POWER, POLITICS
AND THE
FRAGMENTATION
OF EVANGELICALISM
FROM THE SCOPES TRIAL TO THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION

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Introduction

American evangelicalism is that family within the Protestant household, fortified by deep reviver traditions, that has underscored the importance of the Bible, the atoning work of Jesus Christ, conversion and evangelism.¹ The term evangelicalism itself is contested,² but various theological traditions that bear the name invariably express a common interest in the attributes just cited. Part of the rich legacy of this vital movement can be seen in the First and Second Great Awakenings, abolitionism, the Holiness Movement and the progressive movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Its champions range from Jonathan Edwards to Charles Finney, from George Whitefield to Phoebe Palmer, from Billy Sunday to Billy Graham.³ After the disestablishment of the church during the eighteenth century, in which religion was legally (in the First Amendment to the Constitution) separated from the state, evangelical religion nevertheless flowered in the following century, and it had by that point grown to be culturally powerful. However, by the twentieth century the movement had clearly fallen on hard times. That is, it not only broke up into liberal and conservative wings but was also disinherit by key leaders of American culture who began to look elsewhere for their vision.

³Though George Whitefield was British he had such a significant impact on American evangelicalism that he must be listed in any major account.
The shifting fortunes of evangelicalism, especially from the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries, led Timothy Smith to employ the ever-changing image of a kaleidoscope to chart this complex movement.⁴

Such a fall from power, and over a relatively brief period of time, makes the study of American evangelicalism a good window not only on the fortunes of Protestantism in the United States but also on the identity of the American nation itself, especially in terms of what it has become as a modern liberal democracy. To explore this engaging story, which has some odd subplots along the way, we will consider different types of power. In other words we will investigate the various dimensions through which American evangelicalism has been expressed in its rich and vibrant life, especially on the national scene. Power is defined in this context, at least initially, in a very basic and general way. It comes in two principal forms: one positive and the other negative. Power in the first sense quite simply entails the ability to do, to effectuate, to achieve desired ends and goals. It is a reflection of interests. Power in the second, so-called negative, sense involves the ability to restrict and constrain; it consists chiefly in inhibiting or outright preventing certain courses of action. This second sense is similar to the nature of power that Martin Luther (1483-1546) had in mind when he described the political use of the moral law in his Commentary on Galatians.⁵

Though I have defined power quite broadly, in order to be able to recognize the many ways in which the evangelical community in America has expressed its life and purpose as a vibrant community among even larger ones, my approach will nevertheless focus by and large on key powers, especially those that are indicative of the relation between evangelicals and the American nation. In one sense this work is a history of modern American evangelicalism from the 1920s to the present. It tells that story, however, by being attentive to the numerous shifts in fortune that marked the relation of the evangelical community to the broader American nation, especially in terms of cultural, political, intellectual, moral and spiritual power. Indeed, an examination of these same elements will not only help us to comprehend

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evangelicalism better but also the American nation itself.

Though there are different ways of understanding the relation between culture and politics, my approach will view the former as the larger category as it relates to the entire *society* with respect to knowledge, ideas, customs, traditions, skills, beliefs, language, mores, folkways, artifacts and institutions. The latter category, politics, will be considered more narrowly as referring to government (and influencing it), the powers of distribution, restriction and coercion, as well as to the operations of the state. Indeed, one of the principal arguments of this book is that modern America has developed the unfortunate habit of “politicizing” ever larger areas of human culture that at their best should not in effect be overrun with such influences, with such governmental *power*.

Beyond such considerations the American evangelical story cannot be told apart from attention to the intellectual currents that were such an important part of its heritage extending back to Princeton theologians such as Charles Hodge (1797-1878) and B. B. Warfield (1851-1921), the common sense philosophy of the nineteenth century and the intellectual prowess of Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) during the eighteenth century. This distinct and considerable intellectual heritage that was a part of the broader cultural power of evangelicals was challenged in the nineteenth century and put aside by cultural elites in the twentieth. Its loss, as well as the ongoing shadow of that loss, have marked evangelical identity ever since. And Wesleyan evangelicals, by and large, have offered modest help in the quest to regain some of this intellectual capital since they were not often asking the question *What can I know?* (as were their Reformed evangelical cousins) but *How can I love?* a query emblematic of their own heritage of evangelicalism going back to John Wesley himself.

Given that evangelicals in the United States have championed conversion, or being born again, as being at the heart of genuine Christian experience, it is therefore not surprising to learn that this community has often expressed considerable moral and spiritual concern in the national arena. Emphasizing both personal and social responsibility, the evangelical community has articulated an ethic, among other things, of ministering to the poor, protecting the unborn as well as safeguarding the values pertaining to the family, values that should lead to human flourishing. The
irony here, of course, is that in the area of moral power, evangelicals offer researchers abundant evidence of having become increasing accommodated to American culture instead of transforming it. In fact, the divorce rates among American evangelicals are not very different from the nation at large. And scandals at the national level have rocked the community, though I do not believe that the lens of “scandal” is the most appropriate one to come to terms with the great majority of evangelical Americans, who in so many instances live better lives than some of their leaders.

So then the book will employ an historical narrative (for the most part) while being attentive to the interplay between the evangelical community and a broader national context in terms of a number of powers, and thereby offer a much needed cultural analysis. In chapter one, for example, I will begin by noting the rich cultural legacy of evangelicals hailing from the nineteenth century that was challenged by the rise of higher criticism and evolution, among other things. The cast of characters here, so to speak, will include the Scopes Trial, the rise of the Social Gospel, the Great Reversal and the fundamentalist dilemma that is best expressed in terms of ongoing cultural ambivalence. Moreover, unlike other histories of American evangelicalism I will indicate quite clearly why the turn toward fundamentalism was never undertaken by Wesleyan evangelicals, in any significant way, due to the distinct sense of their own identity and mission.

Chapter two will explore the institutionalization of fundamentalism reflecting its status as an ongoing subculture. It will also consider the rise of the neo-evangelicals, who sought to distinguish themselves in several important respects from their fundamentalist brothers and sisters. However, like the fundamentalists, the neo-evangelicals, soon to be known simply as evangelicals, developed an infrastructure to insure that their values and witness would be passed along from generation to generation, given their own standing as a subculture as well. Particular attention will, therefore, be paid to the development of the National Association of Evangelicals, the creation and editorial leadership of Christianity Today, the founding of Fuller Theological Seminary and the ministry of Billy Graham. Beyond this, we will consider some of the engaging social developments at the time, especially the civil rights movement, as well as how it was viewed by key evangelical leaders who at times seemed to be more concerned with
matters pertaining to their own identity and interests. Beyond this, the coalescing of Wesleyan evangelicals during the 1960s in the face of an overly accommodated mainline denomination (what modern, liberal democracy often does to a communion of faith) will also be examined.

Chapter three will portray the significant political and cultural shift brought into being by Lyndon Baines Johnson in his attempt, among other things, to usher in what he called “The Great Society,” that is, one that would eliminate poverty. And the case will be made, interestingly enough, that Richard Nixon, before the whole Watergate fiasco, actually had more in common with Johnson’s poverty fighting approaches than is often acknowledged. The fall of Nixon and the corruption of his administration prepared the way for the election of an outsider, Jimmy Carter, the former governor of Georgia, who as a born again Christian was remarkably open about his evangelical faith, though many evangelicals would quickly turn away from his administration. The aftermath of that disillusionment provides some of the context in which to understand the rise the new religious right in the form of the Moral Majority, and later on the Christian Coalition, and why many Wesleyans opted out. Living in the wake of the historic Supreme Court decision Roe v. Wade, many evangelicals not only made their way into the Republican Party and supported a divorced candidate for the presidency in the form of Ronald Reagan, but they also began to look more kindly toward Roman Catholics, who shared some of their key moral concerns.

A great number of evangelicals supported the rise of the intelligent design movement even though, properly speaking, that movement is not even a species of theism since the designer can be understood in various ways, not all which include the notion of God. At any rate, many evangelicals embraced the movement, and some cheered from the sidelines, simply because in intelligent design they had found a champion who could possibly recover some of the intellectual capital lost during the Scopes Trial, with the hope that this currency could be readily translated into an increased cultural voice. However, because the cultural shadows of Scopes often hung over a consideration of intelligent design, the movement was rarely properly understood. Chapter four then will take great pains to describe intelligent design properly and explore its intellectual challenge and contributions, as well as to note its failures.
Though conservative evangelicals, only a fraction of whom would identify with the religious right, seem to get so much of the attention at the national level, the evangelical left has resurged of late, riding the waves of the popularity of the emergent church and the ministries of Jim Wallis, Tony Campolo and Brian McLaren, and the election of a liberal Democratic president Barack Obama. Chapter five then will take a closer look at this wing of the evangelical community in light of its own writings and against the backdrop of the larger political and cultural changes that have been taking place in the United States from FDR to LBJ and on to Obama. Good windows on the interface between evangelical leftist conceptions of social justice and the modern, liberal democratic state can be illustrated in the recent housing crisis and in the promulgation of the “Manhattan Declaration,” a document that none of the names just mentioned saw fit to sign.

The evangelical community, both the right and the left, has in some sense followed broader cultural trends by reducing their public voices by and large to a political idiom. Modern liberal democratic states, of course, encourage such developments in a number of ways. The transformation of a full-orbed gospel voice to a political idiom in which particular conceptions of social justice, whether from the right or the left, were celebrated, was then brought back into the church (in this evangelicals followed the mainline denominations, though not to the same extent) where it continued to be interlaced with the vocabulary of the gospel itself. In other words, particular conceptions of justice took on an ever larger role such that those evangelicals who thought differently (and there are, after all, many viable ways of understanding social justice) could only feel alienated in such churches. In chapter six then I will detail this problem forthrightly and highlight the ways in which the evangelical community can come to a greater appreciation of the universality of the gospel, its broad catholicity, especially in terms of its transcendent nature. This ongoing political and theological problem likewise demonstrates the necessity of an evangelical political philosophy, one that is informed by Scripture in a preeminent way, as well as by the wisdom of moral and natural law, underscoring those things that pertain to all human beings.

The work will conclude with an assessment of the powers (cultural, intellectual, political, etc.) articulated in the largely historical narrative and will suggest the way forward for the evangelical community.
Cultural Shifts, the Rise of Fundamentalism and the Great Reversal

Though the church in the United States had been officially disestablished in the First Amendment to the Constitution in 1791, Protestants, many of them evangelicals, almost immediately set out to create a de facto establishment. The earlier evangelical revivalism of the 1730s and 1740s, informed by a Puritan heritage that sought to dedicate all of the New World in service to God, pointed the way for nineteenth-century preachers, who employed similar methods in a Second Great Awakening. Wave after wave of revivalism flowing from Cane Ridge, Kentucky, in 1801 to the businessmen’s revival of 1857, to the holiness camp meetings beginning at Vineland New Jersey in 1867, and onto to the pointed preaching of Dwight Moody (1837-1899) during the latter part of the century, all helped to foster a genuine Christian culture. The various means of this establishment, however, were not legal or coercive, but voluntary and persuasive. Revivalism, with its emphasis on the in-breaking of the power of God, now was at the heart of the methods that had so captivated the nation.

A Cultural Legacy
Revivalists of the period, such as Charles Grandison Finney (1792-1875),

who had left a legal career for preaching, took great pains to proclaim a full-orbed gospel: one that offered hope not simply to individuals but also to society. Indeed, Finney remarked on one occasion to the effect that everywhere the gospel is preached there must also be reform. Likeminded reformist evangelicals helped to establish several voluntary societies to meet both the personal and social needs of the nation, such as the American Bible Society (1816), the American Education Society (1816), the American Sunday School Union (1824), the American Tract Society (1825), the American Temperance Society (1826), the American Peace Society (1828) and the American Antislavery Society (1833) among other groups. These societies, which were not only created to ease the plight of the poor but also to enhance the cultural fingerprint of American Protestants, were marked by generous interdenominational cooperation. The whole cluster of these societies interlaced throughout the nation constituted nothing less than a veritable benevolent empire.

So great was the religious and cultural power of evangelical Protestants in the nineteenth century that by 1870 as George Marsden puts it “almost all American Protestants thought of America as a Christian nation.” For example, by 1892 Supreme Court Justice Brewer delivered the opinion of the court (Church of the Holy Trinity v. the United States) in declaring that the United States was a Christian nation. Not surprisingly, many Protestants saw their own faith at the heart of the American enterprise, though Roman Catholics, Jews and skeptics naturally objected. Josiah Strong (1847-1916) demonstrated in 1885 with the publication of his best-selling book Our Country how quickly the evangelical faith of American Protestants could become amalgamated with the alloys of both ethnicity and race. Mistaking Anglo-Saxon culture for the genius of the gospel itself, Strong declared that “the world’s destiny lay with the Anglo-Saxon race.” Andre Siegfried continued this tribal theme early into the next century in his book America Comes of Age (1927), in which he

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4George M. Marsden, Fundamentalism and American Culture (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 11. Due to the scope and focus of the book, nineteenth-century developments are treated more briefly and to the extent that they illuminate the following century.

3Ibid.

raised the question “Will America remain Protestant and Anglo Saxon?” In other words, original stock Protestants, some of whose ancestry went back to the founding of the nation and even earlier, enjoyed and touted their cultural advantages, some of which were reflected in the religious preferences of America.

The Progressive Movement and the Great War

Many evangelicals brought their religious idealism and moral judgments to the progressive movement that spanned the presidencies of Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft and Woodrow Wilson. In a real sense progressivism, as a political movement, was a response to some of the more troubling aspects of industrialization and urbanization. It therefore sought to bring about a new balance between “Protestant moral values, capitalistic competition, and democratic processes.” Among their many reforms progressives helped to pass child labor laws, they developed the notion that charity and welfare should be undertaken by professionals, that is, by social workers, and they supported many of the goals of organized labor.

Voluntary societies to promote social order likewise flourished in the nineteenth century. The Women’s Christian Temperance Union, for example, was founded in 1874 and Frances Willard, a Methodist evangelical, provided pivotal leadership from 1879 to 1898. To be sure, many reformers believed that alcohol was destroying the social fabric of the nation, the family in particular. However, what began as a temperance movement (drinking in moderation) soon became a total abstinence crusade, and progressives viewed the alcohol issue in an ultraist way: that is, it was seen as the moral issue that if properly addressed would result in numerous social benefits, everything from stable family relationships to increased productivity at work. Class and ethnic issues, however, were also caught up in a prohibition coalition that sought to protect the interests of old stock Americans who felt threatened by the unchurched (largely lower class) and by Catholic, Jewish and Lutheran (drinking) immigrants. The

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Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which banned the manufacture and sale of intoxicating beverages, was ratified by the states in October 1919, and it went into effect on January 16, 1920. It represented the social and cultural power of Protestants who yet remained in earnest to establish a Christian America, one very much in their own image.

One of the greatest reforms undertaken by progressives was undoubtedly women’s suffrage. That women did not have the right to vote seemed to belie the democratic principles that grounded the nation. And many Christians reasoned that such a failure detracted from the truth that women, as with men, were created in nothing less than the image and likeness of God. Harkening back to a 1848 founding convention in a Wesleyan church at Seneca Falls, New York, women’s suffrage was yet another key success of the progressive movement with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment by Congress in 1919, an amendment that was ratified by the states the following year.

Despite its many achievements, one of the glaring faults of the progressive era was that its social and cultural vision was largely restricted to white Americans. Indeed, prejudices against African Americans were not only extensive but they were also built into the very social mores of the period. For example, Jim Crow laws that were on the books since the 1880s gave legal and social force to the physical separation of the races. Moreover, demonstrating that the Supreme Court itself was not above the social prejudices of the day, it ruled in Plessy v. Ferguson in 1896 that “separate but equal” policies with respect to African Americans were in fact justified. In addition, some of the worst executive acts against blacks took place during the presidency of Woodrow Wilson (1856-1924), who brought several “southern white stereotypes” to the White House. It would take decades before this blind spot of the reformers was even addressed.

As a reforming Democrat who had earlier cleaned up corruption in New Jersey as governor, Wilson readily weaved together the narrative of an American liberal democracy with that of the gospel. According to Mark Noll this energetic president believed that the American experience “witnessed the fullest manifestation of public Christian values in human

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history.\textsuperscript{9} Remembering the Civil War and the disruption it had brought to American society, and with both his father and grandfather having had careers as ministers, Wilson reluctantly entered the Great War as late as 1917 in order to defeat German militarism and to “make the world safe for democracy.”\textsuperscript{10} William Jennings Bryan (1860-1925), his popular secretary of state, discerned the drift toward war early on and resigned in 1915 on the basis of pacifist principles.

Evangelicals from a number of different social and theological perspectives eventually embraced the war and viewed it, at least to some extent, through the well-worked lens of reform. For example, Columbia University administrators dismissed tenured faculty “for opposing American intervention in the war.”\textsuperscript{11} And Shailer Mathews (1863-1941), the dean of the divinity school at the University of Chicago, declared that for an American “to refuse to share in the present war . . . is not Christian.”\textsuperscript{12} Conservative evangelicals, like their liberal theological cousins, conflated patriotism and Christianity as well. Billy Sunday (1862-1935), for example, the slapdash preacher who knew how to captivate an audience, bellowed from the pulpit on occasion that “Christianity and patriotism are synonymous . . . and hell and traitors are synonymous.”\textsuperscript{13} This was a heady period, to be sure, filled with the all the rhetoric of patriotism, and the American flag was even brought into the churches—and in most cases it remained there.

After the war was over in 1918, the gruesome reality of the carnage (15 million dead) as well as a vision of the vast destruction of resources set in and dispelled the naiveté and optimism that had characterized many of war’s supporters, religious leaders among them. The social consequences of the war were also considerable and were evident not only in a loosing of moral strictures that characterized the rise of the jazz age but also in strengthening the forces of secularization, especially among cultural elites, who were by now weary of all idealism, whatever form it took.

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\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., p. 61.
\textsuperscript{12}Noll, \textit{History of Christianity}, pp. 308-9.
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Cultural Challenges to the American Protestant Empire

The cultural establishment that Protestants had created in the nineteenth century, largely though the enormous success of revivalism in offering many Americans a common vision and purpose, was challenged by a number of shifting social and cultural realities. Precisely because it is made up of so many diverse elements (intellectual, economic, moral, religious and social) cultural power for any particular group in the life of a nation is at best fleeting. Clearly, culturally privileged groups like to focus on a snapshot, so to speak, of the heights of their power, not realizing of course that the photo will age, no longer depicting the present very accurately. In the same way, American Protestants, though remarkably successful in the nineteenth century, were nevertheless a part of a larger cultural complex that contained any number of factors well beyond their control. What cultural power and influence they had amassed could be viewed as either fortuitous or in a more comforting way as the benevolent providence of God. At any rate, it would not last.

Immigration

One of the best and most reliable indicators of the religious life of a nation (both present and future) is none other than immigration statistics. In a real sense America has imported its religious makeup. The period between 1870 and 1920, for instance, marks one of the most significant influxes of immigrants in the history of the nation. According to some of the best statistics available, over twenty million people, largely European, passed through the gates of Castle Garden and, after 1892, Ellis Island. Immigrants came from Germany, Ireland, Italy, Russia, Poland and elsewhere. At the turn of the century the numbers swelled from Eastern Europe, which included many Ashkenazi Jews. America was now both more Roman Catholic (Germany, Ireland and Italy) and Jewish (Russia and Poland).

Nativist sentiment quickly emerged among the “old guard” Protestants who felt challenged by the shifting religious composition of the nation. Josiah Strong, for example, maintained that Catholicism threatens many

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of America’s basic liberties, such as free speech and a free press. “Manifestly there is an irreconcilable difference,” he declared, “between papal principles and the fundamental principles of our free institutions.” And when the Democratic Party in 1928 nominated the Roman Catholic Alfred E. Smith to be president of the United States, many Protestants warned that he would sell out America to the pope. So great was the concern that even the authors of the Christian Century argued that “Catholic teachings and practices clashed with America’s democratic principles.” And evangelical Protestants, for their part, wondered if the fruit of revivalism and the cultural power it had afforded them could be so easily undone by American bureaucratic policy in the form of mass immigration.

Fearing the wrath of its constituencies, Congress began to pass legislation after the war to restrict immigration. A bill that would exclude migrants who failed a literacy test became law in 1917 over the objections—and veto!—of President Wilson. A few years later Congress passed the Johnson Act (1921) and the Johnson Reid Act (1924), both of which restricted immigration along the lines of “national-origins quotas.” The open door of immigration was beginning to close. The World War itself, of course, had interrupted the flow, and with the restrictive legislation of the 1920s followed by the Great Depression of the 1930s transmigration to the United States virtually ceased—at least for a time. And it would not be until much later, that is, during the 1960s, that the country would revamp its immigration policies under the banner of fairness and balance.

**Intellectual Challenges to the American Protestant Empire**

One element of the larger Protestant cultural fingerprint had been the life of the mind that resonated in many respects with American cultural trends throughout a good portion of the nineteenth century. So then in order to appreciate the nature and extent of the intellectual challenges that

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18 Ibid.
the higher criticism of the Bible and the teaching of evolution posed to so many American Protestants during the early twentieth century (with significant loss of intellectual power in the offering), it is necessary to understand just how they read sacred Scripture. However, in order to comprehend what presuppositions and assumptions evangelical Protestants brought to the Bible, especially toward the end of the nineteenth century, it is necessary to explore their changing views on both American culture and the millennial reign of Christ.

Many of the revivalists around the middle of the nineteenth century, such as Charles Finney, were decidedly postmillennialists. In other words, they believed that the activity of the church was helping to usher in the golden and blessed thousand-year reign of Christ predicted in Revelation 20. However, after the Civil War it became more difficult, but not impossible, to hold such an interpretation of American culture and biblical prophecy. By the 1870s Dwight Moody, a former shoe salesman turned preacher, had now become America’s chief evangelist. Though he initially embraced pointed, revivalistic preaching coupled with significant social action along the lines of Finney, after the great Chicago fire in 1871 Moody modified his overall approach to ministry. That is, from now on he largely focused on saving souls. It was almost as if the calamity of the Chicago fire in Moody’s eyes was emblematic of the state of the nation. His new outlook was encapsulated in the often repeated observation: “I look upon this world as a wrecked vessel. God has given me a lifeboat and said to me, ‘Moody, save all you can.’”

Throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century, Moody preached a premillennial gospel that was pessimistic in terms of the outworking of American culture. Put another way, this popular evangelist was not operating out of a grand Constantinian model in which the Christian faith would make generous and lasting contributions to an American civilization. Instead, he considered that civilization to be in decline, and it would continue in that unenviable state until the second coming of Christ. Moody’s new reading of the relation of Christ and culture caught on and many of the leading American evangelists of the period, such as Billy Sunday, Reuben Torrey, W. J. Erdman, J. Wilbur Chapman and George

9Marsden, Fundamentalism and American Culture, p. 38.
Cultural Shifts, the Rise of Fundamentalism and the Great Reversal 25

Needham, followed in his premillennial footsteps. Like Moody these religious leaders now looked down upon the earlier postmillennialist claim uttered by many of the progressives that the Christian faith would transform American culture in very positive and lasting ways. Instead, they took important steps to separate themselves from what they now judged to be a declining culture. Reflecting on the American scene James Gray remarked, “We cannot absolutely separate ourselves from its society, its literature, its politics, its commerce, but we can separate ourselves from its methods, its spirits, and its aims.”

Moody’s premillennial cause was helped by the introduction of the teaching of John Nelson Darby (1800-1882), a British evangelist and member of the Plymouth Brethren. Darby taught two key ideas: first there would be a secret rapture of the church, and second there would be a parenthesis in the prophetic clock between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks of the book of Daniel. These are two of the basic teachings that constitute the system of theology known as dispensationalism.

Arguing that Scripture and the prophetic calendar must be rightly divided, with distinct treatments of the nation of Israel and the church, dispensationalists maintained that God has yet to fulfill several promises to Israel. However, whereas all dispensationalists are premillennialists, arguing that Christ himself will usher in the millennial reign, not all premillennialists are dispensationalists. Nevertheless, both interpretations of the Bible and prophecy depart in key ways from the optimistic and culture-affirming ways of the postmillennialists. By 1917 several professors at the University of Chicago took notice and criticized the premillennialists by arguing that “its leaders were preaching that the current conflict [World War I] was not “the war to end all wars,” that the kingdom of God would not come through moral progress, and that the social application of the gospel was a waste of time.”

One of the things that united the premillennialists and dispensationalists was they tended to approach the Bible in a literal way (in line with

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Ibid., p. 131.
their reading of prophecy) that made it difficult for them to embrace the new learning of the nineteenth century in terms of higher criticism of the Bible. Simply put, prophetic judgment had a significant effect on how one viewed the Bible, especially in terms of its authority. And a dispensational reading of Scripture, with all that this entailed, was spread far and wide through the publication of the Scofield Reference Bible in 1909, a work that was later revised in 1917.

Ernest Sandeen put forth the thesis that a coalition of millenarians and conservative Princeton theologians helped to give shape to American fundamentalism. If true, this thesis would suggest that the base of support of fundamentalists (in contrast to H. Richard Niebuhr’s claim) was virtually indistinguishable from that of modernists. What makes this coalition so interesting is that many of the conservative theologians at Princeton Seminary, such as Charles Hodge and B. B. Warfield, were neither premillennialists nor dispensationalists, but were actually convinced postmillennialists in their reading of the prophetic calendar.

What drew these millenarians and Princeton scholars together was their common dislike of modernism, a movement that in the judgment of both groups could undermine the inspiration and the authority of Scripture. Indeed, modernism in this context refers to those within the church who were willing to retool, so to speak, significant Christian doctrines in light of both higher criticism and evolutionary theory. For his part Charles Hodge approached the Bible through a Baconian paradigm that placed a premium on induction and empiricism: “The Bible is to the theologian, what nature is to the man of science. It is his store-house of facts.” The task of the theologian then, according to Hodge, is “to ascertain, collect and combine all the facts which God has revealed concerning himself and our relation to Him.” A. A. Hodge, the son of Charles, along with his colleague B. B. Warfield laid out Princeton’s view with respect to Scripture in their salient essay titled “Inspiration,” which first appeared in the Presbyterian Review in 1881. According to Sandeen,

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23Sandeen, Roots of Fundamentalism, p. xvi.
three emphases emerged in this view: first, “the inspiration of the Scriptures [extended] to the words,” indicating a plenary verbal view; second, “the Scriptures taught their own inerrancy;” and third, attention was given to “the inspiration of the original autographs,” in order no doubt to ward off the charge of error.\(^6\)

Princeton had a tradition of articulating the basic principles of common sense realism that went back to the eighteenth century. To illustrate, John Witherspoon (1723-1794), a Scotsman who became the president of the College of New Jersey (later, Princeton), had imbibed deeply of this philosophy as he grappled with the work of Francis Hutcheson and the skepticism of David Hume (1711-1776).\(^7\) Indeed, Witherspoon's philosophical perspective was in some important ways similar to that found in the writings of the realists Thomas Reid (1710-1796) and his student Dugald Stewart (1751-1828), who both contended that common sense was, after all, a reliable guide to the perception of what is real. Reid defended such realism by affirming that certain principles exist “which the constitution of our nature leads us to believe, and which we are under a necessity to take for granted in the common concerns of life, without being able to give a reason for them.”\(^8\) This view, along with its implied methodology, was passed along to Archibald Alexander (1772-1851), who was the first professor of the seminary and one who had been taught by a student of Witherspoon.

Though commonsense realism in America had basically run its course by the mid-nineteenth century, its influence could nevertheless still be discerned in the later writings of Princeton theologians. Professors such as Charles Hodge found the notion that human perceptions reveal the world basically as it is congenial to the larger enterprise of civilization building, of articulating a Christian philosophy in which every thought was taken captive to Christ.\(^9\) This particular cultural synthesis, in which religion

\(^{6}\)Sandeen, *Roots of Fundamentalism*, pp. 123, 125, 127.


and science each had a vital and largely noncontradictory role to play, however, would not bear the test of time. That is, the largely static conception of science found in the writings of some of the Princeton theologians would not endure. Moreover, subsequent theologians challenged the appropriateness of viewing the Bible, a very diverse body of literature, through the privileged lens of scientific empiricism. The Bible in their judgment was not simply a storehouse of facts.

Higher Criticism of the Bible

A millenarian reading of the Bible in conjunction with the doctrine of inerrancy espoused at Princeton created a cultural and intellectual climate in some of the Protestant denominations that could only spell trouble for someone like Charles A. Briggs (1841-1913), who saw little difficulty in applying higher critical methods to the Bible as he undertook his ministry as a seminary professor. Having studied the works of Johann Eichhorn (1753-1827), F. C. Baur (1792-1860) and Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918), Briggs believed that historical criticism in raising key questions in terms of sources, date, authorship and form—in other words, to consider the Bible in some sense as any piece of literature—did not detract from “the infallibility of Holy Scripture as a rule of faith and practice.” Appointed to the Edward Robinson Chair of Biblical Theology at Union Seminary in New York, Briggs delivered his inaugural address in January 1891, in which he “disavowed biblical inerrancy,” to the chagrin of several in attendance. He was quickly charged with heresy, was tried by the New York Presbytery, which acquitted him, but was found guilty by the Presbyterian Church General Assembly, which then suspended him from ministry. Briggs recovered somewhat by retaining his position at Union and by his reception into the priesthood of the Episcopal Church in 1899.

Members of the northern Presbyterian denomination who were troubled by the lack of orthodoxy of Union Seminary’s graduates persuaded the Presbyterian General Assembly of 1910 to articulate in an unambiguous statement the fundamentals of the Christian faith. The As-

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36Gaustad, Religious History of America, p. 256.
assembly focused on five basic truths: (1) the inerrancy of Scripture, (2) the virgin birth of Christ, (3) the substitutionary atonement of Christ, (4) the bodily resurrection of Jesus, and (5) the authenticity of miracles. A year earlier two Christian laymen, Milton Stewart (1838-1923) and Lyman Stewart (1840-1923), funded the publication of twelve volumes that contained articles supporting the fundamentals of the Christian faith. A. C. Dixon (1854-1925), a popular evangelist and Bible expositor, and R. A. Torrey (1856-1928), who had been called by Moody to head the Bible Institute of the Chicago Evangelization Society, assumed editorial leadership of the project. Eventually these writings were 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.”

In 1917 William Bell Riley (1861-1947), a minister who tried to snuff out the spread of modernism in the Northern Baptist Convention, published The Menace of Modernism, in which he railed against those who were transforming the Christian faith in light of the theory of evolution. The following summer Riley, along with a few leaders from the Bible and prophetic conference movement, developed the idea of the World’s Christian Fundamentals Association, and the first meeting was held in May 1919. It was not until the following year, however, that the term fundamentalist was coined by Curtis Lee Laws, editor of the Baptist paper The Watchman Examiner. So defined, a fundamentalist was one who was ever ready “to do battle royal for the Fundamentals.” The terminology of Laws, then, was “a protest against the rationalistic interpretation of Christianity which seeks to discredit supernaturalism.” Theological modernists soon became fearful of fundamentalist initiatives in the northern churches, and Harry Emerson Fosdick (1878-1969), pastor of the famous Riverside Church in New York, viewed the whole controversy as one between enlightened

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33 Marsden, Fundamentalism and American Culture, p. 117.
35 Carpenter, Revive Us Again, p. 37.
36 Marsden, Fundamentalism and American Culture, p. 158.
37 Ibid., p. 159.
38 Marty, Noise of Conflict, p. 160.
reason on one side and gross superstition, even ignorance, on the other. In 1922 he queried from the pulpit, “Shall the fundamentalists win?” This probe was quickly answered by Rev. Clarence E. Macartney, senior pastor of Philadelphia’s Arch Street Presbyterian Church, who retorted from his own pulpit, “Shall unbelief win?”

In terms of properly assessing fundamentalism beyond the heated objections of its critics, George Marsden’s work represents an advance over the carefully argued thesis of Sandeen in that it understands this energetic movement as a complex cultural phenomenon, that is, as a distinct version of evangelicalism “uniquely shaped by the circumstances of America in the early twentieth century.” So understood, fundamentalism is “militantly antimonadist Protestant evangelicalism.” Or to put it even more succinctly and in a way that Jerry Falwell himself, much later on, would have it: “a fundamentalist is an evangelical who is angry about something.”

Marsden’s contribution, then, is so valuable because it has contextualized the militancy and anger of fundamentalists against the backdrop of broader American cultural trends rendering such elements intelligible. Again, fundamentalists of the early twentieth century were evangelical Christians “close to the traditions of the dominant American revivalist establishment of the nineteenth century.” That is, they were the heirs of this rich cultural legacy that was very much a part of the evangelical narrative and identity. However, by the turn of the century much of this cultural and intellectual capital had been spent. The power of evangelicals who were taking a fundamentalist turn had been dissipated by cultural forms and movements that they could no longer embrace. Evangelicals were now becoming a part of the disinherited; a designation that had always—or so it seemed—pertained to the “other.” Now it was evangelicals themselves who were being left behind, and they were angry.

Throughout the 1920s the fundamentalist controversy was largely limited to two denominations: the Northern Baptist Convention and the

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39Marsden, Fundamentalism and American Culture, p. 3.
40Ibid., p. 4.
41Marsden, Understanding Fundamentalism, p. 1.
42Marsden, Fundamentalism and American Culture, p. 4.
Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., though there were some rumblings among the Disciples of Christ. As a Presbyterian New Testament scholar at Princeton Seminary, John Gresham Machen (1881-1937) challenged not a few of the conclusions that some scholars were drawing in terms of their use of higher criticism. The modernists, as Machen referred to them, struck at the vitals of the Christian faith because like the ancient Gnostics they utilized all the vocabulary of Christianity (grace, redemption, atonement, etc.) but invested this terminology with entirely new meanings.

In his classic critique *Christianity and Liberalism*, which was published in 1923, Machen maintained that “what the liberal theologian has retained after abandoning to the enemy one Christian doctrine after another is not Christianity at all, but a religion which is so entirely different from Christianity as to belong in a distinct category.” Mincing no words, Machen contended that liberalism, in making the highest goal of life “the healthy and harmonious and joyous development of existing human faculties,” actually descended into paganism. In other words, modernistic liberalism, like ancient paganism, whether in its Greek or Roman forms, was unduly optimistic in terms of the capacity of unassisted human nature, whereas “Christianity is the religion of the broken heart.” Again, liberalism is in the imperative mood, while the Christian faith is in the triumphant indicative mood. In short, liberalism “appeals to man’s will,” Machen declared, “while Christianity announces, first, a gracious act of God.”

Though Machen had taught that many true Christian people, not simply liberal opponents of the faith, did not accept the plenary inspiration of the Bible, his views (and those of other fundamentalists) were nevertheless rejected by the northern Presbyterian Church (PC-USA), which reorganized Princeton Seminary more to its own theological liking in 1929. Effectively forced out of his own educational institution by this de-

42J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), pp. 6-7. It is Machen himself who makes a strong connection between theological “liberalism” and “modernism.”
43Ibid., p. 65.
44Ibid.
45Ibid., p. 47.
46Ibid.
47Ibid., p. 75.
nominal move, Machen took the lead in establishing Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia that same year, a seminary that remained faithful to the historic Westminster Confession. Machen was suspended from ministry in the Presbyterian Church in 1935, and, along with a few other conservatives, helped to form the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1936, which is still in existence today.

Shailer Mathews, representing the outlook of modernism, responded to Machen’s argument in his own The Faith of Modernism, in 1924. In this work he took on the apologetic task of using the methods of Enlightenment science to discern the central values of the faith in order to meet the needs of the modern world: “An un-theological, practical, scientific age is shaping a religious and moral Christianity which has its own intellectual expression and method, its own uplift and revelation; a religion which is intellectually tenable as it is spiritually inspiring.” The goal, of course, was to make the teachings of the Christian faith and the Bible relevant to contemporaries, and thereby maintain the ongoing intellectual power of the faith. As Martin Marty points out, modernists “were genuinely agitated by the idea that, if Fundamentalists won, Christianity would become so implausible that the faith could no longer help shape the culture or attract and ‘save’ the thoughtful individual.” Critics, however, charged that the central doctrines of Christianity were actually transformed in this modernistic apologetic process to the point that they were no longer recognizable. Enlightenment sensibilities and judgments, especially in terms of an empirical method, had essentially displaced the narrative of the Bible.

A second major element of modernism critiqued by Machen and others was its teaching that God is immanent. In other words, the Most High is very close to human beings and is therefore revealed through the slow, gradual processes of human culture. Rejecting the notion of Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) that there is an infinite qualitative distinction between God and humanity, the modernists of the early twentieth century ran the risk of confusing the all-too-human with the divine, of mistaking human achievement for the kingdom of God. Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-

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51Marty, Noise of the Conflict, p. 168.
1971) criticized this tendency among liberal Protestants of the early twentieth century by pointing out that their faith “involved no discontinuities, no crises, no tragedies or sacrifices, no loss of all things, no cross and resurrection.”53 Such a faith actually extolled not God but humanity.

With such a faith in place, several modernists had little difficulty in redefining some of the basic, traditional teachings of the church for a better cultural fit. Once again, Shailer Mathews, for example, in his pamphlet Will Christ Come Again? rejected a literal second coming of Christ and taught instead that the “true Second Coming was the triumph of the ideals of Jesus in human affairs.”53 And Francis John McConnell (1871-1953), Methodist bishop and president of the Federal Council of Churches, quickly mixed American culture with divine action: “I do not misrepresent the churches in the Federal Council when I say that by the sheer magnitude of our enterprise we may take a new place, and make possible a more adequate revelation of God.”54 Elias Sanford recalled the earlier speech of a bishop at the opening of the FCC in which American nationalism was so readily related to the Christian faith: “Let it be ours to sustain that flag and to see to it that wherever that flag goes our holy religion goes, in every part of the world.”55

Unlike their fundamentalist, premillennial counterparts, the modernists of the early twentieth century, precisely because they continued some of the postmillennial traditions of evangelicalism, were much more susceptible to equating the advance of American civilization with the kingdom of God. It seemed as if a sacred canopy, to borrow the terminology of Peter Berger, was placed atop the narrative of American liberal democracy, with its emphasis on autonomy, freedom and individual rights, such that the elements of the gospel itself took their shape from another source.56 Such a consideration helps to explain, at least in part, why many liberal modernists began to underscore the importance of social welfare not only as an expression of Christian love, which it also clearly was, but

54Carpenter, Revive Us Again, p. 39.
55Francis John McConnell, cited in Marty, Noise of the Conflict, p. 36.
56Marty, Noise of the Conflict, pp. 36-37.
also as the chief means of influencing the culture.57

What was at stake, then, in the struggle between fundamentalists and modernists, among other things, was nothing less than the power to influence broader American culture—or so they had thought. And if modernists could claim that fundamentalism was anti-intellectual in its basic rejection of a higher critical approach to the Bible, and therefore not deserving of a larger cultural role, fundamentalists could in turn argue that modernism represented a very acculturated faith, one that could hardly bear the name Christian.

**Evolution**

Prior to the Civil War evangelical religion and science operated without many of the antagonisms that would later emerge. During this period science was for the most part “practical and utilitarian” in outlook.58 In other words, it had not yet taken on the “ideal of professionalization and research” that would mark the twentieth century.59 Moreover, the evangelical religion of the day, fortified in its worldview, once again, by common sense realism was at first largely untroubled by the publication of Charles Darwin’s The Origin of Species in 1859. The way for embracing evolutionary thought had been prepared for some evangelicals by George Frederick Wright (1838-1921), professor of science and religion at Oberlin College, and Asa Gray (1810-1888), a Harvard botanist, who both put forth a position that “harmonized Darwinism and Christian theism.”60 And John Fiske (1842-1901), philosopher as well as a man of faith, championed Darwin’s cause in several essays and contended that “Evolution is God’s way of doing things.”61 Evangelical Christians were further reassured that what came to be known as theistic evolution was indeed a viable option for them through the careful work of Henry Drummond (1851-1897), who wrote Natural Law in the Spiritual World in 1883.62

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57Ibid., p. 216.
59Ibid., p. 11.
60Askew and Pierard, American Church Experience, p. 131.
61Marsden, Understanding Fundamentalism, pp. 36-37.
Interestingly enough, even a fundamentalist such as Reuben Torrey and the Princeton theologian B. B. Warfield accepted theistic evolution. Torrey, for example, exclaimed at one point that a Christian could “believe thoroughly in the absolute infallibility of the Bible and still be an evolutionist of a certain type.” And Warfield, for his part, affirmed in a lecture given at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1888 that “I do not think that there is any general statement in the Bible or any part of the account of creation, either as given in Genesis 1 and 2 or elsewhere alluded to, that need be opposed to evolution.” Nevertheless all was not well in the evangelical camp simply because no one less that Charles Hodge leveled several serious objections against the new theory. But before a few of these criticisms can be considered, it must be borne in mind that the Darwinism of the latter part of the nineteenth century was much different from that of today. According to Larsen, biologists of this period still defended “a variety of evolutionary mechanisms including Lamarckian ones” (the view that an organism can pass on characteristics that it acquired through experience to its offspring), and the contribution of genetics to evolutionary theory would only come later during the 1930s and 1940s in what would be known as neo-Darwinism.

With these caveats in place, Hodge’s criticism of evolution, found both in his essay “What Is Darwinism?” written in 1874, and later in his Systematic Theology (1871-1873), struck at the heart of the theory in terms of its basic assumptions and presuppositions. In the second volume of his major theology, for example, in a section on anthropology, Hodge observed:

The theory in question cannot be true, because it is founded on the assumption of an impossibility. It assumes that matter does the work of mind. This is an impossibility and an absurdity in the judgment of all men except materialists. . . . God, says Darwin, created the unintelligent living cell; . . . after that first step, all else follows by natural law, without purpose and without design.

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63Reuben Torrey, cited in Larson, Summer for the Gods, p. 32.
Since evolution as taught by Darwin simply focused on material causation, excluding the possibility of the influence of mind or intelligence at the outset (that is, such elements were excluded methodologically), Hodge could only conclude that “the system is thoroughly atheistic, and therefore cannot possibly stand.”67

In the same year that Hodge published his essay “What Is Darwinism,” John William Draper (1811-1882) exacerbated an already difficult situation in his polemical work History of the Conflict Between Religion and Science. Draper’s contribution was followed by an equally acerbic work, A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom, by Andrew Dickson White in 1896. The warfare model articulated in this literature was embraced by several key secularists in the early twentieth century who cared little for religious faith. Clarence Darrow (1857-1938), for instance, lawyer for the defense at the famous Scopes Trial, was taught this perspective by his father, who eagerly consumed the writings of Draper.68

Around 1910 American scientists began to distinguish their views very clearly from religious ones, “especially from the academically discredited conservative Biblicist views.”69 And though biologists who espoused Darwin’s theory insisted that their work simply touched on empirical, scientific matters, the patterns of belief in terms of this particular population suggested a much different picture. To illustrate, James H. Leuba (1867-1946) of Bryn Mawr University conducted an early survey among professors and discovered unbelief was higher among biologists than other scientists, and the greater the prestige of the scientist the higher level of unbelief.70 Consequently, “the smallest percentage of believers [was] found among the greatest biologists; they count only 16.9 per cent of believers in God.”71 A comparison of this statistic with the percentage of Americans at the time who held theistic views suggests that these biologists, despite their claims to the contrary, were not content to remain within the parameters of the scientific method but instead began to make several philosophical judgments, especially in terms of the question of the existence of

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67Ibid.
68Larson, Summer for the Gods, p. 22.
69Marsden, Understanding Fundamentalism, p. 144.
70Larson, Summer of the Gods, p. 41.
71Ibid.
God, that were not warranted by their empirical approach. The implications of Darwin’s theory of evolution, with an emphasis on natural selection, were explored in a number of ways. For example, a half-cousin of Darwin, Sir Francis Galton (1822-1911), was a pioneer in the field of eugenics (the study of breeding in order to improve the human species), having coined the term in 1883. In studying various populations through an adept use of statistics Galton coined the phrase *nature versus nurture* and became very interested in seeing that the uppercrust be encouraged to marry early through handsome financial incentives. Closer to home Margaret Sanger (1879-1966) adapted the young field of eugenics (literally “born well”) to the need for birth control, and in 1921 she established the American Birth Control League (that later became Planned Parenthood). Much more controversial than Galton, her British counterpart, Sanger championed a “negative eugenics” that called for various forms of social intervention in order to eliminate undesirable breeding. Other social activists who held similar views argued for selective breeding and even sterilization to improve the human community. One of Sanger’s preferred ways of achieving the goals of negative eugenics was through the restriction of immigrants to the United States, a cause for which she is well known. The American church, however, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, “resented the anti-immigrant thrust of eugenic reformers.”\(^\text{72}\)

Nevertheless, by 1932, according to Lichtman, twenty-seven states had enacted sterilization laws “targeting the least powerful.”\(^\text{73}\) And Larson points out that by 1935 thirty-five states enacted laws “to compel the sexual segregation and sterilization of certain persons viewed as eugenically unfit.”\(^\text{74}\) Yet another implication (mistaken or not) that some drew from Darwin’s concept of natural selection was that the survival of the fittest, so to speak, could be understood socially, that is, in terms of the composition of society itself. Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) led the way in this area and developed a line of thought and a set of practices that would later be referred to as social Darwinism. He argued, among other things, that evolution must be understood not simply biologically but also socially, especially in


\(^{73}\)Ibid.

\(^{74}\)Larson, *Summer of the Gods*, p. 27.
terms of wealth and poverty. Influenced by the earlier writings of Thomas Malthus (1766-1834)—who had taught that populations often outrun their food supply with the result that the weak simply perish—Spencer viewed evolution as a “unifying philosophical principle” that could be applied to “social structures, economic developments, race relations, and the growth of nations.”

Beyond this, William Graham Sumner (1840-1910) offered a few variations on the theme of social Darwinism and considered the ongoing influence of religion in society (that some suggested could ameliorate the hard realities of natural selection) as “sentimental.” But if Sumner’s judgments were accurate, then perhaps Charles Darwin himself was not a social Darwinist, because in his work *The Descent of Man* he factored in the social instincts of “sympathy” and “moral sentiments” as having consequence in the overall scheme of things.

In other words, there is a place for human beneficence and compassion in any social order. The reality is not as stark or as brutal as some of the social Darwinists would have it.

**The Scopes Trial**

Almost sixty years after the publication of Darwin’s classic, many more evangelicals were beginning to have doubts about the implications of evolutionary theory, especially along the lines of Hodge’s earlier reflections. William Bell Riley, for instance, head of the World’s Christian Fundamentalist Association, lobbied state legislatures to pass laws against the teaching of evolution, because in his judgment this theory not only undermined belief in God as the Creator but it also detracted from the dignity of humanity. Riley was successful in the state legislature of Tennessee, which passed the Butler Act in 1925, prohibiting the teaching of evolution. In an attempt to garner publicity for the small town of Dayton, Tennessee (population around 1,700), George Rappleyea, manager of the Cumberland Coal and Iron Company, conceived a plan to test the new law by having his young friend, the twenty-four-year-old John T. Scopes, teach evolution in

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76 Marsden, *Religion and American Culture*, p. 123.

the classroom. Scopes complied and was indicted on May 25, 1925. A grand jury was assembled and a trial date was set.

Rappleyea’s instincts were indeed correct, for in the meantime, before the trial took place, Dayton had attracted national attention. The team of prosecuting attorneys now included William Jennings Bryan, the Great Commoner and three-time presidential candidate. Clarence Darrow, an agnostic who regarded Christianity as a “slave religion” was at the helm of the defense. In his efforts, Darrow was assisted by the American Civil Liberties Union, which took a special interest in the case and framed it in terms of the protection of First Amendment rights. The trial lasted eight days in the sweltering heat of Dayton. In the end Scopes was convicted of violating the Tennessee statute, on July 21, and was fined one hundred dollars. Bryan had won the legal battle but he lost the larger cultural war.

The trial itself was something of a fiasco and was covered by over two hundred reporters from Dayton to London. Complex intellectual issues emerged cartoonlike in some of the national papers, with the fundamentalists being characterized as buffoons. H. L. Mencken (1880-1956), for example, a reporter for the Baltimore Sun, derided, misquoted and vilified Bryan so that he appeared as an aging fool. This was neither an accurate nor an even-handed account of the events in Dayton, but rather an argument that proceeded largely by contempt. Revealing a few of his many caustic prejudices a year before the trial, Mencken remarked, “Christendom may be defined briefly as that part of the world in which, if any man stands up in public and solemnly swears that he is a Christian, all his auditors will laugh.”

Some small-town newspapers, such as a few in Kansas, for example, were far more accurate in their reporting than the national dailies, and the trial was not depicted as a “public humiliation” of Bryan. Instead this key leader of the Democratic Party (who was so popular that he had won the nomination of his party over incumbent Grover Cleveland in 1896) emerged as a controversial, though honorable man. Bryan was un-
doubtlessly one of the most popular progressives of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Combining a commitment to evangelical Christianity with “a willingness to cooperate with those who differed,” Bryan was a national leader who believed that his deeply held faith was not incompatible with the best that a Jeffersonian democracy had to offer. As a key progressive Bryan gave his support to four constitutional amendments that helped to bring some important reforms to the nation: “direct election of Senators, progressive taxation, Prohibition and women’s suffrage.” Having spent the better part of his career championing the cause of the underdog, Bryan criticized the excesses of capitalism, denounced the unfair practices of trusts and argued for greater government regulation of the banks.

So why then was Bryan opposed to the teaching of evolution in public schools? First, it was not because he was an anti-intellectual, as suggested in Richard Hofstadter’s account. Instead, Bryan believed that evolution in its emphasis on natural selection, viewed as a brute and raw struggle for existence (survival of the fittest), would suggest a political approach, offered even by some of the social Darwinists of his day, that left the poor and the downtrodden behind. Moreover, on an international scale, where the forces of realpolitik were in play, Bryan viewed World War I as “the European’s embracing of the theory of evolution, and applying it to societal struggle for dominance.” Second, Bryan thought that the conclusions some would draw from the teaching of evolution would readily undermine belief in God. That is, evolutionary doctrine would not remain simply within the limits of empirical science but would suggest philosophical views, a basic metaphysics, even if only implicitly. “I object to the Darwinian theory,” Bryan exclaimed, “because I fear we shall lose the consciousness of God’s presence in our daily life, if we must accept the theory that through all the ages no spiritual force has touched the life

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81 Marsden, _Fundamentalism and American Culture_, p. 133.
83 Ibid.
84 Ibid., p. 133.
of man and shaped the destiny of nations.\footnote{William Jennings Bryan, cited in Larson, Summer for the Gods, p. 39.}

About a year before taking on the Scopes case, Clarence Darrow, Bryan’s counterpart in the trial, had defended the cause of Nathan Freudenthal Leopold Jr. and Richard Albert Loeb in what was hailed as the trial of the century. The two young, intellectually gifted defendants, one of whom had dabbled in the philosophy of Nietzsche, decided that they would kidnap and kill an innocent teenager (Bobby Franks) simply for the fun of it; that is, to prove that they were genuine “supermen” (\textit{Übermenschen}) not subject to the moral scruples or pangs of conscience of ordinary people. In order to spare their lives Darrow surprised the media and had the two defendants plead guilty. This action resulted in the handing down of two sentences of life imprisonment. In the final hearing, which lasted a whole day, Darrow argued before the judge, and in a way that Bryan found to be deeply troubled, that these youths were the products of their ancestors, and could they really, after all, be held accountable for carrying out the German philosophy that they had learned at the university?

At Dayton, Darrow was adept at spinning the trial in a direction that not only obscured several of the issues at stake but one that also painted Bryan in a very unfavorable light. Upon leaving for Tennessee, Darrow opined, “Nothing will satisfy us but broad victory, a knockout which will have an everlasting precedent to prove that America is founded on liberty and not on narrow, mean, intolerable and brainless prejudice of soulless religio-maniacs.”\footnote{Clarence Darrow, cited in Larson, Summer for the Gods, p. 146.} In order to achieve the proper effect Darrow placed Bryan on the stand and grilled him in terms of the early chapters of Genesis, demonstrating that the head of the prosecution was no match for Darrow’s rhetorical powers in cross-examination. Bryan was after all a sincere and earnest layman and not a biblical scholar well acquainted with the intricacies of higher criticism. And then in a masterful stroke, “fearing an oratorical tour-de-force from Bryan,” Darrow offered no closing summation and thereby denied Bryan the same.\footnote{Tontonoz, “Scopes Trial Revisited,” p. 122.} In his closing speech, in which his own gifts and arguments would surely come to the forefront, Bryan had hoped to view the trial against the backdrop of the Leopold and
Loeb murder, Nietzsche’s philosophy, social Darwinism and the eugenics movement. But he never got the chance. Exhausted from the ordeal Bryan died a few days later—and some said as a broken man.

The myth making, however, did not stop with Darrow’s rhetorical skills. After the trial many cultural leaders expressed outright disdain toward fundamentalism. In 1931 Frederick Lewis Allen, for example, in his Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the Nineteen Twenties, portrayed the Scopes Trial as a defeat for old-time religion, as if this deeply held faith contained nothing of value: “The position of the Fundamentalists seemed almost hopeless. The tide of all rational thought in a rational age seemed to be running against them.” A couple of years after the trial, in 1927, Sinclair Lewis published his novel Elmer Gantry in which the principal character, a preacher, was depicted as a shady, troubled deceiver, ever eager for personal gain at the expense of others. By the time the book was made into a movie in 1960 (in which Burt Lancaster and Jean Simmons starred) the stereotype that ministers were basically dishonorable folk was already well worked in American popular culture.

The chief vehicle, however, for communicating the issues that were on stage at the Scopes Trial was none other than the 1955 play by Jerome Lawrence and Robert Edwin Lee titled Inherit the Wind. With a goal of combating the McCarthyism of the period, Lawrence and Lee distorted key elements of the historic trial in order to fit their contemporary purpose, and people of faith, once again, were portrayed as ignorant dupes. When the constitutional scholar Gerald Gunther attended the Broadway performance of the play, he remarked, “For the first time I walked out of a play in disgust... I ended up actually sympathizing with Bryan.” As recently as 1994 the National Center for History in Schools recommended that teachers use excerpts from Inherit the Wind to teach the views of Bryan and Darrow. And when Tony Randall revived the play on Broadway in 1996,

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9Larson, Summer of the Gods, p. 244.
the critics hailed it as “pertinent and timely.” The irony in all of this, of course, is that the critics of fundamentalism who use the Scopes Trial as their vehicle are supposed to be the critical thinkers, the “bright ones,” as it were, and yet they have apparently not even taken the trouble to get the facts straight, much less consider what were the actual (and in many instances reasonable) concerns of a fundamentalist like William Jennings Bryan.

**The Wesleyan and Pentecostal Difference**

Fundamentalism as a distinct movement was a response found principally among Baptists and Presbyterians to rapid cultural and intellectual change in early twentieth-century America. Militant opposition to modernism was not, after all, a Methodist theme. Though conservative Wesleyans, broadly understood, clearly did embrace the doctrinal concerns of their Reformed brothers and sisters, and were therefore orthodox, they were never as deeply pained by each cultural turn, each intellectual shift. One of the reasons there was not anything quite like the Briggs trial within the Wesleyan ranks (which would include Methodists, Holiness groups and Pentecostals) was that they were not so much epistemologically (emphasis on knowledge) as they were soteriologically (highlighting redemption) oriented. In other words, Wesleyans at the beginning of the twentieth century were not trying to articulate a cultural philosophy that would constitute the capstone of a Christian civilization in America. That is, they were preoccupied not so much with questions of knowledge or intellect, but with those of salvation. As noted earlier, such an emphasis clearly reflected their rich evangelical pietist heritage that went back to the father of Methodism, John Wesley himself.

Given their concern to underscore the importance of salvation in general and sanctification in particular, of a life marked by the graces of holy love, Wesleyans faced the possible decline and even death of their movement through the specter of ongoing enculturation, of being co-opted by broader American culture, especially in terms of the allure of

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95Ibid. p. 264.

96In terms of Darwinism and higher criticism, for instance, Vinson Synan points out that “the holiness and Pentecostal movement generally cite these currents of thought as the ‘false doctrines’ against which the movement protested” (Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987], p. 57).
wealth and upward mobility. This salient theme has been explored in the
past by Donald Dayton is his “embourgeoisement” hypothesis.97 Riley
Case explored this dilemma in terms of distinguishing establishment
Methodism with its “tall steeples, rented pews, [and] robed choirs” from
populist Methodism with its “log cabins, moral crusades, circuit preachers,
revivals [and] camp meetings.”98 But this consideration of nineteenth-
century Wesleyans should not be understood simply in terms of class
analysis in which economic factors receive the lion’s share of attention. For
interlaced with the prospect of embourgeoisement, to use Dayton’s term,
was the preoccupation with holiness, the doctrine of entire sanctification
in particular, which many holiness leaders believed was being shunted
aside in the quest for social respectability by “regency” factions within de-
nominations. In other words, as in Wesley’s own day, the fear was that
riches would empty out the life of the Spirit, wealth would replace re-
demption itself, such that what remained was simply the form of religion,
mahogany Methodism as Case put it, that lacked the vital power of the
Spirit of holiness.

One of the key champions of holiness in the nineteenth century was
Phoebe Palmer (1807-1874). Her Tuesday meetings, held at her home in
New York City, demonstrated a renewed interest in the doctrine of entire
sanctification and eventually led to the establishment of the National
Camp Meeting Association for the Promotion of Holiness. As holiness
proponents stressed the importance of a “second work” of grace, beyond
conversion, they were looked upon with disdain by some of the settled
clergy of the Methodist Episcopal Church. One Methodist bishop, for in-
stance, complained, “There has sprung up among us a party with holiness
as a watchword: they have holiness associations, holiness meetings, ho-
liness preachers, holiness evangelists, and holiness property.”99 Holiness
folk both “came out” and were “pushed out” of their larger denominations
such that by the end of the nineteenth century a virtual empire of denomi-
nations that made holiness their abiding interest was now in existence,

97Donald Dayton, “The Embourgeoisement of a Vision: Lament of a Radical Evangelical,” The Other
99Marty, Irony of It All, pp. 241-42.
among which included the Wesleyan Methodist Church (1843), the Free Methodist Church (1860), the Church of God Anderson (1881), the Church of the Nazarene, as well as some smaller black holiness communions such as the Zion Union Apostolic Church (1869).

Through the influence of Palmer, Asa Mahan (1799-1889) and others, many Wesleyans began to identify the doctrine of entire sanctification with the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The Pentecostals who were coalescing around the turn of the century found this teaching congenial. Indeed according to both Synan and Dayton, Pentecostalism is best understood as a child of the holiness movement. Thus, to the second work of grace was added “the ‘Pentecostal baptism’ with the evidence of speaking in tongues as a ‘third blessing,’ superimposed [upon] the other two.”

Pentecostals, like their holiness cousins, were never content merely with the form of religion but wanted nothing less than the active, real and sustaining power of the Holy Spirit in their daily lives.

Since many, though clearly not all, Pentecostals were Arminian in their theology, they too were unwilling to become too closely identified with fundamentalism. Indeed, the fundamentalist controversy that had so disrupted American Protestantism left the Pentecostals “largely untouched.” And since holiness and Pentecostal groups were major sources of black evangelicalism, African Americans rarely took on the militancy of fundamentalism. Moreover, the fundamentalists themselves rejected Pentecostals outright, viewing them as excessive, even fanatical. In fact, at the 1928 convention of the World’s Christian Fundamentals Association, the Pentecostals were “soundly condemned.” Consequently those interpreters who view Pentecostalism simply as fundamentalist Christianity with “a doctrine of Spirit baptism and gifts added on,” will be very disappointed.

Charles Fox Parham (1873-1929) was the first to teach that the biblical evidence for having received the baptism of the Holy Spirit was the gift of


\[101\] Ibid., p. 205.

\[102\] Ibid., p. 221.

\[103\] Ibid., p. 206.

tongues.\textsuperscript{105} He viewed this gift as part of the “latter rain” promised in the book of Joel. On December 31, 1900, Parham conducted a watch night service in Topeka, Kansas, at which Agnes N. Ozman began to speak in tongues after midnight, the first day of the new century. Spreading his Pentecostal teaching throughout the Midwest and into Texas, Parham established a Bible school in Houston in December 1905, where he caught the attention of William J. Seymour (1870-1922), a black hotel waiter and preacher. Due to the racism of the time, Seymour had to suffer the indignity of listening to Parham’s lectures in the hallway since blacks were not permitted to sit in the same classroom as whites. Having profited from these lectures, Seymour headed west to Los Angeles and began to preach his Pentecostal doctrine in a dilapidated building on Azusa Street in 1906.

Seymour’s anointed preaching helped to spark a revival at Azusa Street that lasted from 1906 to 1909. Tears flowed, confessions were made, and people spoke in tongues. One of the many uncanny things about this particular unction of the Spirit, beyond the freedom from the power of sin that it brought, was that the hard and fast lines of racial division were overcome in a unity that mirrored Pentecost. “In an age of Social Darwinism, Jim Crowism, and general white supremacy,” Synan observes, “the fact that [blacks] and whites worshipped together in virtual equality among the Pentecostals was a significant exception.”\textsuperscript{106} Even more poignantly he adds, “The color line was washed away in the blood.”\textsuperscript{107} Here then was a different kind of power, not that of coercion, influence or social respectability, but of a holy love that brought people together in deep humility and loving communion. Such an anointing took evangelicals back to the roots of their identity as they glorified the Spirit, the One who had tabernacled among them in transforming power.

The Social Gospel

In the early twentieth century and right on past World War I a number of evangelicals continued in their postmillennial ways, rejected fundamentalism and unflaggingly pursued the quest for a Christian America, despite

\textsuperscript{105}Synan, Holiness Pentecostal Movement, p. 99.
\textsuperscript{106}Ibid., p. 165.
\textsuperscript{107}Ibid., p. 109.
the significant influx of Jews. Moreover, believing that the “golden age of society was right around the corner,” seminary professors such as Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918), who had ministered in Hell’s Kitchen in New York City, articulated a theology known as the Social Gospel. Identifying in some important ways the American nation, as a liberal democratic society, with the kingdom of God (“the conception of God can be cleansed from the historic accretions of despotism and be democratized”), Rauschenbusch as well as Washington Gladden (1836-1918), pastor and leader of the progressive movement, created a theological climate in which the social creeds of the Protestant churches emerged. The Methodists, for example, published a social creed in 1908, and it in turn became the basis for several others. Rauschenbusch and Gladden saw clearly the disruptive nature of capitalism to the urban poor who were being left behind.

With an eye on the social dimension of the country, the theologians of this new movement developed the concept of social sin that pertained to the very structures of society. In other words, sin was not simply personal but corporate as well. Rauschenbusch, for example, in his *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, published in 1907, contended that social problems must take the lead. “If the Church has no live and bold thought on this dominant question of modern life,” he reasoned, “its teaching authority on all other questions will dwindle and be despised.” While many viewed the social definition of sin as helpful, critics of the new terminology quickly pointed out that one was effectively a sinner simply by participating in any modern industrial society, with the result that clear lines of responsibility were blurred. Moreover, upon closer examination the kingdom envisioned in the Social Gospel did not seem to be very different from “the bourgeois idealism of post-Civil War Victorian America and its Anglo-Saxon institutions.” This was an old Protestant habit, but it was dressed up in spanking new attire. To be sure, two of the more glaring blind spots of the Social Gospel were gender and race. Rauschenbusch, for example, resisted the Democratic Party plank of 1912 pertaining to women’s rights.

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“He had no use at all for suffrage,” Marty notes. Beyond this, important social justice issues that concerned blacks and others were virtually ignored. “Few pages of the Social Gospel are given over to creativity in respect to native Americans, Orientals, or blacks.”

Though the claim is sometimes made that the Social Gospel mirrored the reforming philosophy of the benevolent empire that had arisen in antebellum America, some important differences should be noted. First, many of the Social Gospel leaders engaged in an ongoing critique of personal salvation. This is something that Finney, for example, did not do. That is, the gifted evangelist did not play off one good news against the other; he viewed the gospel as one. But Rauschenbusch, for his part, repeatedly complained along the following lines: “The individualist gospel has taught us to see the sinfulness of every human heart. . . . But it has not given us an adequate understanding of the sinfulness of the social order.”

Second, Social Gospel pastors were often critical of revivals’ emphasis on instantaneous conversion. Indeed, these preachers, so socially minded, preferred to view salvation by and large as a synergistic process, of divine and human cooperation, in which a premium was placed on the efficaciousness of human activity as men and women served their neighbors in all manner of very tangible social action. Antebellum revivalists, on other hand, such as Orange Scott (1800-1847) and Luther Lee (1800-1889), while mindful of the necessity of human action in easing the plight of the poor, especially in terms of their abolitionist efforts, were perhaps even more aware of the work that God alone could do, that is, in both forgiving sins and renewing the human heart in liberating love.

**The Great Reversal**

What was once held together by nineteenth-century evangelical Protestants, that is, vibrant personal religion and extensive social action, broke up in the early twentieth century (sometime between 1900 and 1930) in what Timothy Smith in one of his lectures referred to as “the Great Reversal.” Clearly for many of the fundamentalists the Social Gospel was no

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113 Marty, *Irony of It All*, p. 292.
114 Ibid., p. 294.
For example, in addressing the World Christian Fundamentalist Association in Philadelphia (1919), Riley fulminated against what he called “social service Christianity” that left out the soul.\(^{117}\) And Aimee Semple McPherson (1890-1944), of Foursquare Gospel fame, who worked among the poor in Los Angeles, considered all other action than soul winning “basically a waste of time.”\(^{118}\)

The key issue in the breakup of American evangelicalism was not that leaders like Rauschenbusch and Gladden were endorsing social concern. Indeed, the Salvation Army did not miss a beat in its social witness from one century to the next. Rather Social Gospel leaders were perceived by their fundamentalist cousins as undertaking social action “in an exclusivist way.”\(^{119}\) Such a judgment set up an unfortunate dynamic among fundamentalist evangelicals, who eventually abandoned important parts of their own story (“everywhere there is revival there must also be reform”) by deprecating social issues. Moreover, the consequence of this shift was filled with a good deal of irony, for by 1930 the fundamentalists themselves had become as nearly exclusivist as their liberal counterparts. This time, however, the unswerving focus was not on social action but on a personal, individual gospel. The cause of the Great Reversal then was not simply “the fundamentalist reaction to the liberal Social Gospel after 1900.”\(^{120}\) It also included the prior action of the Social Gospelers themselves, who had neglected the very depths of personal religion. Even as late as 1966 at the World Congress on Evangelism, Billy Graham, who was by no means a fundamentalist, yet exclaimed: “The ‘new’ evangelism says soul winning is passé. It wants to apply Christian principles to the social order. Its proponents want to make the prodigal son comfortable, happy and prosperous in the far country without leading him back to the Father.”\(^{121}\)

**The Fundamentalist Dilemma**

The predicament of fundamentalists in the 1930s was clearly unenviable,
for they were alienated on two key levels: first, in terms of their rejection by cultural elites, who as a consequence of their upward mobility often preferred that American civilization contain few religious elements;¹²² and second with respect to liberal evangelicals who wanted to create as much distance as possible between themselves and their supposedly anti-intellectual, socially challenged fundamentalist neighbors. Stripped of their dominance in American culture, and having lost any leadership role in the mainline denominations, fundamentalists retreated into an enclave of institutions such as Bible colleges, separatist churches and mission boards that kept their premillennial vision alive.

Many fundamentalists, however, chaffed under this policy of separatism and retreat simply because the quest for a Christian America and the social power and influence it offered had been such an important part of the their own story, especially in terms of the revivalism that played out in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. That is, on the one hand, fundamentalists were repulsed by the direction of the country; on the other hand, they wanted to steer the ship, so to speak, thinking that their own moral and spiritual values were the best for the nation. Marsden repeatedly underscored this paradoxical tendency in his own work (“to indentify sometimes with the ‘establishment’ and sometimes with the ‘outsiders’”) and argued that fundamentalists “experienced profound ambivalence toward the surrounding culture.”¹²³

As the country entered an economic depression after the great stock market crash of 1929, many of the churches were depressed as well. As Carpenter notes, “[The] fundamentalists yearned for another Great Awakening that would revive the church’s integrity and power, restore the culture’s religious character, and bring back national prosperity.”¹²⁴ But it was not to be. And as they awoke one morning in the middle of the 1930s some fundamentalists began to realize that perhaps the goal of a Christian America was over.¹²⁵ They had not, after all, witnessed the

¹²²Nathan O. Hatch points out that “Studies show that those most ready to jettison traditional religious constraints are precisely those whose cultural authority is rising” (Nathan O. Hatch, The Democratization of American Christianity [New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989], p. 218).
¹²³Marsden, Fundamentalism and American Culture, pp. 6, viii.
¹²⁴Carpenter, Revive Us Again, p. 111.
¹²⁵Robert Handy writes, “Since 1935, the debate over the relation of church and state has often been
arrival of the New Israel as they had hoped. Instead, they found themselves exiled to a land that had never been in their vision—Babylon, a very American Babylon.

clouded by lack of clear recognition that the Protestant era of American history has indeed come to an end” (Robert T. Handy, A Christian America, Protestant Hopes and Historical Realities [New York: Oxford University Press, 1971], p. 214).