

Fundamentalists, Evangelicals and Billy Graham

Gordon H. Clark, Reprinted from the *Reformed Presbyterian Advocate*

AT THE BEGINNING of this century when destructive criticism and modernistic theology were gaining an even firmer footing in the seminaries and the churches, there was published (1910-1912) a set of booklets entitled *The Fundamentals*. Among the authors were James Orr, B. B. Warfield, R. A. Torrey, A. T. Pierson, W. J. Erdman, James M. Gray, Wm. G. Moorehead, Robert E. Speer, George L. Robinson, Joseph D. Wilson, and W. H. Griffith Thomas. These were the original fundamentalists. Some of them were scholars of highest standing; others were less well known. Some of them, too, by their later actions, seemed to repent of their fundamentalism; but at the time they united to defend the Inspiration of the Bible, the Virgin Birth, the Deity, the Atonement, and the bodily Resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Personality of the Holy Spirit, and the certainty of the Judgement to come.

As these men passed from the scene or compromised with modernism, there were fewer men of intellectual qualifications to take their places. Fundamentalism became a movement whose flaws lent themselves to caricature. There is a ludicrous distance between James Orr and Aimee Semple McPherson. Her spectacularism and peculiar conduct were not conducive to esteem. Less reprehensible, indeed entirely understandable, was the tendency of the movement to concentrate on the fundamentals. Since the very foundations of Christianity were being denied, it was these doctrines that needed defense. That other doctrines should have been neglected in the process was unfortunate, even though natural. The result was that for the most part these people adopted a truly Biblical but truncated and abbreviated creed. Some of their preaching, however, was not so Biblical. With strong

insistence on the Atonement and the Resurrection, the relation between regeneration and faith was reversed, assurance, security, or perseverance was questioned, dispensationalism was allowed to break the unity of the covenant, election and effectual calling were either denied or ignored, and the hill billy music and jazz displaced reverent hymnology.

Nevertheless, with all their faults, even the later fundamentalists stood like Elijah against the prophets of Baal. They thought they stood alone, and it was they, not the silent seven thousand, who were accused of troubling Israel, of disturbing the peace of the church, of being schismatics. But let us always remember who it was that made these accusations.

With the coming of World War II the opinion grew that there was needed something better than the fundamentalist program. A new movement was initiated that adopted the name evangelical. The most prominent aspect of this movement is the National Association of Evangelicals. More recently the bi-monthly periodical, *Christianity Today*, mailed to 160,000 ministers and church workers, has added itself to the evangelical movement. The dominating motives seem to have been the ineffectiveness, the crudity, the oft-asserted unloveliness of fundamentalism, rather than a desire for a fuller presentation of the message of the Scriptures. The creed of the N.A.E., consisting of seven short articles, is as brief and inadequate as the usual fundamentalist statements. In fact, it can hardly be called evangelical at all, for a Roman Catholic would find little in it that he could not accept. An associated group, the World Evangelical Fellowship, has a slightly different creed. One of its phrases is 'salvation by faith apart from works.' This surely is not Romish, but neither

is it evangelical; for while the Bible definitely teaches justification by faith alone, it also teaches that sanctification, an essential part of salvation, involves a life of good works. See Romans 6.

At the same time our judgement of these groups should not be entirely negative. The N.A.E. is doing a great work for the right of evangelicals to preach the gospel by radio, for the defeat of Romish purposes, for the stimulation of the Sunday Schools, for Christian schools, for world relief, and for many worthy and needy causes. These men are doing the Lord's work and deserve our prayers and support.

Christianity Today is also doing a good work, but it is much less evangelical. Its Declaration of Principles (Oct. 14, 1957) avoids accepting the infallibility of Scripture and contents itself with a vague neo-orthodox language to the effect that "the Bible is the authoritative disclosure of God's word." There is no affirmation of the Virgin Birth, the Atonement or the Resurrection. Virtually everything that makes Christianity distinctive is either blurred or omitted. Nothing much but the name of Jesus Christ remains. Let it be gratefully acknowledged that *Christianity Today* has published articles defending the Deity of Christ, the Virgin Birth, and the Resurrection. It is well edited. Only, it seems that its owners and directors are less interested in evangelical doctrines than its editors are.

Into this present complicated situation of decadent fundamentalism, energetic but ambiguous 'evangelicalism,' dominant neo-orthodoxy, and the remains of modernistic liberalism, comes the phenomenal Billy Graham. The liberals are naturally disgusted with him. The neo-orthodox are ready to make some alliance with him. The fundamentalists are dismayed at his acceptance of, indeed his seeking for, the

sponsorship of unbelievers; and they wonder why he does not warn his converts away from unbelieving churches. The evangelicals are his enthusiastic supporters.

Such a prominent figure is sure to draw criticism both just and unjust. He has been accused of referring his Roman Catholic converts to Romish priests. This charge could be thought plausible in view of his efforts to secure the support of as many churches as possible and his refusal to direct his converts only to churches that are true to the Bible. But I have a signed letter (not by Billy Graham) which says that a fundamentalist* minister disguised himself as a priest and somehow secured cards that were incorrectly filled out and mistakenly directed to a priest. My letter states, "It is untrue that cards are referred to Roman Catholic priests and Jewish rabbis. I have this directly from Dr. Graham himself." If, now, cards were in fact obtained under false pretense, such conduct is utterly reprehensible and without any excuse whatever. We may perhaps disapprove of seeking modernist and neo-orthodox support and of referring converts to modernistic churches, but simple honesty requires us to expose evil rumors that have been evilly invented and circulated.

Such unwarranted attacks on this exceptional evangelist have produced another unfortunate result. By way of reaction they have driven Dr. Graham's evangelical supporters to absurd and unchristian defenses. It is now being said that Dr. Graham's acceptance of modernist and neo-orthodox sponsorship is justified Biblically by the fact that the Apostle accepted the sponsorship of the Stoics and Epicureans on Mars Hill. This argument, believe it or not, has actually appeared in print.

Now, though it seems unnecessary to answer such a silly contention, perhaps it ought to be pointed out, especially since some "evangelicals" show scant knowledge of what *evangelical* means, that Paul neither sought nor accepted pagan sponsorship. The Epicureans and Stoics, who "spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing," said to

*This whole rumor of a disguised fundamentalist minister has been called into serious question. We have not yet been able to ascertain if it is true or not.—Ed.

themselves, "What will this babblers say? . . . And they took him and brought him unto Areopagus saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is?" These philosophers were curious; they wanted to find out what Paul's new doctrine was; so, they took Paul from the market place and brought him to the quieter Areopagus where they could listen to him in more comfort. They assuredly did not form a committee to invite him to Athens, nor did they sit on the platform and give approval to Paul's appeals to the Athenian populace. They simply asked Paul to speak to them. This is not sponsorship. And Paul did not refer his converts to the Stoic and Epicurean churches.

Actively to seek modernistic sponsorship for the purpose of having all the churches present a united front seems to be in accord with the principle, Let us do evil that good may come. Dependence on such support is independence and distrust of the power of the Holy Spirit.

In this disturbed and confused age, when the most prominent defenders of the gospel dilute and even distort it, there is an available rule for judgment and action. It is by no means popular, but it has God's approval. When Paul said farewell to the Ephesians on his way to Jerusalem, he said, "I am pure from the blood of all men, for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:26-27).

All of the counsel of God—not just half a dozen fundamentals. We must preach not only the Virgin Birth, the

Atonement, and the Resurrection; but we must also preach Justification by faith. It is only by preaching Justification by faith alone that we deserve the name evangelical. Through faith a righteousness from God is imputed to us on the basis of which God justifies us. Christ's propitiation enables his Father to be both just and the justifier of those who have faith in Jesus. Without this doctrine we are not evangelicals, nor are we pure from the blood of all men.

Yet even this is not enough. God requires us to preach all his revelation. A creed of six articles is too short, and a creed of twelve articles is also too short. To be faithful to God's commands we cannot be content with less than a full fledged Calvinism. Evangelicalism is good as far as it goes. But Calvinism goes further and is better. Of all the Protestant creeds the Westminster Confession is the fullest and most detailed. Of course it does not contain all that God has revealed in Scripture, but it contains and systematizes more than any other creed. We might wish to add to it, were we properly qualified to do so, but we cannot wish to subtract from it.

Let us then in this adulterous and sinful generation choose our path and policies in the light of the full gospel. We will not calumniate sincere Christians whose faith is unfortunately truncated. We will not oppose their good efforts; we will not rejoice over any of their failings in forgetfulness of our own. But we must insist on loyalty to all the revealed will of God.

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