commission.⁶ According to another group, the Fundamental Fellowship of the Northern Baptist Convention, the “doubt, unbelief, and irreligion” of the day implied that Baptists should “reaffirm their faith in the great fundamentals.”⁷ Similarly, according to the “Call and Manifesto of the Baptist Bible Union of America,” many Baptists were departing from both the rule of the faith (the Bible) and from the faith itself; consequently, the Union’s chief aims were to “contend earnestly” for the Bible as God’s very word and to maintain “the Evangelical Faith, and especially...those essential and clearly [sic] revealed doctrines which, at the present time, are being assailed, questioned or ignored in certain circles.”⁸ According to this document, fundamentalism focused on the authority of Scripture and on what constitutes the essence of Christianity. The echo of Jude 3 (“contend earnestly”) shows that the proposed militancy was rooted in Scripture itself.

Third, our aim should not be to return to some primitive or pristine Christianity of the past, but to grow as a church into greater maturity. In doctrine and practice, we should develop the Christian tradition through building on the right insights of our forefathers, while

⁵ The continuity between foundational understanding and mature discernment resembles the way that scientist sometimes speak of making progress in a fundamental science. For example, it is reported that chemist G. N. Lewis “felt that a chemistry department should both teach and advance fundamental chemistry” (John Kotz and Keith F. Purcell, *Chemistry and Chemical Reactivity* [Philadelphia: Saunders College Publishing, 1987], 299).

⁶ W. B. Riley, “What Is Fundamentalism?” *The Christian Fundamentalist*, July 1927. Riley’s coordination of creed and conduct is interesting in light of some fundamentalist’s concern today to maintain both orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Ten years earlier, when Riley was promoting the idea of an interdenominational confederacy, he also stressed that adherence to the “infallible Book” as the ultimate standard will demand both a correct creed and correct conduct. In his opinion, “The heresy of modern times is no more in theological thinking than it is in individual living!” (William B. Riley, *The Menace of Modernism* [New York: Christian Alliance Publishing, 1917]).

For these citations and for many in this article, I am indebted to the facsimiles supplied by Dr. Kevin Bauder in his course on the History of Fundamentalism, given during a summer module in 1997 at Central Baptist Theological Seminary, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

⁷ This statement comes from the preamble to the Goodchild Confession, submitted by Frank Goodchild at the Des Moines, Iowa pre-convention meeting in 1921 (see William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, rev. ed. [Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1969], 383).

⁸ Regarding Scripture, the Union’s first aim explicitly states, “To ‘contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints,’ and the presentation of united witness to the Bible as not only containing and conveying, but as being in itself the Word of GOD” (The Baptist Bible Union of America, “Call and Manifesto of the Baptist Bible Union of America”). Although I do not know the specific date of publication for this document, the Union convened for the first time on 10 May 1923 in Kansas City, Missouri (see David O. Beale, *In Pursuit of Purity: American Fundamentalism Since 1850* [Greenville, SC: Unusual Publications, 1986], 209-10). Lumpkin reports that the “Call and Manifesto” was issued in 1921 (Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 384).

discarding their mistakes. In other words, let us strive for dynamic purity and healthy maturity in the ongoing spirit of reformation. Specifically, let us honor our elders by listening to them before speaking, even as Elihu refrained from comment until his elders proved unfit (Job 32:4ff). Let us imitate them where they imitate Christ (1 Cor 11:10; cf. Heb 13:7); but because “great men are not always wise” (Job 32:9), let us not imitate them slavishly or hold them as the ideal. Even if the fundamentalists had been perfect, they would have been flawless in a previous state of doctrinal development—that is, in a state falling short of today’s need of development. By analogy, a healthy child is still a child. They can be example to an adult of health, but the adult should strive for more development in thought and experience. In following this model, we are free to both honor our elders and to correct their mistakes.

In summary, we aim to grow in our own development through a careful consideration of the doctrinal meaning of the historic fundamentalist movement. We desire to use the apostles as our interpretive key, often letting the fundamentalists speak for themselves. We will also allow room for the critics of fundamentalism to speak, especially those critics who arose from within fundamentalism and still either claimed to be a fundamentalist or saw fundamentalism as an ally. These friendly critics may have already spotted some of the meaning we are seeking, so their comments are worth considering. Moreover, when we remember that humble pride recognizes that all Christian leaders belong to us in Christ, we want to learn from them all. To understand both fundamentalist and critic, let us consider briefly the beginnings of interdenominational fundamentalism before evaluating the meaning of the movement as a whole.

The Beginnings of American Fundamentalism and One Practical Lesson

Every child has a father, and organized American fundamentalism is no exception. In the summer of 1918, *William Bell Riley*, pastor of First Baptist Church in Minneapolis, met with other prophecy-conference leaders in the summer home of R. A. Torrey, dean of the Bible Institute of Los Angeles, to discuss future plans. The group had just completed a successful “prophetic conference” in Philadelphia, where attendance far exceeded expectations; but instead of planning for another one in Philadelphia, Riley convinced the group to host a conference on the defense of the fundamentals of the faith. Such a confederation had been his desire for at least a year, as seen in his book *The Menace of Modernism* (1917); surely, he must have been excited to see this vision get some traction.⁹

During May 25 to June 1, 1919, over six thousand attended the first ever World Conference on the Fundamentals of the Faith. Riley gave the keynote address, comparing this nascent movement to the Protestant Reformation. Citing anti-modernism as a cause for the conference, Riley then mentioned the goal of “a new fellowship, a fellowship that is bringing into closer and closer union men from the various denominations who hold to the certain deity of Jesus Christ and to the utter authority of the Bible.”¹⁰

As a result of the conference, the World’s Christian Fundamentals Association (WCFA) emerged, representing the first “organizational structure capable of correlating the

⁹ For the messages given at the prophecy conference, see *Light on Prophecy: A Coordinated, Constructive Teaching Being the Proceedings and Addresses at the Philadelphia Prophetic Conference, May 28-30, 1918* (New York: The Christian Herald Bible House, 1918).

¹⁰ *God Hath Spoken: Twenty-Five Addresses Delivered at the World Conference on Christian Fundamentals, May 25– June 1, 1919* (Philadelphia: Bible Conference Committee, 1918); reprint, *Fundamentalism in American Religion, 1880 - 1950*, ed. Joel E. Carpenter (NY: Garland Publishing, 1988), 45.

fundamentalist opposition to modernism.”¹¹ Riley served as president. One of his main goals was “to bring under the WCFA umbrella the just-emerging interdenominational network of fundamentalist Bible schools and publications.”¹² To correlate the work of these separate institutions, five standing committees were created:

- (1) On Bible Schools – to standardize curriculum and creeds
- (2) On Colleges and Seminaries – to create a list of doctrinally safe schools
- (3) On Religious Magazines and Periodicals – to promote WCFA and in turn receive articles and reports
- (4) On Missions – to withdraw support from unfaithful boards and to give it to approved boards
- (5) On Conferences – to bring the concerns to other cities

Of the five, only the fifth produced substantial results. Chaired by Riley, the committee “launched an extraordinarily ambitious cross-continent tour,” with speakers staggered out in a series, going on ahead without waiting for the others to finish speaking. The results were amazing. In six weeks, the tour reached eighteen cities, and “transformed the concerns of Riley and other conservative Protestant leaders into a national crusade.”¹³ Equally amazing, however, was how quickly this initial organized faded in importance. By 1922, the WCFA was already in decline. Commenting on this decline, Riley’s biographer noted, “Although Riley’s speaking tours and related activities heightened antimodernist sentiment, they were of minimal value in banding fundamentalists together in a tightly structured organization.”¹⁴ *What went wrong?*

Chief among the factors was a stiff independent spirit among the fundamentalist leaders. In the words of Riley’s second wife Marie, “Some personal incompatibilities, and a constant tendency towards independent leadership combined to retard the progress of what was intended to be an ‘all-inclusive fellowship’ in the Association itself.”¹⁵ This independent spirit seemed to include Riley himself, who probably chose unwisely to lead the surge that he had birthed. Yes, he himself lamented, and perhaps rightly so, that “some fundamentalists are laws unto themselves, and [that] even those who have no such disposition are not as yet in the close coordinated fellowship that would accomplish the best and most to be desired results;” but the fact also remains that he himself kept the coordinated effort under his supervision.¹⁶

If there is one practical lesson to learn from the beginnings of American fundamentalism, it may be this lesson: *revival comes through brotherly unity* (cf. Ps 133). Disunity grieves the Spirit and dooms all effort to the resources of the flesh, which cannot succeed in building the temple of God (cf. Eph 4:30; Zech 4:6). Regarding the 1920s, more than one commentator has noted that fundamentalist “internecine battles, especially the power struggles among ambitious spokesmen, help to explain their organizational difficulties as well as their failure to achieve

¹¹ Willard B. Gatewood, Jr. *Controversy in the Twenties: Fundamentalism, Modernism, and Evolution* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1969), 18.

¹² William Vance Trollinger, Jr. *God’s Empire: William Bell Riley and Midwestern Fundamentalism* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 39.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 39-40.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 41-42.

some of their stated goals.”¹⁷ As a result, the WCFA in particular failed to provide “an institutional alternative to the modernist-tainted denominations,” and eventually shifted its goal to antievolutionism, which was in essence almost an admission of defeat, though not as public a defeat as the ill-crafted Scopes Trial it later sponsored.¹⁸

While the WCFA represents the fate of organized, interdenominational fundamentalism, a similar story could be told for intradenominational groups within the Northern Baptist Convention or the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America. This brief recounting of the WCFA is helpful as background, but our focus here will be not less on practical lessons from the story of fundamentalism, but more on doctrinal lessons from the concept of fundamentalism as interpreted by the fundamentalists themselves and by their friendly critics.

Learning from the Fundamentalists

At first glance, the very concept of fundamentalism seems opposed to any idea of doctrinal development. After all, how can a movement focused on the fundamentals of the faith contribute to a developed understanding of the faith? As an example of this apparent disparity, consider the truncated confessions of fundamentalism. Compared to the classic confessions of post-Reformation Protestantism, these fundamentalist confessions appear as regress, not as progress. For example, in light of the historic grandeur of the Westminster Confession of Faith, used for centuries as the basis for the ordination in the Presbyterian church, the subsequent publication in 1910 of *five* fundamentals necessary for ordination appears unnecessary, even desperate. Even when allowance is made for loose subscription, earlier centuries did not need a truncated list of *five* fundamentals. Why was such a list necessary? Was such a list an admission of failure, a last-ditch attempt at retaining at least *some* standards? In light of this disparity and due to other differences as well, historian D. G. Hart contends that J. Gresham Machen, the famous apologist of the fundamentalist era, was not a fundamentalist, but a confessional Presbyterian.¹⁹ This distinction may be helpful. By merely comparing the size of Protestant confessions to fundamentalist statements, it would seem that doctrinal development occurs only within confessional Christianity. Fundamentalism appears to have been an emergency measure—not a development, but a tourniquet.

In response, it is interesting that early fundamentalist leaders recognized this truncation but saw it in a different light. Regarding a recent list of nine fundamentals, Riley wrote:

Fundamentalism undertakes to reaffirm the greater Christian doctrines. Mark this phrase, “the greater Christian doctrines.” It does not attempt to set forth every Christian doctrine. It has never known the elaboration that characterizes the great denominational

¹⁷ Gatewood, *Controversy in the Twenties*, 17-18; cf. Trollinger, *God’s Empire*, 41-42.

¹⁸ Trollinger, *God’s Empire*, 43, 44.

¹⁹ According to Hart, Machen should be known as a “conservative intellectual” and a “Presbyterian traditionalist” as well as a man to whom fundamentalists were attracted (D. G. Hart, *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in America* [Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994], ix; cf. *ibid.*, 68). As proof, Hart reports, “Unlike fundamentalist and modernist Protestants, Machen fully rejected the hope of building a Christian civilization in America and so found himself on the same side with other secular intellectuals in many of the cultural conflicts of the 1920s,” such as Prohibition (*ibid.*, x). Interestingly, Hart gave his Ph.D. dissertation on Machen the title “Doctor Fundamentalis.”

confessions. But it did lay them side by side, and, out of their extensive statements, elect nine points upon which to rest its claims to Christian attention.²⁰

According to this interpretation, fundamentalism is a reaffirmation of the core of the historic confessions, rather than a replacement or a truncation. As proof, at least as it concerns Riley himself, when some fundamentalists within the Northern Baptist Convention sought to instate the traditional New Hampshire Confession of Faith, the Minneapolis pastor not only fully backed the measure, but allegedly wept when he read the confession at the 1922 pre-convention meeting in Indianapolis.²¹ Similar to Riley, the Baptist Bible Union asserted that its doctrinal basis was not “a Comprehensive Creed,” but rather “merely a statement of such truths as, in the present circumstances, it is important that Baptists should rehearse and emphasize, in view of their historic witness and of the flagrant ambiguities and omissions of fundamental and vital truths in, the DOCTRINAL BASES of the Modernists.”²² Again we see a reaffirmation of the essentials, rather than a comprehensive confession of faith. While the historic confessions defined the various Protestant denominations, the fundamentals of the faith defined Christianity itself.

Why was it necessary to reaffirm the essentials in the modern era? Answering this question leads right into the meaning of fundamentalism as a movement. According to William Jennings Bryan, three-time presidential candidate and a leading Presbyterian layman, the essentials needed reaffirmation because of clerical dishonesty:

A congregation has a right to *assume* that a preacher, if an honest man, would not accept a position [sic] unless his views were in agreement with the views of the church. Some preachers have tried to avoid a statement of their views by declaring non-essential the doctrines they reject,—hence it was necessary for the General Assembly to assert that these doctrines are *essential* as well as true.²³

Please note two things. First, the question of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy pertained not simply to what was *true*, but to what was *essential* to Christianity. The confessions told what the various Protestant denominations held as true, but not everything was essential to Christianity. The very idea of denominationalism reflects the fact that Protestants recognized each other as Christians under different names or “denominations.” As stated earlier, the long tradition of lax subscription among the Presbyterians shows that some doctrines were regarded as peripheral. Because the Westminster Confession did not differentiate between peripheral and essential doctrines, it was now necessary to confess essential doctrines, in light of the attack of the modernists on the core of the faith. Second, even though honesty was certainly a factor—and Machen brought this out forcefully in the conclusion to his classic book *Christianity and Liberalism*—the dishonesty had hermeneutical roots that made it difficult to eradicate. It was simply not enough to quote an essential doctrine and then check whether a potential minister

²⁰ Riley, “What Is Fundamentalism?” Similarly, the Fundamental Fellowship, feeling the need “for Baptists publicly to reaffirm their faith in the great fundamentals,” desired “to restate the foundation doctrines of our faith in [a] brief and simple confession which is but a reaffirmation of the substance of the historic Philadelphia and New Hampshire Confessions of faith” (Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 383).

²¹ Kevin T. Bauder, “Conflict: 1920-1932” (classroom lecture notes, 524—*History of Fundamentalism*, Central Baptist Theological Seminary, Minneapolis, MN, Summer 1997).

²² Baptist Bible Union of America, “Call and Manifesto.”

²³ William Jennings Bryan, “The Fundamentals” (*The Forum*, July 1923).

agreed with it or not. In the Auburn Affirmation of 1923, many moderate Presbyterian ministers affirmed the basic doctrines of the Christian faith, but then called them “theories.”²⁴ According to Machen, doctrines in the Westminster Confession was being affirmed as true in the seventeenth century but as inadequate for expressing the modern faith.²⁵ How could these modernists justify such behavior? The answer is hermeneutics.

The modernists added one step between the biblical texts and understanding those texts—a step called “interpretation.” For example, in 1883 liberal Congregationalist Theodore T. Munger compared the new theology to the old theology in terms of hermeneutics:

In brief, [the New Theology] reads the Scriptures as literature, yet with no derogation from their inspiration. It refuses to regard the writers as automatic organs of the Spirit,—“moved,” indeed, but not carried outside of themselves nor separated from their own ways and conceptions. It is thus that it regards the Bible as a *living* book; it is warm and vital with the life of a divine humanity, and thus it speaks to humanity. But as it was written by men in other ages and of other habits of speech, it needs to be interpreted: it is necessary to get back into the mind of the writer in order to get at the inspiration of his utterance; for before there is an inspired writing there is an inspired man, through whom only its meaning can be reached. This is a very different process from picking out texts here and there, and putting them together to form a doctrine....The Old Theology reads the Scriptures with a lexicon, and weighs words as men weigh iron; it sees no medium between the form of words and their first or preconceived meaning.²⁶

Thus, between the form of the words and their meaning stands a necessary process of interpretation. Similarly, Shailer Mathews, a liberal professor at the University of Chicago and (in many ways) the father of the Northern Baptist Convention, founded in 1907, asserted:

...ecclesiastical authority must be replaced by some intelligible method by which one would be able to distinguish between the form and the content of an inherited religious group belief, and then determine as to the truth of its content by such criteria as were applicable.²⁷

Mathews also testified that the “distinction...between the words of the Bible and the teaching of the Bible” located in “experience” is “the heart of the Modernist’s position regarding the

²⁴ The Auburn Affirmation began as a private document of an Auburn Theological Seminary professor named Robert Hastings Nichols, who was attempting to defend doctrinal liberty within evangelical bounds. The Affirmation’s final form resulted from the word of some New York pastors, who published it under the name, “An Affirmation Designed to Safeguard the Unity and Liberty of the Presbyterian Church of the United States” (see Bradley J. Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy: Fundamentalists, Modernists, and Moderates* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1991], 77ff).

²⁵ J. Gresham Machen, *God Transcendent*, ed. Ned Barnard Stonehouse (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949; reprint, Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1982), 163-65.

²⁶ Theodore T. Munger, “The New Theology,” in *Issues in American Protestantism: A Documentary History from the Puritans to the Present*, ed. Robert L. Ferm (New York: Anchor Books, 1969; reprint, Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1983), 228. Similar to Munger, though not as radical, stands the Congregationalist Edwards Amasa Park, whom orthodox Presbyterian theologian Charles Hodge took to task for presupposing a theology of feeling that is somehow independent of the words that express a theology of intellect (see Charles Hodge, “Theology of the Intellect and of the Feelings,” in *The Princeton Theology 1812-1921: Scripture, Science, and Theological Method from Archibald Alexander to Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield*, ed. Mark A. Noll, rev. ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001], 185-207).

²⁷ Shailer Mathews, “Theology as Group Belief,” in Vergilius Ferm, *Contemporary American Theology: Theological Autobiographies*, Second Series (1933), 173, as quoted in Ferm, *Issues*, 223.

Bible.”²⁸ In contrast to this practice, Machen confessed his reluctance even to use the word “interpretation,” for, as he told the inaugural class at Westminster Theological Seminary, that word “has been the custodian of more nonsense, perhaps, than any other word in the English language to-day. Every generation, it is said, must interpret the bible and the creeds of the church in its own way ‘to suit the modern mind.’”²⁹ In his own writings, Machen often stressed what he called the “facts.”

In contrast to the modernists, the fundamentalists took the Bible literally. In other words, while recognizing that the Bible contains figurative speech that must be interpreted, fundamentalists contended that the bulk of the Bible contains plain speech that essentially speaks for itself.³⁰ Riley strongly maintained:

Fundamentalism insists upon the plain intent of Scripture speech. The members of this movement have no sympathy whatever for that weasel method of sucking the meaning out of words and then presenting the empty shells with an attempt to palm them off, as giving the Christian faith a new and another interpretation.³¹

He later quoted the *New York Nation* in noting that liberalism “pretends to preach the higher criticism by interpreting the sacred writing as esoteric fables.”³² These observations are enlightening, for they reveal that some leaders in the fundamentalism era grasped that the problem involved not simply ethical honesty, but also hermeneutical sophistry. Amidst all the fundamentalists’ assertions about inerrancy, we should not lose sight of the main thing of fundamentalism, namely the reaffirmation of the fundamentals as essential to Christianity. Modernists were not merely denying the peripheral scientific and historical details of the Bible; they were denying its core under the guise of interpretation through a false division of form and meaning.

This hermeneutical bifurcation of form and meaning has persisted to this day, but in a different form. Whereas modernism placed the meaning in the mind of the author, postmodernism places it in the mind of the reader. Both modernism and postmodernism agree, however, that the meaning cannot be in the words themselves. In contrast, fundamentalism takes words literally. In doing so, fundamentalism adds a necessary element to evangelicalism’s emphasis on the experience of the new birth. By uniting Christians around an experience more than doctrine, evangelicalism inadvertently opens the door to liberalism, which, in the famous formula of Adolph von Harnack, was all about “Life, not doctrine.” Machen saw this too and urged revivalist Christians not to knock down the foundation—the Bible—which brought them

²⁸ Shailer Mathews, “Modernism and the Bible,” in Ferm, *Issues*, 284. This quotation is taken from Mathew’s book, *The Faith of Modernism* (1924), which he published as a response to Machen’s *Christianity and Liberalism* (1923).

²⁹ J. Gresham Machen, *Education, Christianity, and the State*, ed. John W. Robbins (Jefferson, MD: The Trinity Foundation, 1987), 147-48.

³⁰ Some of this tendency to take the Bible literally is related to the hermeneutics of dispensationalism. For example, Lewis Sperry Chafer explained, “While some prophecy is couched in symbolic language, those portions which trace the forward movements of the kingdom in the earth are largely free from problems presented by such symbolism, and that body of truth appears in language and terms the meaning of which cannot reasonably be questioned.” Therefore, he explained, “In tracing these passages scarcely a comment is necessary if the statements are taken in their plain and obvious meaning” (Lewis Sperry Chafer, *The Kingdom in History and Prophecy* [New York: Revell, 1915], 15).

For the relationship between fundamentalism and dispensationalism, see George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 43-71.

³¹ Riley, “What Is Fundamentalism?”

³² *Ibid.*

to that height of experience.³³ In reality, we need both doctrine and experience, both fundamentalism and evangelicalism. Without fundamentalism, I believe evangelicalism will continue to suffer from its current identity crisis and will remain vulnerable to fresh advances of liberalism.³⁴

Learning from Critics

Today fundamentalism is known more for the practice of separation than for a particular approach to hermeneutics. In fact, separation is the one item now upon which all fundamentalists agree.³⁵ In the beginning, fundamentalism as a movement lacked this association with separatism—not due to any lack of willingness (except in a few cases), but due to the fact that separation had rarely yet occurred.³⁶ In the midst of the controversy, it was yet to be determined who would win and control some of the large Protestant denominations. Granted, separation of liberalism from Christianity was, as Machen so aptly argued, “the crying need of the hour,”³⁷ but in the early 1920s it was still unclear whether this separation would occur by putting out the liberals or by the fundamentalists themselves coming out. Therefore, fundamentalists have always favored separation, but they were not yet identified by this practice nor were they in agreement on how or when to apply this practice.

While not yet known for separation, early fundamentalism was known for a certain attitude. Taking its cues from the language of Jude 3 (“contend earnestly”), early fundamentalism was defined both by its affirmation of the fundamentals of the faith and by its attitude of militancy in defending the faith. In fact, the very name “fundamentalist” was coined by a Baptist editor identifying with the new movement. In the summer of 1920, editor Curtis

³³ J. Gresham Machen, “History and Faith,” in *Ferm, Issues*, 275. This article was originally published in *The Princeton Theological Review* for July 1915.

³⁴ The crisis over evangelical identity and evangelicalism has been discussed on many occasions by many individuals. For a fundamentalist viewpoint, which largely agrees with the paragraph above, see Bauder, “Fundamentalist Response,” 64-65.

In contrast to this solution, some Protestants would argue that confessionalism is the answer, that is, a return to the historic confessions of the Protestant denominations. In the 1990s, the Alliance for Confessing Evangelicals argued for such a position. More recently, Carl Trueman has warned that without a return to confessional Protestantism, evangelicalism will likely succumb to the cultural forces represented by homosexuality (see *the Real Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* [Chicago: Moody, 2011]). For a discussion led by a confessional Protestant, see Michael Horton, “The Battles over the Label ‘Evangelical,’” *Modern Reformation*, March/April 2001, 15-21, and the other contributors to that issue of the magazine.

While I respect the historic confessions in particular and denominationalism in general, an overemphasis on confessions risks turning them into authoritative creeds and isolating denominations that should be working together in evangelical unity. Perhaps if the creeds were rewritten with core doctrines differentiated from secondary doctrines, denominations could more easily work together and contend for the fundamentals of the faith.

³⁵ At the Beeson symposium, Kevin Bauder asserted, “Separation is the heart of fundamentalism. Whatever else they may quarrel about, all fundamentalists agree that no Christian fellowship or union is possible with those who deny the gospel by denying fundamental doctrines” (Bauder, “Fundamentalist Response,” 63; see also George Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991], 3, 73).

³⁶ One example of a reticence towards separation is J. C. Masee, pastor of the Baptist Tabernacle in Brooklyn and the first president of the Fundamental Fellowship within the Northern Baptist Convention. At the inaugural meeting held in Buffalo, New York during May 1920, Masee announced, “We will not go [into the convention] with swords sharpened to conflict, but with spirits prayerfully called to unity” (Beale, *Pursuit*, 193). Masee later resigned from the Fellowship in 1925 (*ibid.*, 227).

³⁷ In *Christianity and Liberalism*, the argument for ecclesiastical separation forms the climax of the book and is based squarely on the definition of Christianity itself: “One thing is perfectly plain—whether or not liberals are Christians, it is at any rate perfectly clear that liberalism is not Christianity. And that being the case, it is highly undesirable that liberalism and Christianity should continue to be propagated within the bounds of the same organization. A separation between the two parties is the crying need of the hour” (J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* [New York: Macmillan, 1923; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999], 160). According to Bauder, Machen “captured the core of the fundamentalist idea: the belief that Christian unity and fellowship are possible only with other Christians” (Bauder, “Fundamentalist Response,” 62-63).

Lee Laws proposed, “We suggest that those who still cling to the great fundamentals and who mean to do battle royal for the fundamentals shall be called ‘Fundamentalists.’”³⁸ Consequently, it is possible (as Bauder and others do) to define fundamentalism as a species of the genus evangelicalism, in that a fundamentalist not only affirms the evangel (as an evangelical traditionally would) but affirms the evangel with a militant attitude.³⁹ Fundamentalist historian George Dollar went one step further when he asserted, “Historic fundamentalism is the literal exposition of all the affirmations and attitudes of the Bible and the militant exposure of all non-Biblical affirmations and attitudes.”⁴⁰ Linguistically, militancy has become such a defining element to fundamentalism that in secular usage, any militant religious group is now identified as a “fundamentalist.”⁴¹ For our purposes, it is important to note that from the beginning of the movement fundamentalists defined themselves in terms of militancy.

Separation became a hallmark of fundamentalism in the second generation of the movement, after a coterie of young fundamentalists defected and sought to win both the culture and the old denominations as “new evangelicals.” These young fundamentalists, mainly scholars, affirmed the fundamentals of the faith, but unlike their elders, they sought to defend the faith with a smile. They also sought to reunite social service with evangelization—a union common to evangelical Protestants throughout the nineteenth century.⁴² When Billy Graham became their national representative and started involving liberal ministers in his crusades, starting with the 1957 Madison Square Garden crusade in New York city, the fundamentalists not only frowned upon his lack of separation, they separated from him! Ever since then, fundamentalism has had two forms of separation: separating from liberals and separating from evangelicals who do not separate from liberals (a practice called “secondary separation”). As a result, two controversies define contemporary fundamentalism: first, in opposition to the modernists, fundamentalists regard certain doctrines as essential to the faith and worthy of militant defense; second, in opposition to the new evangelicals, fundamentalists regard separation as a necessary corollary to the militant defense of the fundamentals of the faith.

Before introducing two friendly critics of fundamentalism, we should remind ourselves of the danger of the self-labels “militant” and “separatist.” Both of these labels are negative. If a fundamentalist were asked, “Are you a good fundamentalist?” he would now have to defend

³⁸ Curtis Lee Laws, “Convention Side-Lights” *Watchman-Examiner*, 1 July 1920, 834.

³⁹ Kevin T. Bauder, “Ecclesiastical Separation: the Questions We Must Ask” (lecture given at the Great Lakes Sunday School Convention, Troy, MI, 11 March 2006; cf. Bauder, “Defining Fundamentalism” [classroom lecture notes, 524—*History of Fundamentalism*, Central Baptist Theological Seminary, Minneapolis, MN, Summer 1997]). The language of my paragraph (“affirmations” and “attitude”) owes its origin mainly to Bauder, who pointed out the other sources as well.

⁴⁰ George Dollar, *A History of Fundamentalism in America* (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1973), xv. Later, Dollar qualifies his definition, noting that in Canada, the term fundamentalism is “synonymous with orthodox or evangelical and refers to, or includes, any person who rejects the tenets of the Modernists or the Liberals” (ibid., 108). This tendency to fight over all doctrines has become a caricature of fundamentalism (e.g. R. Albert Mohler, Jr., “A Call for Theological Triage and Christian Maturity,” *Southern Seminary Magazine*, Summer 2006, 3).

⁴¹ Marsden notes that by extension the term “fundamentalist” is now applied to any militant religious group. He calls fundamentalists “militant evangelicals” (a species within a genus) and claims, “. . . fundamentalists are a subtype of evangelical and militancy is crucial to their outlook.” He also identifies World War I as a primary contributing factor to this attitude initially (*Understanding Fundamentalism*, 1, 50ff).

It is important to stress that this connotation of militancy is not essential to the denotation of the word “fundamental,” which refers to that which is necessarily basic for a body of thought or a group of people. It should also be noted that Islamic fundamentalism differs radically from Christian fundamentalism in its outward expression (a literal sword versus a spiritual sword) and yet these forms of religion resemble each other in taking the founder and original tenets of their respective religions seriously and literally in the face of modernity and its relativism.

⁴² For one statement of the agenda of the new evangelicals, see Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

himself by pointing out his militancy and his separatism. By analogy, this resembles asking a parent, “Are you a good parent?” with the response, “Oh, yes, I spank my children regularly.” While spanking is necessary for good parenting, a better answer would be, “Yes, I love my children, which involves training them through both education and corrective discipline” (cf. Eph 6:4; Prov 3:11-12; 13:24).⁴³ In contrast, Jesus said that Christians will be identified by something positive—something they have and do—by their love (John 13:35).

With the militant and separatist traits of fundamentalism in mind, let us now consider the two friendly critics: Carl F. H. Henry and Francis A. Schaeffer. Both men were troubled in the postwar era by what fundamentalism lacked, especially in positive traits. They differed, however, regarding what they perceived was lacking.

Carl F. H. Henry and Social Activism

Carl F. H. Henry may have been the most significant Baptist theologian in America during the twentieth century. As the inaugural editor of *Christianity Today* (1956) and the author of a monumental work on biblical revelation, the multivolume *God, Revelation and Authority*, Henry set a standard for evangelical scholarship that is still influencing men today, including R. Albert Mohler and young men trained by him, such as Russell Moore and Gregory Alan Thornbury. As a young scholar, Henry published a movement-defining critique of fundamentalism entitled *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*. In it, Henry shares his “uneasy conscience” over fundamentalism’s cultural retreat and lack of social activism: “Fundamentalism is the modern priest and Levite, by-passing suffering humanity.”⁴⁴ Instead of constructively applying the “genius of our position...to those problems which press most for solution in a social way,” fundamentalism was more concerned “to parade secondary aspects of our position as necessary frontal phases of our view.”⁴⁵ As a result, Henry feared that fundamentalism would soon “become a cult or a despised sect,” thereby losing hope for “another world hearing for the Gospel” and missing the opportunity to “lift our jaded culture to a level that gives significance again to human life.”⁴⁶ If to some of his contemporaries this sounded like a rebirth of the social gospel with its postmillennial hopes of a Christian culture, Henry reasoned:

The futility of trying to win all does not mean that it is futile to try to win some areas of influence and life. An evangelical world program has its timeliest opportunity at the present hour.⁴⁷

As in personal evangelism, where the prospect of hard-hearted rejection is cheered with the hopeful reminder of a sovereign God potentially doing a miracle through His living word, so now the church should address the hardened West with all the hopeful expectancy that God may

⁴³ By further analogy, while it may be necessary to amputate a limb in order to save a body, amputation should not define health (cf. 2 Tim 2:16-17). Similarly, if six apostles had refused to shake the dust off their feet when rejected, should the other six have called themselves the Dust-Shakers (cf. Matt 10:14)? In general, should we define ourselves by comparing ourselves with others (cf. 2 Cor 10:12)? Or by what we do not touch?

⁴⁴ Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, 2.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, xvii.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, xv-xvii.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 76.

yet again grant national repentance. We should remember that the word of Jesus still raises the dead when and where He wishes!

In one sense, Henry was saying nothing new. His call for “united effort” echoed the evangelical movement of the early republic, which also saw Christianity as the only hope for a stable culture.⁴⁸ Moreover, his vision of a reasoned Christianity gaining a cultural hearing strongly resembles the personal manifesto of Machen as a young man.⁴⁹ However, where Machen focused on the universal church and stressed intellectual answers to the modernist objections, Henry’s little book focused on the culture and called for intellectual answers to social problems. This focus was shared by Henry’s pastor, Harold J. Ockenga, who wrote in the preface to Henry’s book, “The church needs a progressive Fundamentalism with a social message.” Again, if this sounded like the social gospel, Ockenga saw such fears as a false dilemma, because “the higher morality of redemption does not invalidate moral consistency.”⁵⁰

Three aspects of Henry’s agenda concern me. First, it is very cerebral, as if philosophical thought will win the day. Second, I am cautious about the inclusion of humanitarian effort within the church’s mission. Not only has this proven to be a recipe for apostasy in America, as seen in the history of nineteenth-century evangelicalism, it is also contrary to the example of Jesus, who came to preach the gospel and then die for our sins (Mark 1:38; 10:45).⁵¹ True, Jesus healed the sick, but He healed the sick because He felt compassion for them (e.g. Mark 1:41; 8:2), not because healing was His goal in visiting village upon village. In a sense, preaching was Jesus’ day-to-day mission and healing was His significant interruption. Third, I am also concerned about using humanitarian effort as a means for the gospel. True, our good works should shine and invite men and women to faith in Christ (e.g. Matt 5:16; 1 Pet 2:12ff), but we need to also do our works in secret, just as Jesus often charged others not to tell what He had done (e.g. Mark 7:36). Truly, I share Henry’s vision for a theological solution to social problems and for Christians to maintain organized benevolent ministries in addition to isolated acts of compassion; however, I remain hesitant about making this part of the church’s mission *as the church*. Like Jesus Himself, the church has been called to preach and suffer for the gospel.

Francis Schaeffer and a Crisis of Faith

Regardless of the merits or demerits of Henry’s agenda for the church, the image of fundamentalism as a modern priest bypassing suffering humanity, if *true*, points to a lack of compassion within Bible-believing Christianity in America. This lack of spiritual vitality in the 1940s was noticed by other commentators as well, including the evangelical mystic and preacher A. W. Tozer, who bluntly claimed, “We have reached a low place of sand and burnt wire grass.”⁵² The results, he claimed, were widespread and apparent:

⁴⁸ Ibid., xviii. For evangelicalism in the early republic, see Charles I. Foster, *An Errand of Mercy: The Evangelical United Front 1790-1837* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1960); Fred J. Hood, *Reformed America: The Middle and Southern States, 1783-1837* (University: The University of Alabama Press, 1980).

⁴⁹ J. Gresham Machen, “Christianity and Culture,” *The Princeton Theological Review* 11 (1913): 1-15.

⁵⁰ Henry, *Uneasy Conscience*, xx-xxi.

⁵¹ For the connection between early nineteenth-century evangelicalism and late nineteenth-century advocates of the social gospel, see Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957; reprint, with new afterword, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).

⁵² A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, Tozer Legacy Edition (reprint, Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1982 [1948])

Shallow lives, hollow religious philosophies, the preponderance of the element of fun in gospel meetings, the glorification of men, trust in religious externalities, quasi-religious fellowships, salesmanship methods, the mistaking of dynamic personality for the power of the Spirit. These and such as these are the symptoms of an evil disease, a deep and serious malady of the soul.⁵³

As a cure, Tozer called believers back to their inner Holy of Holies, where the presence of God was pursued with such passion that possessing nothing but Him was considered blessed and the veils of the hyphenated-self, such as self-esteem and self-interest, were renounced and removed.

Francis Schaeffer shared with Henry and Tozer their estimation of American Christianity in the late 1940s, but with one difference—he condemned himself as well. Backed with a stellar fundamentalist pedigree, especially as a student under Machen and then as the first to receive ordination in the newly-formed Bible Presbyterian Church, Schaeffer served three churches in the United States as pastor, lasting ten years, before going to Switzerland as a missionary to children.⁵⁴ There, during the winter months of 1950 and early 1951, Schaeffer experienced a severe crisis of faith, because he did not see spiritual reality in himself or in the spiritual leaders of “the movement.” He later confessed, “I realized that in honesty I had to go back and rethink my whole position. I had to go all the way back to my agnosticism.”⁵⁵ Consequently, he spent many days pondering the faith, as he either walked in the mountains or paced on rainy days in the attic of a nearby barn. Finally, the night began to break and the devotion of poetry filled his heart. Having rethought the entire Christian position, Schaeffer then published his views on spirituality in the *Sunday School Times*—views that he later developed and published in his classic book *True Spirituality*.⁵⁶ As a result of his crisis, Schaeffer often taught on the inseparability of truth and love for true spirituality. Specifically, a Christian should never separate in heart from another Christian, even a disobedient one. The true mark of a Christian is love.⁵⁷ The stress on love and unity stood in sharp contrast to the fundamentalist ideals of militancy and separatism.

Even with his criticism of fundamentalism in his day, Schaeffer did not repudiate his fundamentalist ordination nor sever his ties with his mission agency. In later print, he continued to defend the ideas of fundamentalism, including both the idea of a core of essential doctrines, within which a Christian must remain, as well as the need for Christians to avoid the spiritual adultery of apostasy—a need he recognized, although he lamented the criticism that the early come-outers heaped upon those fundamentalists who stayed within the denominations longer.⁵⁸ In private, Schaeffer warned one individual not to let “cold fundamentalism” lead him to regard

⁵³ Ibid., 69.

⁵⁴ For the life story of Francis Schaeffer, see the account written by his wife as he was dying of cancer: Edith Schaeffer, *The Tapestry: The Life and Times of Francis and Edith Schaeffer* (1984). Conspicuously absent from this record is Carl McIntyre, the infamous Presbyterian fundamentalist who fomented the break from Machen’s Orthodox Presbyterian Church and caused later divisions as well in the ACCS.

⁵⁵ Francis A. Schaeffer, *True Spirituality* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1971, 2001), xxix. The introduction to this edition, written by Schaeffer’s disciple Jerram Barrs, describes both the spiritual crisis and how it led to the writing of this book.

⁵⁶ See Francis A. Schaeffer, “The Secret of Power and Enjoyment of the Lord,” *The Sunday School Times*, 16 June 1951, 3-4; 23 June 1951, 3-4.

⁵⁷ See Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Mark of a Christian* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1970, 2006).

⁵⁸ See Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Church before the Watching World: A Practical Ecclesiology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1971).

liberalism as “less of hell than it is.”⁵⁹ In public, Schaeffer warned the 1966 World Congress on Evangelism, “If we do not make clear by word and practice our position for truth as truth and against false doctrine, we are building a wall between the next generation and the gospel.”⁶⁰ Again, at the 1974 congress on world evangelization in Lausanne, Switzerland, Schaeffer warned evangelicals:

We must practice the truth we say we say [sic] we maintain. We must practice this truth in the area of religious cooperation where it is costly...If we say that Christianity is truth, yet for any reason, including evangelism, we blur the line between liberal theology and biblical Christianity in the area of religious cooperation, we lose credibility.⁶¹

It has also been reported to me that at this same congress, it was due to Schaeffer’s insistence that inerrancy was included in the Lausanne Covenant; otherwise, he had refused to sign it.⁶² To the end, Schaeffer retained a fundamentalist criticism of evangelicalism, as witnessed by his final book *The Great Evangelical Disaster*.⁶³

Truly, this life is significant and worthy of consideration. It was no accident that Schaeffer went through a spiritual crisis. As confirmed by two or three witnesses, the fundamentalism of the late 1940s was cold and lifeless, perhaps not unlike the church at Smyrna, which Jesus Himself describes as having “a name that you are alive, but you are dead” (Rev 3:1). In large part, fundamentalism itself was the cause behind Schaeffer’s spiritual crisis. Therefore, just as J. Gresham Machen may be the chief proponent of fundamentalism’s core ideas, Francis Schaeffer may be the chief opponent to fundamentalism’s negative spirituality. Jesus raised up both men; and both men belong to us. Let us embrace them both in humble pride.

Please, do not misunderstand me. I praise God for early fundamentalism and its stand against the modernists. False teachers had crept into the church “unnoticed” (Jude 4); therefore, it was right to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all [time] delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). In quoting this famous passage from Jude, early fundamentalists may have missed the fact that Jude did not regard this approach as normal or ideal, but as necessary. Originally, he had set his mind on writing about “our common salvation” (Jude 3), but the presence of false teachers forced him to call for a fight. *Do you see?* The core identity of Christianity is salvation, not militancy, just as the core nature of God is love, not hatred. Even though it is true that God does “hate all workers of iniquity” and will eventually punish them in hell (Ps 5:5; 6:8; Matt 7:23), it would not be right to say, “God is hate.” His fundamental identity is “God is love” (1 John 4:8, 16). In like fashion, a Christian leader must fight falsehood, but he should be wary of defining himself as a fighter, for as the apostle Paul notes, the “servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition” (2 Tim 2:24-25; cf. 1 Tim 3:3; 4:6).

⁵⁹ Francis A. Schaeffer, *Letters of Francis Schaeffer*, ed. Lane T. Dennis (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1985), 72, as cited in Iain H. Murray, *Evangelicalism Divided: A Record of Crucial Change in the Years 1950 to 2000* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2000), 77, n. 1.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Murray, *Evangelicalism Divided*, 77.

⁶¹ Reported in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice: International Congress on World Evangelization*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1975), 361-62, as quoted in Murray, *Evangelicalism Divided*, 50, n. 5.

⁶² It should be noted that Schaeffer apparently did sign the Covenant, even though it did not adopt his ideas on evangelistic cooperation. All these matters need further verification.

⁶³ Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Great Evangelical Disaster* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1984).

Certainly, not all fundamentalist leaders assumed a primarily militant identity. Among the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches, fundamentalist leader Robert T. Ketcham wrote a manual of spirituality.⁶⁴ Similarly, early fundamentalist leader W. B. Riley continued to stress the need for consistent creed and conduct, even in the face of criticism by fellow fundamentalists for not leaving the Northern Baptist Convention right away. In response to leaders who quoted the apostle, “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers” (2 Cor 6:14), Riley replied:

...the passage in II Cor. 6 cuts in more ways than one. We are not only [not] to be “*unequally yoked together with unbelievers*,” but we are to regard the fact that “*righteousness has no fellowship with unrighteousness*,” and unfortunately, some of our “Come-Out” movements have been cursed with “*unrighteousness*” in conduct; and fundamentalism, in whose name these “*unrighteous*” courses were conducted, has suffered in consequence.

We are absolutely in line with those who say, “NO COMPROMISE,” but we insist that that should apply at the point of both creed and conduct.⁶⁵

As this testimony shows, fundamentalism was already suffering from a negative reputation in the 1930s. One of Riley’s worse critics was Canadian Baptist T. T. Shields, the first president of the Baptist Bible Union and a preacher formerly known as the “Canadian Spurgeon.” When a youthful Martyn Lloyd-Jones visited with him in the summer of 1932, he found a preacher who would pump himself up to preach on Sunday mornings by reading liberals. As a result, it is not surprising to hear that Shields was “spoiling his ministry by his unceasing diatribes against liberals and Roman Catholics.”⁶⁶ Truly, as Jesus said, “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matt 12:34).

Beware! A church can easily lose its grip on love through constant militancy. It is very possible for a church to remain doctrinally faithful and yet to lose its previous love for Christians. Is this not what happened at Ephesus? The solution there was not to abandon their hatred and opposition to heresy, which Jesus also hated, but to return to their first love by doing the deeds they did at first. If the church failed to repent, their greatest threat was not from false teachers but from Jesus Himself, who threatened to remove their lampstand (Rev 2:1-7).

Lessons for Doctrinal Development

In humble pride, we thank our Lord Jesus Christ for our forefathers and seek to build upon what they have given to us. In light of the development of Christianity, we must recognize at least three lessons from fundamentalism: one core idea, three unions for defense, and one necessary corollary.

⁶⁴ Robert T. Ketcham, *God’s Provision for Normal Christian Living* (Chicago: Moody, 1960).

⁶⁵ W. B. Riley, “The Come-Outers,” *The Christian Fundamentalist*, August 1931, 46.

⁶⁶ Bethan Lloyd-Jones, *Memories of Sandfields* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1983), 51. For Lloyd-Jones and Shields, see Iain H. Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The First Forty Years* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1982), 271ff.

The Core Idea of Fundamentalism

In its very name, fundamentalism carries its core idea: certain doctrines are fundamental to Christianity and must be believed. Consequently, a knowledgeable and resolute denial of any fundamental doctrine disqualifies a man from the status of “Christian” and from heaven—unless he repents and believes. While the church has operated according to this idea for centuries, the church has never had to defend it on a large scale until the modern era.

At least two falsehoods call for a defense of the very idea of having nonnegotiable fundamentals of the faith. On the one hand, an exaggerated liberty of conscience has made disciplining an errant member appear cruel. In 1923, William Jennings Bryan commented on this inordinate emphasis on “freedom of thought”:

As an *individual*, anyone is free to believe anything he likes or to refuse to believe... That is the very essence of freedom of conscience. But freedom of conscience belongs to *individuals* only. No man has a right to substitute his conscience for the conscience of a church or the conscience of a congregation.⁶⁷

On the other hand, an exaggerated change in circumstances has made “truth” into whatever works pragmatically for people in a given era. For example, in 1912, as part of his campaign for the presidency, Woodrow Wilson interpreted the Constitution according to Darwinian principles and called the Declaration of Independence “an eminently practical document... not a theory of government, but a program of action.” As such, it remained irrelevant to modern times, unless the modern generation could “translate it into the questions of our own day.”⁶⁸ Therefore, it is now necessary not only to confess what a church or a Christian believes, but also to assert that some of those beliefs are necessary for Christianity and that truth itself does not change. Pressure from within and without the church will force her to defend this fundamentalist position and to act in accordance with it.

Three Unions for the Defense of Fundamentalism

For most of the twentieth century, the church sought to defend fundamentalism on the basis of inerrancy. This doctrine has often been the first doctrine mentioned in fundamentalist confessions of faith.⁶⁹ Now that postmodernism has come, defense of inerrancy seems less relevant, for what is the use of defending the truthfulness of the Bible when even language itself is under attack? As seen earlier, this hermeneutical separation of words and meaning actually lay

⁶⁷ William Jennings Bryan, “The Fundamentals,” *The Forum*, July 1923. Later in the century, this exaggerated liberty of conscience became a huge debate among moderates and conservatives in the Southern Baptist Convention.

⁶⁸ Ronald J. Pestritto and William J. Atto, eds., *American Progressivism: A Reader* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, Lexington Books, 2008), 51. Although Wilson was correct in asserting that the Declaration of Independence was primarily a practical document (hence, a *declaration* of a fact), its opening paragraphs certainly contained “a theory of government.” For more information of how America changed its view on this occasional document, see Pauline Maier, *American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence* (New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1997).

⁶⁹ For example, in 1910, the northern Presbyterian General Assembly affirmed as its first fundamental: “It is essential doctrine of the Word of God and our standards that the Holy Spirit did so inspire, guide and move the writers of Holy Scripture as to keep them free from error” (quoted in Bryan, “Fundamentals”). Among the Baptists, article one (“Of the Scriptures”) of the statement of faith published by the Baptist Bible Union explained that inspiration implies the sacred writings were “free from error” (“Articles of Faith Put Forth by the Baptist Bible Union of America,” as cited in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 385). This emphasis on inerrancy continued into new evangelical movement, even becoming the sole doctrine in the initial statement of faith the Evangelical Theological Society.

beneath the modernist position; therefore, fundamentalist at heart was a defense of not only the Bible, but also of taking the Bible literally. To defend this position well, three unions seem necessary.

First, learning and piety should be reunited.⁷⁰ The division of head and heart has a long history within evangelicalism, but it is a dangerous legacy if doctrine and experience are separated. Jesus kept these two together: “The truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). By “truth,” Jesus meant knowledge gained through continued adherence to His verbal message (John 8:31). Life comes from the Holy Spirit through doctrine (John 6:63). Therefore, it is very dangerous to seek Christian growth and transformation apart from the renewing of our minds (Rom 12:2). Genuine Christian doctrine is “good and profitable to men” towards a life of good deeds (Titus 3:8).

Within Protestant church history, the distinction between heart and head may begin with Martin Luther himself. Based on Hebrews 11:1, Luther defined faith as a feeling of assurance.⁷¹ This definition made its way into the first edition of John Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, but by the second edition, Calvin had begun to classify faith as a form of knowledge—a firm knowledge given by the Spirit through enlightened eyes and the certainty of the heart.⁷² Given this difference in the definition of faith, it seems fitting that liberalism sprang out of Lutheranism and not from Reformed Christianity. In the early 1800s, Friedrich Schleiermacher defined faith as feeling of dependence, largely divorced from doctrine. Later in the century, liberal historian Adolph von Harnack reveled in Luther’s piety as the genuine kernel beneath the husks of dogma.⁷³ Unfortunately, evangelicalism has followed this same bifurcation and has thereby emphasized ecclesiastical unity around the experience of rebirth rather than around a core of doctrine.⁷⁴ Moreover, redefining “believe in Jesus” as “trust Jesus” sounds a lot like the old liberal piety, especially if it is divorced from knowledge of the real, historical Jesus revealed in the inspired words of the Bible. Therefore, Machen was right in calling the church to reunite piety and learning, as well as history and faith.⁷⁵

Second, both evangelical and fundamentalist Christians should recognize “the conserving power of the doctrines of grace,” as defined by traditional Reformed doctrine.⁷⁶ Over a century ago, conservative Presbyterians A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield pointed out that similar

⁷⁰ Early in the twentieth century, Machen pleaded for the union of “knowledge and piety,” which to him meant the “consecration” of the arts and sciences to “the service of our God” (“Christianity and Culture,” 3, 5).

⁷¹ According to Reformation scholar Marvin Anderson, Luther made his breakthrough discovery in lecturing on Hebrews (1517-18), when he came to Hebrews 11:1 and defined faith as confidence and assurance—an existential entity (Marvin Anderson, “Luther’s Theology of the Cross” [classroom lecture, 84200—Martin Luther, Fall 1999]).

⁷² For Calvin’s definition of faith, see *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols., Library of Christian Classics, no. 20-21 [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960], 3.2.7, 14. For Calvin’s shift in 1539 from defining faith as “confidence and hope” (following Luther’s *Enchiridion*) to knowledge, see François Wendel, *Calvin: Origins and Developments of His Religious Thought*, trans. Philip Mairet (reprint of the 1963 translation of the original 1950 edition, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 240-41. It should be noted that due to the nature of supernatural things and the weakness of human ability, Calvin concluded, “The knowledge of faith consists in assurance rather than in comprehension” (Calvin, *Institutes*, trans. 3.2.14).

⁷³ For the views of F. E. D. Schleiermacher, see his book *Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers* (1799), as reported in Noll, *Princeton Theology*, 188, n. 6. For the views of Adolf von Harnack, see his *History of Dogma*, 7 vols. 3rd ed., trans. Neil Buchanan (London: Williams & Norgate, 1905). His views on Luther are found in the final volume.

⁷⁴ For example, see the report of Edward J. Carnell in Bauder, “Fundamentalist Response,” 64.

⁷⁵ For Machen’s union of piety and learning, see J. Gresham Machen, “Christianity and Culture,” in *Education, Christianity, and the State*, 45-59. For his union of history and faith, see idem, “History and Faith,” in Ferm, *Issues*, 262-76.

⁷⁶ Tom Nettles, “The Conserving Power of the Doctrines of Grace,” *Founders Journal* (1997?): 20-24.

reasoning about the relationship between God's sovereignty and human action stands behind both the doctrine of inspiration and the doctrine of providence.⁷⁷ This same reasoning can carry over into the relationship between divine illumination and human comprehension. Supraterrestrial things can only be appreciated through a Supraterrestrial Being—the Holy Spirit—sharing His experience with us (cf. 1 Cor 2:9-16). Thus both modernism's emphasis on the writer and postmodernism's emphasis on the reader will find their best answer in the doctrine of concurrence found within the Reformed tradition.⁷⁸

Third, there should be a reunion in form and meaning in all areas of church life, not just in the realm of words. This point may be the greatest potential doctrinal legacy of fundamentalism. For example, take the realm of formal worship. Historian D. G. Hart, the living authority on J. Gresham Machen, points out the similarity between many evangelical worship services and a liberal approach to doctrine. Separating the form and the content in worship, as if anything goes as long as it is presented sincerely, strongly resembles liberalism's aim at separating the kernel from the husk in doctrine.⁷⁹ The similarity is due to more than coincidence, for both ideas have their roots in Lutheran pietism, which sought initially to have a church within a church, that is, a formless church that was alive within a formal church that was growing devoid of spiritual life. While pietism may lead to short-term renewal, it cannot lead to long-term reformation, which requires the discipline of form. Similarly, just as we are embodied souls, we need both the body and soul of biblical church life. Again, this is also another example of the conserving power of Reformed Christianity with its regulative principles of worship, to offer to God only what He has prescribed.⁸⁰

While I stand in debt to Hart's analysis of evangelicalism in terms of polity, creed, and liturgy, I disagree with the conclusion that resisting pietism implies a return to traditional forms of Christianity, whether high-church formalism, which Hart implies, or low-church legalism, which Hart does not imply. Regarding the latter, an attention to form does not mean a slavish adherence to manmade rules on externals, such as the length of hair or hem—rules that often

⁷⁷ Hodge and Warfield wrote, "It is also evident that our conception of revelation and its methods must be conditioned upon our general views of God's relation to the world, and his methods of influencing the souls of men." Astutely, they observed, "The *whole* genius of Christianity, *all of its essential and most characteristic doctrines*, presuppose the immanence of God in all his creatures, and his concurrence with them in all of their spontaneous activities" (Archibald A. Hodge and Benjamin B. Warfield, *Inspiration* [Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, n. d.], 9, italics added).

⁷⁸ Examples of interdenominational coalitions of Reformed evangelicals include the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals (ACE), the Fellowship of Independent Reformed Evangelicals (FIRE), the Gospel Coalition, and Together for the Gospel (T4G).

⁷⁹ According to Hart, in seeking to find the lowest common denominator for the sake of union, evangelicalism has often avoided discussions about polity, creed, and liturgy. Consequently, evangelicalism has lacked the "discipline and rigor of the church," which explains why "evangelicalism has deconstructed." Evangelicalism failed because it was built upon "a fundamentally liberal maneuver" of trying "to separate the kernel from the husk of the Bible." Therefore, Hart advises, "For mere Christianity to survive, wise and constant diligence needs to be directed to a complete reflection on biblical truth as possible. In other words, to preserve the minimum, you need to defend the maximum" (D. G. Hart, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism: Conservative Protestantism in the Age of Billy Graham* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004], 30-31).

As I mention below, this all-or-nothing feel should be resisted. Just because a minimalistic approach to Christian unity is insufficient for preserving Christianity, a maximalistic approach tends towards the common criticism about contemporary fundamentalism, that all doctrines are alike defended as fundamental. Somehow, discernment should differentiate between that which is essential and that where differences are allowable (traditionally called "adiaphora"). In Romans 14, after describing what is nonnegotiable in doctrine and in morals, Paul then urges Christians to accept our differences—even when there is a true, right answer (such as all foods are clean)—as long as we hold these truths in faith towards God and love towards the brothers.

⁸⁰ Writing to the emperor upon the request of other Reformed leaders, John Calvin once described the worship of God and the gospel of Christ as comprehending "the whole substance of Christianity," whereas the sacraments and government of the church were "instituted for the preservation of these branches of doctrine." As an illustration, Calvin pointed to the union of body and soul: "Rule in the Church, the pastoral office, and all other matters of order resemble the body, whereas the doctrine which regulates the due worship of God, and points out the ground on which the consciences of men must rest their hope of salvation, is the soul which animates the body" (*The Necessity of Reforming the Church*, trans. Henry Beveridge [reprint, Audubon, NJ: Old Paths Publications, 1994 [1544, 1844], 4-5).

lack in practice the connection between form and meaning. Such rules have become the stereotype of fundamentalism today, which is unfortunate, because these things could be done in an atmosphere of individual freedom as an expression of truths regarding gender or modesty. Regarding the former, I am in agreement with the Baptists that a simplified service without scripted prayers can still have a meaningful form, in which *how* things are done expresses fittingly *what* things are said from the word of God through the leading of the Spirit. According to 1 Corinthians 14, there is no dichotomy between the leading of the Spirit and formal rules of order. Nothing in Scripture would necessitate the use of a traditional liturgy nor would anything forbid its use. We have freedom in Christ to use it, improve it, or improvise—all within the parameter of form expressing meaning.⁸¹

As far as application, the need for adequate forms to express meaning helps to explain two debates within evangelicalism—contemporary worship music and the role of women in the church. Both debates concern the legitimacy of separating the form from the content, as if the form has no bearing on the overall message presented. For example, why should we fuss about the form of music if the lyrics are biblical? Likewise, who cares if a woman or a man is preaching as long as the doctrine is sound? In both instances, we are tempted to forget that the medium (the form) is a metaphor (to borrow Neil Postman’s twist on Marshall McLuhan’s maxim on forms of communication).⁸² The medium of communication limits what the speaker may say and also inclines the hearer to receive the message in a certain way. In some instances, the message is limited by the form; in other instances, the message is distorted by the form. For example, can any static, visible, dead image represent the dynamic, invisible, living God? Can a medium of levity convey a message of gravity? If all of life is a joke, would we not be tempted to regard the warning to escape as lightly as the sons-in-law of Lot? In all honesty, I do believe that the pietistic root must be uprooted before we will resolve both the doctrinal crisis of words or the practical crises of music in worship or women in church leadership.

A word of caution is in order. In our zeal to reclaim form, we may become preoccupied with lesser things and inadvertently drift towards formalism or legalism. Let us remember that it is possible to have “a form of godliness” without “its power” (2 Tim 3:5). If Jews could be called “uncircumcised in the heart” (Jer 9:26), then certainly it is possible for Baptists to be “unbaptized” in heart. Conversely, in our zeal for major things, we may unnecessarily and wrongly neglect minor things, contrary to Jesus’ command and evaluation (Matt 23:23; 5:19). After all, the Great Commission instructs us to observe and teach “all things” commanded by Jesus (Matt 28:20). Therefore, may God give us the wisdom and the courage to major on the majors and to minor on the minors! His wisdom is often felt in the liberty that a right form yields for worship and obedience.

Therefore, the long-term defense of the idea of fundamentalism will require the union of head and heart (along with faith and history), the union of Christian leaders on the doctrines of divine grace, and the union of form and meaning (that is, the rejection of pietism).

⁸¹ Interestingly, just as the Methodists represent well the pietistic option in American church history, with their lack of requirements in baptismal form, the Baptists represent the Reformed (or Puritan) option with their emphasis on believer baptism by immersion. Together these two denominations epitomize two poles within contemporary evangelicalism—those who disregard form (except as a tool of manipulation) and those who value form.

⁸² Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Penguin, 1985), 13.

One Necessary Corollary to Fundamentalism

Because fundamentalism means that certain doctrines are fundamental to the faith and that the knowledgeable and resolute denial of any one of these doctrines forfeits the right to be considered a Christian, there are clear lines between who could be reckoned a Christian and who should not, especially with regard to Christian teachers. As a necessary corollary to fundamentalism, but *not as a defining identity*, it will be necessary for us to separate from false teachers—hopefully by forcing them out of our Christian fellowships through anathemas, before they gain a following; but if that fails, by coming out ourselves and forming new Christian fellowships. If we are tempted to ignore this corollary, we should take a hard look at Jehoshaphat’s foolish alliance with wicked King Ahab and see what happened to Jehoshaphat’s household. God forbid that the same things should happen to Christ’s churches! We should also consider the sorry state of Billy Graham’s confession of faith after decades of cooperating with liberal and of speaking softly about them in public.⁸³ Anyone who has heard and loved how fiery and truly strong Graham was in his early crusades must lament what happened to him in later years. Therefore, while truth and love must be our defining preoccupations in Christ, militancy and separation will at times be necessary (as in Jude)—not in order to be a card-carrying member of some fundamentalist movement, but in obedience to the commandments of Christ (2 Cor 6:14-7:1; Gal 1:8-9; 2 Tim 2:14-21; 2 John 10-11; Jude 3-4).

Conclusion

In some regards, much of Christianity in America resembles a two-lane highway that has a fading double-yellow line. On the left are conservative evangelicals, who are outspokenly against the worldliness and doctrinal deviations leading many evangelicals into the leftist, liberal ditch of the Sadducees. On the right are many “liberal” fundamentalists, who are disturbed by the oppressive militancy of overzealous fundamentalists who are preoccupied with artificial rules on music and with keeping their women in subjection—leaders heading for the Pharisaical ditch on the right. The right lane has emphasized truth and the left lane has emphasized love. Perhaps in Schaeffer’s day, it was necessary to leave the country in order to propose a union of truth and love; today, however, conservative evangelicals and “liberal” fundamentalists are erasing the yellow line in order to unite. In doing so, here are some proposals to consider.

First, let each group recognize the fundamental necessity of truth. Perhaps this recognition will mean a readjustment to the definition of faith or to the understanding of how regeneration occurs.⁸⁴ Perhaps it will mean a revision of the historic confessions of faith, separating the essential fundamental doctrines from the denominational distinctives, thereby allowing the fundamental doctrinal basis for the *evangelical unity* of true Christians to be more easily seen. At any rate, consider the exciting prospect, that the basic idea of fundamentalism—that certain doctrines are necessary to the faith and unchanging—could become the great catalyst for interdenominational unity, because we all hold these truths in common. Let us regain the wonder that we all believe these supernatural doctrines!

⁸³ On Graham’s decline in orthodoxy, see Iain H. Murray, *The Unresolved Controversy: Unity with Non-Evangelicals* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2001).

⁸⁴ In John’s gospel, believing God (i.e. His word) is inseparable from believing in His Son (John 6:68-69; cf. John 3:36 and 5:24). Moreover, it is “the truth” that sets a man free in regeneration (John 8:32; cf. 3:36).

Second, once the groundwork of truth is laid, let each group also recognize the matching necessity of love. For example, if a brother is experiencing a fundamentalist-modernist controversy within his church or denomination, let us pray for him and seek to encourage him. If a brother is preaching Christ out of party spirit, let us recognize the difference between matter and motive, and rejoice that Christ is preached (Phil 1:18).⁸⁵ If a brother preaches Christ outside of our particular denominational arena, let us resist the temptation to sidestep our differences and instead seek unity through speaking the truth in love (Eph 4:11-16). One former liberal called this form of discussion “irenics” in contrast to “polemics.”⁸⁶ If we cannot cooperate with a brother who refuses to separate from apostasy, then let us do so with grief, regarding him not as an enemy but as a brother (cf. 2 Thess 3:15). Let us recognize that beyond our love for the Lord Himself, the emphasis of the New Testament epistles is *one another*, not the culture—whether winning the culture (evangelicalism) or shunning the culture (fundamentalism). We can only have one preoccupation, so let us hit the mark. Jesus said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments” and “These things I command you, that you love one another” (John 14:15; 15:17). The solution begins locally, prayerfully, with one phone call, one lunch appointment.

Finally, regarding evangelicalism’s current identity crisis, it was reported to me that Harold Lindsell, in his follow-up to *Battle for the Bible*, apparently suggested a return to the name “fundamentalist”—at least that term had meaning.⁸⁷ If Lindsell’s opinion was plausible in the 1970s, long after the fundamentalist-modernist controversies of the 1920s, it may still be plausible today. Given our culture’s attack on absolute truth and even on language itself, evangelicals may need to accept that dreaded *nomen* “fundamentalist” as the reproach of Christ in our generation. While we may want to accept it as an adjective only—“I am a *fundamentalist* Christian”—keeping in mind our earlier discussion about self-labels, there may be no better term for communicating to our culture our firm stand on truth and its significance. Can you think of a better word to confess our faith?

As historical precedence for a return to earlier terminology, consider the wisdom of Athanasius, defender of the deity of Christ in the fourth century. In company with other bishops, Athanasius succeeded in uniting two orthodox parties who agreed in substance but differed in terminology about the Trinity. After confirming the agreement, he called them back to the language of the Nicene Creed, issued forty years earlier—to the dreaded *homoousios* term of the creed that the Arians hated.⁸⁸ Could the Lord Jesus be calling His church back to the original terminology of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy? Is there a better term than “fundamentalism” for expressing the idea of changeless doctrine necessary for genuine Christianity and for making genuine Christians? Indeed, fundamentalism may need the evangelical emphasis on love, but evangelicalism needs fundamentalism’s emphasis on essential

⁸⁵ The application of this verse came home to me while listening to John C. Whitcomb give a lecture series at Central Baptist Theological Seminary in the late 1990s. From Paul’s example, I infer that it is better to be in a fellowship with a proud, party-spirited fundamentalist preacher who has the right message than in a fellowship with a kindly evangelical who fails to preach the message faithfully. See John C. Whitcomb, *Biblical Fundamentalism* (Orange Park, FL: The Christian Workman Institute, n. d.), 10.

⁸⁶ Thomas C. Oden, *After Modernity...What? Agenda for Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, Academic Books, 1990), 172-73.

⁸⁷ Harold Lindsell, *The Bible in the Balance* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979). (I apologize for the lack of reference. I seem to recall having followed up on this report, but I cannot find any notes for it now.)

⁸⁸ Athanasius, *Tomus ad Antiochenos*, trans. Archibald Robertson, in *St. Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, ed. Archibald Robertson, American ed. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 2nd Series, vol. 4 (Buffalo: Christian Literature, 1891; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 484-85.

doctrine—the *fundamentals* of the faith. In slowly forgetting these fundamentals, evangelicalism is slowly forgetting what it means to be a Christian. Loss of memory leads to loss of identity.

In short, we should adopt the idea of fundamentalism as the Christian position, along with its corollary of separating from false teachers. We should continue to identify ourselves as “Christians,” but we should not shrink from being labeled by the world as “fundamentalists.” Because we take the Bible literally and seriously, because we hold gospel truth to be necessary for salvation and essential for Christianity, let us not be ashamed of the label “fundamentalist,” but in that label glorify God, whose truth has set us free. In doing so, let us hold in humble pride all past and current leaders in the gospel—happy to claim them as our own in Christ, and eager to imitate them whenever they imitated Christ in truth and love. May it be, Lord! Amen.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ In advocating this union of truth and love, I owe a personal debt to several individuals: to Dean Johnson, a former district superintendent in the Evangelical Free Church of America, who in a private conversation in the early 1990s pointed out this concept to me from John 1:14; to my parents, whose criticism God used to open my eyes to the wisdom of Schaeffer’s spirituality; and to my friend Joel Tetreau, who showed me this union of truth and love from 2 John, and who graciously invited me to speak at the Friends Conference in California. (Thanks, Joel!) Most of all, we all owe an infinite gratitude to the One who dispenses wisdom “liberally and without reproach” (Jas 1:5) and to His Son, in whom “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3), to whom belongs glory and dominion, both now and forevermore. Amen.