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## Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism (Book Review)

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describes fundamentalist attitudes toward revelation. Under the guise of loyalty to Scripture, the fundamentalist elevates the vehicle of revelation over the gospel. Proving the Bible inerrant becomes more important than the message of reconciliation within it (50).

Pinnock suggests that evangelicalism is not a static, doctrinaire tradition like fundamentalism or modernism. While it affirms the essentials of the Christian tradition, evangelicalism is also open to cultural engagement. The latter is not as innocuous as it first appears. Pinnock's understanding of cultural openness entails a certain willingness to redefine the Christian message in order to gain entry into modern culture. He self-consciously wants to theologize from a "bipolar" perspective, one which is oriented toward both content and context, thus refusing to repeat the fundamentalist and modernist mistake of absolutizing one of the poles. Obviously, the agenda here is one of locating an irreducible core within the Christian message which cannot be redefined in the attempt to be relevant to modern culture. Pinnock locates that core in the narrative story of redemption, a story which is at one and the same time the *content* of the Christian message and the *context* within which people are confronted with the claims of Jesus Christ (153-180).

This proposal is both exciting and frightening, as Pinnock himself admits (68). The heart of the Christian story is that God in his grace has *objectively* broken into history and culture (158-160). Unfortunately, Pinnock is willing to let fall by the wayside whatever he does not see as essential to the gospel story. He wants to hold onto the notion that the Bible is a legitimate witness to the events of the story, while admitting that there are real world, historical referents for the biblical events, he is willing to allow the classical confession of the Bible's status as *revelation* to fall into disrepair.

*Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism*, by George Marsden (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans) 1987. 311 pages, hardback, \$19.95. Reviewed by Michael Williams, Assistant Professor of Theology.

How do you follow up on a real blockbuster? Well, these days, you produce a sequel. Marsden's *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (1980) certainly qualifies as a mega-hit of historical scholarship. His revisionist look at fundamentalism declared much of the previous scholarship in the area obsolete, and fundamentalist themes became "hot topics" for both historians and theologians almost overnight. Enter *Reforming Fundamentalism*, or as Marsden himself refers to it in the preface: *Son of Fundamentalism*. This work may not be quite as important, but it is every bit as good, every bit as satisfying.

The same holds for his understanding of creation. In fact, creation does not function as a constituent of Pinnock's *narrative evangelicalism* at all. The creation story of Genesis is taken as little more than myth or a "playful legend" (161). The Christian message is one of redemption. Whatever does not directly serve that message is of negligible importance.

The ghost of Immanuel Kant appears on almost every page here. Pinnock's proposal for an evangelical narrative theology is no more than a *proposal* (151). His evangelical can no longer be as certain about truth as his fundamentalist forbearers were. The epistemological and confessional tentativeness and modesty necessitated by modernity make all theological assertions little more than proposals, personal or communal positions which have no direct bearing or reference to the world external to the tradition. Jesus Christ died to effect redemption. That's the bare-bones message. The realities of modern pluralism make all interpretations of that historical reality equally valid. The revelation is the Christ-event, not the biblical telling of the story.

Pinnock is fully aware that his minimalist reduction of revelation to narrative event will raise the question of whether his evangelicalism is not in fact a dangerous movement toward classical liberalism. He does not believe, however, that evangelical moderation of the Christian message will result in a new wave of liberalism. As Pinnock sees it, the liberal is driven by modernity rather than the gospel (*xi*, 68). His proposal for the future of evangelicalism is one which does move away from finding the rule of faith in an abstract authority (Bible), and toward announcing of the good news in Jesus Christ (history). Whether that is so different from the liberal agenda of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, I am not sure.

What makes this such a worthy sequel is that the story of Fuller Seminary is in microcosm the story of evangelicalism from the late 1940s on. All the fundamentalist and evangelical players are here: Charles Fuller, Carl F. H. Henry, Harold Ockenga, Billy Graham, Cornelius Van Til, the National Association of Evangelicals, Youth for Christ, George Ladd, Wheaton College, Calvin College, Dallas Seminary, Moody Bible Institute, E.J. Carnell, Francis Schaeffer, James Daane.

As Marsden tells the story, Fuller was intended as something of a Princeton out of the ashes, a "New

School," west coast, broadly evangelical Princeton (24, 119). Another, perhaps more apropos analogy drawn by Marsden, is that Fuller was thought of by its founder, Charles Fuller, and its first president, Harold Ockenga, as something of a new City Upon a Hill, a beacon for Christian civilization (62-67). But this city was built upon a fault line, "a fine ideological fissure that underlay the attempted fusion of the more malleable positive emphases of the new Reformist evangelicalism and the hard rock of stricter fundamentalism" (147).

From the very beginning, Fuller was an institution with a mission. The vision was nothing less than the reformation of an anti-intellectualistic, belligerent fundamentalism. Consciously rejecting fundamentalism's retreat from American life into subcultural enclaves of doctrinal purity, Fuller sought to forge a new cultural role for evangelicalism. That role was understood, at least by Ockenga and Carl F.H. Henry, as reformatory or transformational. While the school began with a premillennialism plank in its statement of faith, Fuller's vision did not include premillennialism's usual attendant cultural pessimism and restriction of the kingdom of God to a purely futuristic or millenarian state of affairs. In fact, the premillennialist plank was later dropped under Carnell's presidency in the mid-50s. Much of this was due to the influence of Abraham Kuyper on some of the early faculty members (78-9).

The early Fuller reflected the "broad coalition of antimodernists" that made up that strange confessional thing which came to be known as "fundamentalism" in the 20s and 30s. Fuller was part Princeton-Reformed, part separatist Baptist, part pietistic revivalist, and part dispensationalist millenarian. These forces would seek to pull the fledgling seminary in often contradictory and competing directions. The issues of separatism and doctrinal purity proved to be so vexing to Carnell that he wrote an interoffice memo in 1957 proclaiming: "I have no intention of giving a week of my time to a conference where water-soaked saints gather to check on the heresy of the speaker"

(172). Issues like premillennialism, separatism, and inerrancy were some of the very things that gave fundamentalism its particular character as an American confessional movement, and they were the very things that Fuller attempted to divorce itself from. The debates in these areas threatened to sink the Fuller ship more than once.

G.K. Chesterton once said that "people have fallen into the foolish habit of speaking of orthodoxy as something heavy, humdrum, and safe. There was never anything so perilous or so exciting as orthodoxy." The Fuller story is the drama of American evangelicalism trying to right itself after the arduous and bloody campaign against the secularist forces of modernity. Evangelicalism not only lost the battles of the 20s and 30s to the modernist foe, but almost lost itself in the process. The cultural and theological gulf between Jonathan and Charles Blanchard, father and son, both presidents of Wheaton College (see *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 27-32), evidence the almost self-destructive speed with which the nineteenth century evangelical consensus broke down in the face of the threat of modernism and liberal theology, and the speed with which evangelicalism devolved into an anti-intellectualistic, mean-spirited, and culturally pessimistic fundamentalism.

The Fuller story is a noble one, perhaps a tale that is even ennobling, for it is not one of escape or flight from modern culture. It is not one of crass accommodation or acquiescence. Nor is it merely one of manning the barricades and shoring up the walls of an archaic and embattled Christian culture. There were certainly enough examples of all of these responses to the changing cultural and theological climate of the early twentieth century. No, Fuller sought to retrieve, to revive, to fix evangelicalism. However imperfect the people were, however jaded some of their motives, a story of reformation is also always worth telling. And in Marsden's most capable hands, it's a story told well.