

Fundamentalism is a relatively new brand of Protestantism started in America that has attracted a tremendous following, including many fallen away Catholics. How did this popular movement originate? The history of Fundamentalism may be viewed as having three main phases. The first lasted a generation, from the 1890s to the Scopes "Monkey Trial" of 1925. In this period, Fundamentalism emerged as a reaction to liberalizing trends in American Protestantism; it broke off, but never completely, from Evangelicalism, of which it may be considered one wing. In its second phase, it passed from public view, but never actually disappeared or even lost ground. Finally, Fundamentalism came to the nation's attention again around 1970, and it has enjoyed considerable growth.

What has been particularly surprising is that Catholics seem to constitute a disproportionate share of the new recruits. The Catholic Church in America includes about a quarter of the country's inhabitants, so one might expect about a quarter of new Fundamentalists to have been Catholics at one time. But in many Fundamentalist congregations, anywhere from one-third to one-half of the members once belonged to the Catholic Church. This varies around the country, depending on how large the native Catholic population is.

Fundamentalist churches in the South have few converts from Catholicism because there never have been many Catholics in most parts of the South. In the Northeast and Midwest, where Catholics are more common, one finds former Catholics making up a majority of some Fundamentalist congregations. And in the Southwest, with its substantial Hispanic population, former Catholics are the congregation. Indeed, it has been estimated that one out of six Hispanics in this country is now a Fundamentalist. Twenty years ago there were almost no Hispanic Fundamentalists.

FUNDAMENTALISM: RELATIVELY NEW

While the origin of the term "Fundamentalist" has a fairly simple history, the movement itself has a more

confused origin. There was no individual founder, nor was there a single event that precipitated its advent. Of course, Fundamentalist writers insist that Fundamentalism is nothing but a continuation of Christian orthodoxy. According to this theory, Fundamentalism flourished for three centuries after Christ, went underground for twelve hundred years, surfaced again with the Reformation, took its knocks from various sources, and was alternately prominent or diminished in its influence and visibility. In short, according to its partisans, Fundamentalism always has been the Christian remnant, the faithful who remain after the rest of Christianity (if it can even be granted the title) has fallen into apostasy.

Until almost 100 years ago, Fundamentalism as we know it was not a separate movement within Protestantism, and the word itself was virtually unknown. Those people who today would be called Fundamentalists were formerly either Baptists, Presbyterians, or members of some other specific sect. But in the last decade of the nineteenth-century, issues came to the fore that made them start to withdraw from mainline Protestantism.

The issues were: the Social Gospel, a liberalizing and secularizing trend within Protestantism that tried to weaken the Christian message, making it a merely social and political agenda; the embrace of Darwinism, which seemed to call into question the reliability of Scripture; and the higher criticism of the Bible that originated in Germany.

To meet the challenge presented by these developments, early Fundamentalist leaders united around several basic principles, but it was not until the publication of a series of volumes called *The Fundamentals* that the movement received its name.

The basic elements of Fundamentalism were formulated almost exactly a century ago at the Presbyterian theological seminary in Princeton, New Jersey, by B. B. Warfield and Charles Hodge, among others. What they produced became known as Princeton theology, and it appealed to conservative Protestants who were concerned with the liberalizing trends of the Social Gospel movement, which was gaining steam at about the same time.

In 1909 the brothers Milton and Lyman Stewart, whose wealth came from the oil industry, were responsible for underwriting a series of twelve volumes entitled *The Fundamentals*. There were 64 contributors, including scholars such as James Orr, W. J. Eerdman, H. C. G. Moule, James M. Gray, and Warfield himself, as well as Episcopalian bishops, Presbyterian ministers, Methodist evangelists, and even an Egyptologist. As Edward Dobson, an associate pastor at Jerry Falwell's Thomas Road Baptist Church, summarized the collaboration, "They were certainly not anti-intellectual, snake-handling, cultic, obscurantist fanatics."

The preface to the volumes explained their purpose: "In 1909 God moved two Christian laymen to set aside a large sum of money for issuing twelve volumes that would set forth the fundamentals of the Christian faith, and which were to be sent free of charge to ministers of the gospel, missionaries, Sunday school superintendents, and others engaged in aggressive Christian work throughout the English speaking world."

Three million copies of the series were distributed. Harry Fosdick, a theological liberal, wrote an article in *The Christian Century* called "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" He used the title of the books to designate the people he was opposing, and the label he originated became commonly used to designate those who adhered to *The Fundamentals*.

The fundamental doctrines identified in the series can be reduced to five: (1) the inspiration and what the writers call infallibility of Scripture, (2) the deity of Christ (including his virgin birth), (3) the substitutionary atonement of his death, (4) his literal resurrection from the dead, and (5) his literal return at the Second Coming.

THE FIVE FUNDAMENTALS

Fundamentalists' attitude toward the Bible is the keystone of their faith. Their understanding of inspiration and inerrancy comes from Benjamin Warfield's notion of plenary-verbal inspiration, meaning that the original autographs (manuscripts)

of the Bible are all inspired and the inspiration extends not just to the message God wished to convey, but to the very words chosen by the sacred writers.

Although the doctrine of the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible is most commonly cited as the essential cornerstone of the Fundamentalist beliefs, the logically prior doctrine is the deity of Christ. For the Catholic, his deity is accepted either on the word of the authoritative and infallible Church or because a dispassionate examination of the Bible and early Christian history shows that he must have been just what he claimed to be—God.

Most Catholics, as a practical matter, accept his divinity based upon the former method; many—the apologist Arnold Lunn is a good example—use the latter. In either case, there is a certain reasoning involved in the Catholic's embrace of this teaching. For many Fundamentalists, the assurance of Christ's divinity comes not through reason, or even through faith in the Catholic meaning of the word, but through an inner, personal experience.

As Warfield put it, "The supreme proof to every Christian of the deity of his Lord is in his own inner experience of the transforming power of his Lord upon the heart and life." One consequence of this has become painfully clear to many Fundamentalists: When one falls into sin, when the ardor that was present at conversion fades, the transforming power of Christ seems to go, and so can one's faith in his deity. This accounts for many defections from Fundamentalism to agnosticism and secularism; the tenuous basis for the Fundamentalist's beliefs does not provide for the dark night of the soul. When that darkness comes, the Fundamentalist has no reasonable basis for hope or faith.

As an appendage to the doctrine of the deity of Christ, and considered equally important in *The Fundamentals*, is the Virgin Birth—although some Fundamentalists list this separately, resulting in six basic doctrines rather than five. One might expect the reality of heaven and hell or the existence of the Trinity to be next, but the Virgin Birth is considered an essential doctrine since it protects belief in Christ's deity. One should keep in mind, though,

that when Fundamentalists speak of Christ's birth from a virgin, they mean that Mary was a virgin only until his birth. Their common understanding is that Mary later had other children, citing the scriptural passages that refer to Christ's "brethren."

In reaction to the Social Gospel advocates, who said Christ gave nothing more than a good moral example, the early Fundamentalists insisted on their third doctrine, namely, that he died a substitutionary death. He not only took on our sins, he received the penalty that would have been ours. He was actually punished by the Father in our stead.

On the matter of the resurrection, Fundamentalists do not differ from orthodox Catholics. They believe that Christ rose physically from the dead, not just spiritually. His resurrection was not a collective hallucination of his followers, nor something invented by pious writers of later years. It really happened, and to deny it is to deny Scripture's reliability.

The most disputed topic, among Fundamentalists themselves, concerns the fifth belief listed in *The Fundamentals*, the Second Coming. There is unanimous agreement that Christ will physically return to Earth, but the exact date has been disputed. Some say it will be before the millennium, a thousand-year golden age with Christ physically reigning on earth. Others say it will be after the millennium. Others say that the millennium is Christ's heavenly reign and that there will be no golden age on earth before the last judgment. Some Fundamentalists also believe in the rapture, the bodily taking into heaven of true believers before the tribulation or time of trouble that precedes the millennium. Others find no scriptural basis for such a belief.

Such are the five (or six) main doctrines discussed in the books that gave Fundamentalism its name. But they are not necessarily the beliefs that most distinguish Fundamentalism today. For instance, you rarely hear much discussion about the Virgin Birth, although there is no question that Fundamentalists still believe this doctrine. Rather, to the general public, and to most Fundamentalists themselves, today Fundamentalism has a different focus.

DISTINGUISHING MARKS

The belief that is first and foremost the defining characteristic of Fundamentalists is their reliance on the Bible to the complete exclusion of any authority exercised by the Church. The second is their insistence on a faith in Christ as one's personal Lord and Savior.

"Do you accept Christ as your personal Lord and Savior?" they ask. "Have you been saved?" This is unmodified Christian individualism, which holds that the individual is saved, without ever considering his relationship to a church, a congregation, or anyone else. It is a one-to-one relationship, with no community, no sacraments, just the individual Christian and his Lord. And the Christian knows when he has been saved, down to the hour and minute of his salvation, because his salvation came when he "accepted" Christ. It came like a flash.

In that instant, many Fundamentalists believe, their salvation is assured. There is now nothing that can undo it. Without that instant, that moment of acceptance, a person would be doomed to eternal hell. And that is why the third most visible characteristic of Fundamentalism is the emphasis on evangelism. If sinners do not undergo the same kind of salvation experience Fundamentalists have undergone, they will go to hell. Fundamentalists perceive a duty to spread their faith—what can be more charitable than to give others a chance for escaping hell?—and they often have been successful.

Their success is partly due to their discipline. For all their talk about the Catholic Church being "rule-laden," there are perhaps no Christians who operate in a more regimented manner. Their rules—non-biblical rules, one might add—extend not just to religion and religious practices proper, but to facets of everyday life. Most people are familiar with their strictures on drinking, gambling, dancing, and smoking.

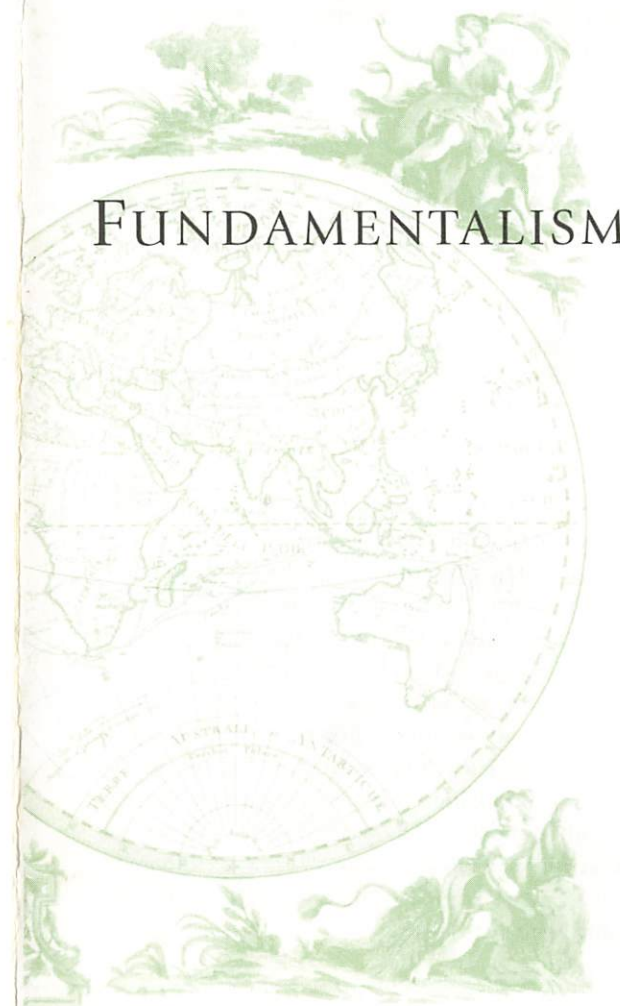
Fundamentalists also are intensely involved in their local congregations. Many people returning to the Catholic Church from Fundamentalism complain that as Fundamentalists they had no time or

room for themselves; everything centered around the church. All their friends were members; all their social activities were staged by it. Not to attend Wednesday evening services (in addition to one or two services on Sunday), not to participate in the Bible studies and youth groups, not to dress and act like everyone else in the congregation—these immediately put one beyond the pale; and in a small church (few Fundamentalist churches have more than a hundred members) this meant being ostracized, a silent invitation to conform or to worship elsewhere.

Nevertheless, despite the criticism Fundamentalists sometimes receive, they do undertake the praiseworthy task of adhering to certain key Christian tenets in a society that has all too often forgotten about Christ.

Non-Catholic Churches & Movements

FUNDAMENTALISM



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