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Fundamentalism in the CRC: A Critique*

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I can imagine someone who knows what "CRC" refers to, objecting rather spontaneously to this title. "Why pay so much attention to fundamentalism? Why all this critique on fundamentalism? Haven't you heard? Our biggest problem is liberalism, not fundamentalism." So the question arises, why a critique on fundamentalism rather than liberalism? By way of introduction let me try to respond to this question.

First of all, I might simply duck the issue by saying I was asked to discuss this topic. So your quarrel is with someone else. But that is really a cheap shot. After all, I am responsible for ac-

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cepting the invitation and for what I have to say. So secondly, let me state the case more historically. Have we, perhaps, been so busy over the years trying to cover the left flank that, almost undetected along the right flank, fundamentalism has had an opportunity to creep in almost unawares? Let me leave this as a question for the moment.

More profoundly, I believe a critique of fundamentalism is at the same time also a critique of liberalism. For, at bottom, in terms of their fundamental commitments, the two are bedfellows, strange bedfellows perhaps, but bedfellows nevertheless. Basically, liberalism and fundamentalism both share a common worldview, arising out of the enlightenment. Kuyper never tired of saying that both conservatism and liberalism have a common origin. Both of them appeal to a dualistic sacred/secular worldview. Liberals take that

common commitment and go left with it; fundamentalists take that same commitment and go right with it. Both are, of course, mistaken. For life is not partly secular and partly sacred. Life is 100 percent sacred in the sense that it is always lived *coram Deo*. At the same time, it is also 100 percent secular in the sense that there is no other place to live but within the *seculum* of this world. From this point of view, therefore, a critique on fundamentalism is also a critique on liberalism.

Finally, in response to the question, "Why a critique on fundamentalism rather than liberalism?" one should recognize that to deal with fundamentalism in the short run, is to deal with liberalism in the long run. My line of reasoning goes something like this. It is generally assumed among most evangelicals that Bible-believing Christians today face basically two choices: fundamentalism on the one hand and liberalism on the other. There is no other choice. In the measure that people live out of this assumption, when fundamentalism goes sour, as eventually it must and will, then all that is left is liberalism. So, to be alert to fundamentalism in the short run is, in the long run, to be warned also of the dangers of liberalism. Of course, once again, the assumption is wrong—namely, that fundamentalism and liberalism are the only choices that we face. There is a third way. There is a genuine alternative, a holistic worldview developed within the Reformed tradition which stands as a repudiation of both liberalism and fundamentalism. It is holistic in the sense that creation, fall, redemption, and the eschaton are all seen as totalistic, holistic realities.

Clarifying the use of CRC in the title, let me say that by CRC I mean the Christian Reformed community—life in the CRC centered in the institutional church, but not limited to it. To appeal to a bit of Kuyperian phraseology, it is not only the church as institute, but also the church as organism that I have in mind. The focus then is on our part of the body of Jesus Christ, not only as we worship together on Sunday but also as we live our lives through the week. In thus defining CRC, I am appealing to the basic New Testament concept of *ecclesia*. It involves

us as people of God not only in our congregational, classical, and synodical structures, but also in the various agencies which arise out of our communities. This includes home life, Christian schools, our colleges, seminaries, institutes of higher learning, missions, evangelism, other kingdom agencies such as APJ, our publications, Christian Farmers Association, and so on. That is what I have in mind when talking about the CRC.

Historical-Theological Background

With these preliminary comments, what shall we say about fundamentalism in the CRC? My major thesis is this: American fundamentalism and an Americanized CRC were born together and grew up side by side on a roughly parallel course. Something like Jacob and Esau, fundamentalism and an Americanized CRC appeared upon the scene almost simultaneously during the years immediately preceding World War I. Let me offer just two bits of evidence. It was in 1909 that the *Scofield Bible* was first published, making a big impact on the early rise and spectacular development of fundamentalism. Shortly thereafter, in 1914, the CRC published its first English version of the *Psalter*. We then began singing in the English language. Thus both arose early in this century, fundamentalism as a movement and the CRC as a consolidating church body. From that point onward, especially since the time of World War I, they have developed side by side across the unfolding decades. Along the way there have been frequent points of contact and intersection between the CRC and fundamentalism. But these interacting influences have gone largely in one direction. Fundamentalism has had a greater impact on us than we have had upon it.

The Emergence of Fundamentalism

Let us look at some of the factors in the emergence of fundamentalism. First of all, and perhaps basic to all the rest, is fundamentalism's strong reaction to the prevailing liberalism of the 19th century. It was Karl Barth who said, "The whole of the 19th

century belongs without dispute to Schleiermacher, and he has no equal." Schleiermacher is the father of modern liberalism. It was against the widespread influence of Schleiermacher and modern liberal theology that fundamentalism arose early in the century as a strong reactionary movement.

A second factor is the Keswick holiness conferences, which were launched in England and then carried across the Atlantic to our shores. These Keswick conferences placed strong emphasis on holiness, piety, and perfectionism within fundamentalist Christianity.

Thirdly, as mentioned, there was the publication of the *Scofield Bible*, which swept across the country like a prairie fire in those early decades, popularizing dispensational theology with its segmented view of scripture not only, but of all history as well, dividing it into seven distinct eras.

To mention one more factor, we can account for the early spectacular rise of fundamentalism by the publication and distribution of that series of booklets known as *The Fundamentals* between the years 1910 and 1915. It reaffirmed the historic Christian faith, especially against the erosions of the historical critical method of bible interpretation within modern liberalism. Thus, fundamentalism enjoyed a spectacular rise to prominence as a widespread, highly diffused, semi-organized movement. It cut across many denominational lines, rallying evangelical Christians, especially from the Baptist and Presbyterian traditions. By 1920 it had earned for itself the official title of fundamentalism as a deliberate and self-conscious alternative to the prevailing liberalism of the day.

Concurrent Trends in the CRC

Meanwhile, during this same time span, the CRC was also becoming consolidated as an American Reformed community, putting down its roots in its new homeland. These roots, of course, go back to the Secession movement of the mid-19th century. But these Dutch Reformed communities remained largely small and struggling clusters of Christians scattered across the face of the continent throughout the

second half of the 19th century. There was nothing very strong and stable about them. Around the turn of the century this situation changed. These communities received an enormous boost that really put them on their feet by a second large-scale wave of immigrations between 1890 and 1914, the years immediately preceding World War I. This second wave of settlers were largely Kuyperian Calvinists. They took with them the ideas of the Doleantie.

Then came World War I. The national priorities of the great war led to what seems to have been a temporary slow-down in the development of both American fundamentalism and the Americanizing CRC. For the CRC, World War I meant decisively the beginning of the end of its era of isolation. In the face of American inability to distinguish between Dutch and Deutsch, the CRC community had to prove its loyalty by adapting themselves to the English language and the American way of life. By the close of the war, the young men who had been conscripted into military service came back with stories about a world beyond the colony which broadened the horizon of many in our communities.

Interesting in this connection is one of the most intriguing books I have ever read. It is the biography of Herman Hoeksema, *Therefore Have I Spoken*, written by his daughter-in-law. In that book the story is told of a public debate in Holland, Michigan, where Herman Hoeksema was serving the Fourteenth Street CRC. He became embroiled in an open controversy with a local pastor of the Reformed Church concerning the propriety of unfurling an American flag in the church sanctuary. Hoeksema opposed that practice: "The church is the church," he said, "and the state is the state." On that account he was charged with being anti-American and unpatriotic. Later during those years, a civic rally was organized in the Holland armory, and Herman Hoeksema was asked to speak. Remembering his attitude toward flying the flag in church, a plain podium was set up, with no bunting or decorations. Getting up to speak, Hoeksema inquired, "Where is the flag? Where is the red, white and blue? I will not speak until you bring out the

colors!" Quickly they complied. (Kuyper was not the sole advocate of sphere sovereignty.) The charge of anti-Americanism was leveled not only against Hoeksema but against many CRC communities as well, forcing them into an Americanizing pattern.

Similar incidents took place in other settings as part of the struggle—the birth pangs, if you will—of a CRC community emerging upon the American scene and taking its first very uncertain steps into that threatening new world of experiences.

Sometime ago I was shown the minutes of the First CRC in Grand Haven going back to 1911. At a congregational meeting called to discuss

fessionals, perpetuating the tradition of the Secession; secondly, there were the Kuyperians, the more recent immigrants, bringing with them the world-and-life-view of Kuyper and the Doleantie; thirdly, there was a new force appearing upon the scene, the American Calvinists. These Americanizers wanted to remain Reformed, but their major concern was to become relevant to the American scene and to adapt the Reformed tradition to the new world. It is Zwaanstra's argument that by 1918 this third new wing had emerged as the dominant movement within the CRC. The CRC was being plunged into the American melting pot. With isolation breaking

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the question of transition to the English language, the clerk of the consistory inscribed in the minutes the following words: "Ach Heer, vanavond is de vijand in ons midden gekomen," which translated reads: "Oh, Lord, this evening the enemy has entered our ranks"—meaning worship in English.

Clearly the CRC was entering upon that rocky road called the Americanization Process. In his dissertation, *Reformed Thought and Life in North America—1890 to 1914* (1973), Henry Zwaanstra distinguishes around the turn of the century three wings within the CRC. (It appears that we have never been as homogeneous as some of us suppose.) First, there were the Con-

down, the CRC was running into its first sustained exposure to the American religious scene.

A case could be made that the CRC was not well prepared for such confrontation. It took this giant step outward precisely at that fateful juncture in American history when the gathering storm of conflict between liberalism and fundamentalism was coming to a head. The great war was behind us. Full attention was now focused anew upon that smoldering controversy, which was now becoming a raging conflagration between the liberals and the fundamentalists. On which side were we to cast our lot? Neither position comported very well

with the Reformed faith. Neutrality seemed hardly thinkable.

Thus the CRC was cast into an identity crisis, in which its unity was sorely tested. That crisis took its early and heavy toll. During the war and the years immediately following, three cases appeared before the Synod of the church for adjudication, namely, in 1918, 1922, and 1924. Taking them in reverse order, in 1924 the prevailing doctrine of common grace seemed to many of our people to be an accommodation to liberal attitudes toward American culture. This case eventually led to the formation of the Protestant Reformed Churches. In 1922 the views of Professor Janssen on biblical interpretation were viewed by many as an unacceptable accommodation to liberal ideas on higher criticism. This case led to the dismissal of the professor. In 1918, the views of Rev. Harry Bultema of the First CRC, Muskegon, Michigan, who wrote a book called *Maranatha*, were brought before the tribunal of the church and judged to be contrary to Scripture and the creeds. He was accommodating himself, it was argued, to the fundamentalist wing of American Christianity by accepting their dispensationalist view of Scripture and history. This case ended in a small exodus of CRC people to form the Berean Churches of Western Michigan. All three cases, I think, can be viewed as instances of accommodation, either to the left or to the right, either toward liberalism or fundamentalism, and all in rapid succession.

Bultema's case, it seems to me, represents the first major official intrusion of fundamentalist theology into the ranks of the CRC membership. The synodical action, taken all too hastily, did not end the matter. We lost the Bereans. But millennialism continued to live on in the church. It was even tolerated officially as long as its advocates avoided agitation. Later the CRC faced the views of Professor Diedrich Kromminga. His millennialist theology was left unresolved, due to the untimely death of the professor. When men die, it seems, their cases die with them. Moreover, it seems that there had always been a fundamentalist-like streak of thinking within the Secessionist side of the

North American Reformed tradition.

Points of Contact

Taking all this into account, in the 1920s, when the CRC was forced to choose between fundamentalism and liberalism, it generally came down on the side of the fundamentalists. The other route was simply too thoroughly secular and too much at odds with historic Christianity. Generally, therefore, the CRC found itself leaning uneasily toward the side of the fundamentalists, though always with misgivings. As someone coming out of that era said, "Fundamentalists are half-baked Christians, very warm on the outside, but still soggy on the inside." Nevertheless, from 1943 to 1951, we did affiliate with many of them through our membership with the National Association of Evangelicals. We later parted company with them because of what we saw as a defective ecclesiology. Over the years, therefore, through their literature, their evangelical campaigns, their Bible conferences, their radio broadcasts, their television extravaganzas, and more recently, through the Moral Majority movement, fundamentalism has influenced the CRC much more than we have been able to influence it.

It must be added, however, that over the years, especially during the past three or four decades, large scale changes have taken place among the fundamentalists. One can say that fundamentalists belong to that broader movement known as evangelical Christianity. At the same time it must also be said that not all evangelicals are fundamentalists, a distinction often lost in the media. One of the results is the anomaly that toward the end of his life even Karl Barth was called a fundamentalist. This is perhaps understandable when judged in contrast to the demythologizing theology of Rudolph Bultmann. We have witnessed this changing face of American fundamentalism especially since the middle of this century. One significant turning-point was 1947 when Carl Henry published his monumental little book, *The Uneasy Conscience of American Fundamentalism*. This was followed in the 1950s by,

the emergence of the magazine, *Christianity Today*, and the growing acceptability of the Billy Graham evangelistic campaigns. Such events during the past three decades have led to various intrusions of fundamentalist thought and life into CRC circles.

In very recent times (the late 70s and the 80s), we have witnessed the resurgence of a kind of old-fashioned fundamentalism through television celebrities such as Jerry Falwell, Jimmy Swaggart, Pat Robertson, Jim Baker, Oral Roberts, and the rest. This has led to a repopularizing of many of the original ideas of fundamentalism after they had been partially eclipsed by the ideas of the neo-evangelists.

Moreover, as American society becomes increasingly secular, we can expect that fundamentalism will assert itself ever more strongly, for fundamentalism is, at bottom, a reaction to secular liberalism. The more blatant the liberalism, the more forthright is the fundamentalist response. They are reactions to each other. But reactions, while understandable, very seldom offer abiding answers to real issues.

Within the evangelical world, fundamentalism continues to be a dubious reality, a weasely word, slippery, and hard to define clearly. In the past we thought we knew. At so-called learned theological conferences we would look around: if those present smoked pipes, they were Barthians; if cigars, they were Calvinists; if cigarettes, they were liberals; and if they did none of the above, they were fundamentalists. It's not quite that easy now.

The complexity of the situation is further reflected in the fact that historians tell us that there are at least 14 distinct groups of evangelicals in the United States, many of whom qualify as fundamentalists. Perhaps that is not surprising when we recognize that fundamentalism represents the convergence of many Christian traditions coming from numerous countries and various churches, ethnic groups, and confessional backgrounds. Together they form part of that religious melting pot known as American fundamentalism. In view of this conglomerate, let me try very briefly to define in what sense we are con-

sidering fundamentalism in its relationship to the CRC communities.

Defining Fundamentalism

It is possible to distinguish four meanings of fundamentalism. First of all, fundamentalists are those who identify themselves with the publications known as *The Fundamentals*. Many of these booklets were written by prominent Presbyterian and Reformed scholars. Most CRC people had little trouble identifying with these publications. In fact, they felt very much at home with them, and appealed to them rather consistently. In this sense, therefore, namely, in relating positively to *The Fundamentals*, most CRC people were not ashamed to be known as fundamentalists.

Secondly, fundamentalists are those who shared the concern of other evangelical Christians for the defense of the fundamental teachings of Scripture against the higher criticism launched by liberals. The defense of fundamental, orthodox doctrines centered mainly on the inspiration and authority of Scripture, the deity of Christ and with it the doctrine of the trinity, the virgin birth based upon the reliability of the gospel narratives, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the substitutionary atonement, and the reality of miracles. Fundamentalism arose to the defense of the so-called supernatural over the naturalistic tendencies of liberalism. But this very distinction between natural and supernatural is reminiscent not only of the medieval tradition, but also of its modern, updated, restatement in Kantian philosophy. Thus, once again, it is evident that both liberalism and fundamentalism were buying into a common worldview, one which Francis Schaeffer calls a split-level, upstairs-downstairs view of reality. As the liberals looked for ways of living downstairs, the fundamentalists insisted that to be truly Christian one had to move the furniture upstairs and live there. In siding with fundamentalists on such issues, the CRC often earned the very dubious distinction of being classified with them in terms of this very faulty worldview.

Thirdly, fundamentalists are those who ad-

vocate a certain kind of Christian "ethos." They stood for strict standards of moral conduct. Often they emphasized a negative stand on current lifestyle issues, such as strong prohibitions on the use of alcoholic beverages, smoking, card playing, dancing, and theatre attendance. Meanwhile, there stood the CRC, looking on, betraying some of the same ethical, moral attitudes as evidenced by synodical decisions on worldly amusements taken precisely during this era, 1928. The question may be raised: did this fundamentalist ethos intrude itself upon the CRC community as an unhealthy influence upon us?

In the fourth place, in its fullest meaning fundamentalism must be understood as a distinctive world-and-life-view. As such it brings with it a unique Biblical hermeneutic secured by a doctrine of Biblical infallibility which insists upon the concept of inerrancy. It also emphasized a very literalistic understanding of creation, publicly highlighted in the so-called "Monkey Trial" of 1926, where creationism was pitted against the evolutionism typical of the liberal movement—both of which are susceptible to a Biblically Reformed critique. This fundamentalist worldview is also evident in its view of history; dividing the unity of the Biblical drama into various dispensations, it sets the church of the New Testament off against the Israel of the Old Testament. Law and gospel are juxtaposed in a paradoxical, dialectical relationship, if not in outright contradiction to each other. The fundamentalist worldview thrives on prophetic insights into history and blueprints concerning the future—the impending rapture, the millennium, the restoration of Israel, accompanied by endless debates about whether the rapture is "pre-trib," "mid-trib," or "post-trib."

Misplaced Emphases in Doctrine

Viewing fundamentalism as a worldview discloses its deepest and fullest meaning. As this was recognized, the CRC tended to offer its stiffest resistance to the movement. The fundamentalist worldview with its doctrinal ramifications has bombarded CRC com-

munities almost daily for decades. And these exposures have taken their toll, sometimes subtly, sometimes very blatantly in the faith and life of the Reformed communities. Following are five ways in which the doctrinal emphases of fundamentalism have intruded themselves upon the life of the CRC.

Eclipse of Creation

First, it has contributed to the eclipse of the Biblical doctrine of creation as an ongoing normative reality in Christian confession and life experience. Fundamentalists are, of course, militant in their defense of the creation account in Genesis over against the prevailing theories of evolution. Yet, the reality and meaningfulness of the world's continuing createdness is largely suppressed. It attaches very little significance to the creation order, with its divine ordinances, which still hold normatively for our life together in God's world. Fundamentalism is all too ready to account for the regularities of our life experience by simply appealing to natural law. One cannot expect much from creation: it is fallen, it lies under the curse of sin, captive to the prince of darkness. Therefore, Christians should live not by natural creation, but by supernatural redemption. Redemption is accordingly seen not as the restoration of a fallen creation, but as release from creation.

Quite obviously these views stand in sharp contrast to the thinking of Calvin. The operative theme in his *Institutes* is the *duplex cognitio deo*, the two-fold knowledge of God, namely, God as Creator and God as Redeemer. Fundamentalists seem to be in a hurry to get past creation on their way to the cross and the resurrection. If we fail to do justice to creation, however, in the end we also fail to do justice to redemption. Fundamentalism tends to see God as the Savior who snatches perishing souls out of a perishing world. And many CRC people live on a daily diet of such gospel preaching, which tends to undermine the Biblical storyline of creation, fall, and redemption. As Klaas Schilder and others have said, if we lose sight of creation, in the end we will also lose sight of

eschatology and everything in between. For it is the gospel in its fulness which binds the alpha and the omega, creation and re-creation together.

Coming very close to home, I have often wondered whether we are sufficiently alert to the danger of falling easily into a fundamentalist trap even in dealing with the Heidelberg Catechism. For the Catechism does not give a prominent place to creation. With its triple theme of sin-salvation-service, it begins with the fall, as recorded in Genesis 3, thus bypassing the doctrine of creation. Even in its commentary on Article 1 of the Apostles' Creed in Lord's Day 10, we find only a passing reference to creation. This is, of course, very understandable. Darwin had not yet been born and the *Origin of the Species* had not yet been published. The doctrine of creation-out-of-nothing was not a burning issue in the age of the Reformation. It seems to me, therefore, that in dealing with this most ecumenical and endearing of all confessions, we will have to flesh out for our times what was not sufficiently formulated in this 16th century confession. With this in mind the *Contemporary Testimony* is committed to giving the Biblical doctrine of creation a larger place in a confession of faith for our times. In passing, I would suggest this thesis: confronted as we are in our times with the challenge of believers' baptism, it seems to me that a foundational case for infant baptism calls for a strong appeal to the Biblical doctrine of creation.

Dualistic Views of Humanity?

A second doctrinal emphasis in fundamentalism involves the continuing exploitation of long-standing views of humanity which stress the dualism of body and soul. In such anthropologies there is a continuing acceptance of the legitimacy of the old dichotomy/trichotomy controversies. The question then inevitably arises, if we are made up of two parts, body and soul, which takes priority? While liberals concentrate their attention on bodily concerns, fundamentalists place their emphasis upon the soul. God is the Savior of souls. Our

basic concern must therefore be the salvation of souls. Similarly, the question arises: where to locate the real seat of the image of God in us? In the soul, or in the body, or in both? Along these same lines, L. Berkhof in his theology argues that we are made up of two and only two constitutive elements, one called body and one called soul. This view fails quite largely to take advantage of more recent biblical studies which have recovered a more holistic view of man, as e.g. with Herman Ridderbos in his *Coming of the Kingdom* and Paul: *An Outline of His Theology*. We have not benefited sufficiently, moreover, from the holistic anthropology which comes through very forcefully and clearly in Berkhofer's *Man—the Image of God*.

And the results are upon us. From time to time I hear sermons on the petition in the Lord's Prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread." A 20 or 25 minute discourse is then devoted to common ordinary table bread. Then suddenly the preacher becomes uncomfortable. He apparently cannot feel right about spending that much time on plain bodily concerns. So, to soothe an overly spiritualistic conscience, the pulpiteer turns in the final five minutes to saying, "Brethren and sisters, we also need spiritual bread. (Our souls need some attention, too.)" In so doing, he fails to recognize that every bodily concern is also a spiritual concern, and that every spiritual concern comes to corporeal expression.

We are not made up partly of body and partly of soul. It is not true that I *have* a body and I *have* a soul. After all, who is the "I" that has these things? Rather, we are mysteriously and wonderfully made, as the psalmist said, in such a way that I *am* body and I *am* soul, both, simultaneously, in an integrally unified way. Missing this kind of holistic, biblical perspective, we go on playing spiritual things off against material things. We then continue to employ such faculty anthropologies as those bequeathed to us by the old faulty psychology with its head, its heart, and its hand—the intellect, the emotions, and the will. In such misconceptions the heart is no longer the key to the whole person, but becomes a part. Thus, we lose the centrality of the heart and unity of the

person. Then we can no longer do justice to the integrality of human nature, nor to its diversity. For our diversity is richer than can be captured in the categories of body and soul; or even of body, soul and spirit; and much less the categories of head, heart, and hand.

Continuing to absorb and accept such dualistic self-images from fundamentalist and other sources, we get locked into a seemingly irresistible conflict between word and deed ministries, not only on the home front, but also in foreign programs of outreach. The thought often crosses my mind that perhaps the healthiest way to make a long-run contribution to ongoing reformation in CRC circles would be to pay sustained attention to a biblically holistic view of human nature. It could have a beneficial impact upon our teaching, preaching, pastoral, and fellowship ministries, as well as upon our work in missions, evangelism, and world relief.

Infallibility/Inerrancy

I shall now touch in more rapid succession on three remaining doctrinal points. The fundamentalist quarrel regarding the relative merits of biblical inerrancy versus biblical infallibility have needlessly complicated our understanding and implementation of a more classic, Reformed view of Scripture. At the very least, it seems to me, we must not allow the infallibility-inerrancy debate a normative role in our confession and practice of biblical interpretation. Although it is not infallible, I think that Report 44 can still stand the test of sanctified, Christian scrutiny, and can serve the church well.

Congregationalism

In the fourth place, the individualism which characterizes fundamentalist proclamation of the gospel is also reflected in its view of church life. This is evident in its independentistic, congregational view of church life and polity. Generally, fundamentalists hold that each local church, each separate congregation, is an ecclesiastical island. Occasionally they do indeed

build temporary bridges from one island to another, thus forming a conference to deal with specific issues. But basically each congregation represents an independent unit. In the case of American fundamentalism perhaps this is explainable historically by the Pilgrim-Puritan experiment in New England—in part at least. For New England became an index to the further development of Christianity in North America. And the New England situation, it is often argued, called for a congregationalist rather than a presbyterian form of church government. Perhaps one may also explain congregationalist church life by the wilderness experience along the western frontier during the westward movement of the nation and its churches. Whatever its roots, American congregationalism repudiates not only the more corporate character of a presbyterian Reformed understanding of church life, but also represents a departure from the time-tested tradition of Western Christianity as a whole, including that part which emerged from the Reformation. This solid tradition of organic church life is not wholly accidental or arbitrary. It reflects the more corporate picture of church life as we find it represented in the New Testament.

Believers are not merely individual people. Nor are they gathered into isolated congregations. The body of Jesus Christ is a peoplehood. And that peoplehood and bodyhood must come to unified expression. Fundamentalism, therefore, loses sight of the biblical idea of the catholicity of the church. I wonder sometimes whether this fundamentalist model of church life is not beginning to rub off heavily on us. In places like Grand Rapids, or even Sioux Center, how much unified and consolidated effort is put forth to engage a number of congregations in projects of common concern to the community as a whole? Sometimes the impression is left that a neighboring church building could burn down, and its sister churches would hardly bat an eyelash. On a broader scale, to what extent is such fundamentalist influence discernible in the renegade action of some local CRC congregations in breaking the bond of unity by taking unilateral action in response to troublesome

issues?

Loss of Kingdom Vision

Finally, fundamentalism severely reduces the biblical idea of the coming of the kingdom of God. Among fundamentalists, the kingdom idea gets short-changed in a number of ways. For example, it is often confined to the soul life of the individual Christian and identified with the marks of inner piety. Jesus is Lord in the heart and life of the individual believer and that is it. Or the kingship of Christ is limited to certain allegedly sacred sectors of life—the privacy of the home, the inner closet, the church—having little or no significance for public life. Or, again, kingdom causes are identified with those that are clearly church-related. If one cannot relate them to consistorial, classical, or synodical agendas, they then become dubious. Or, once more, the kingdom vision is projected beyond this earthly life as an exclusively future hope without any present reality. It seems to me that there are indications, on a larger or smaller scale, that these drastically reduced views of the kingdom are making their inroads into CRC circles. This represents a real loss, for it undercuts our commitment to and interest in such agencies as the Association for Public Justice, the Christian Farmers' Association, Christian journalism, art, science, and publications, Christian labor associations, and the like.

Looking back now for a moment over these five points, fundamentalism is obviously not the sole cause of all these problems. Perhaps more than we realize, however, and perhaps more than we would care to admit, it is, I think, a strongly contributing factor to the decline of a biblically Reformed Christian worldview as it comes to doctrinal expression in these five ways. Perhaps the impact of fundamentalism upon us is most fully measurable in terms of what we have lost, rather than in terms of what we have picked up—namely the loss of a classic Reformed heritage. On these previous points, as well as those that follow, if I were challenged by the critical rejoinder, "But similarity and commonality does not prove, or even entail causality," I suppose I would be hard-pressed to

make a convincing and persuasive case. Nevertheless, for the time being, I shall stand by what I have said.

Indications of Fundamentalist Influence

I will conclude with some more practical indications, as I sense them, of fundamentalist influences within Christian Reformed circles.

Dearth of "Full-Gospel" Preaching

First, there is a dearth of Old Testament, "full-gospel" preaching. Recently I served as a guest preacher in a Christian Reformed congregation in the Grand Rapids area. I delivered the morning sermon on Zachariah, thus from the Old Testament, pointing out how the promissory character of Zachariah's prophecy was fulfilled in Matthew's gospel. Before the evening service, sitting in the consistory room, a knowledgeable elder turned to me and asked in the presence of his brothers, "Why is it that we hear so little Old Testament preaching these days? Is it because it's so difficult for ministers to explain the Old Testament? Or is it because they are catering to their congregations?" Well, there is the question. As I go around preaching here and there I try quite consistently to preach at least one Old Testament sermon. It is surprising how often people come up to me and say, "It was nice to hear an Old Testament sermon once again for a change." So Monday I go to my class and ask my students "What did you do yesterday?" Early in the semester they say "I went to church." By the end of the semester they usually learn to say, "I joined the church in going to its place of worship." Following up on that, I then ask them "What percentage of sermons that you hear are from the New Testament—75 percent?" No, they say, not 75 percent, but at least 80 or 90 from the New Testament! Four, five, six to one against the Old Testament! The biggest part of the Bible is losing out.

Now, in both of those situations I am speculating that there is some fundamentalist/dispensationalist influence at work. Very few of us would endorse a dispensational

theology. Yet are we becoming practical dispensationalists? Does our practice belie our convictions? By our sermon choices are we joining the chorus of those who say that the Old Testament is for Israel, and the New Testament is for the Christian church? In so doing, we are forgetting, of course, that the familiar household language of the New Testament is itself deeply embedded in the Old, and is not understandable apart from it. Interpreting the New without the Old is like building a house without a foundation. The New without the Old is like a cut flower which eventually, and rather soon at that, withers in your hand, because it has been cut loose from its roots.

With such "dispensationalist" practice comes a loss of the fullness of the gospel as a covenantally-based and kingdom-oriented proclamation. Then covenant and kingdom become reduced to themes that one deals with occasionally, from time to time, perhaps prompted by the Heidelberg Catechism. But then they no longer serve as operative principles that shape and mold a ministry. Little wonder, too, that we should then experience a decline in a deep sensitivity to a biblically-Reformed world view, a decline in kingdom vision, and a decline in support for Christian organizations. For by such spiritual myopia we miss the heartbeat of the Scriptures. As Herman Ridderbos says, "There can be little doubt but that the central theme of all of Biblical revelation is the coming of the kingdom."

The Gospel-Hymn Tradition

Second, the fundamentalist influence is manifest in the intrusion of gospel hymn traditions into our congregational worship. Almost everywhere I go alternative songbooks have made their appearance. Usually the morning service is exempt of these gospel melodies and folklore tunes. Apparently that hour is considered too solemn. But the evening service is quite different. The question then arises: who selects the hymnbooks? And who screens the songs? The process seems often to be very haphazard and the results likewise. Almost anything can happen. These singspiration tunes

often reflect very little sensitivity to the Reformed faith. I hope the new *Psalter Hymnal* will offset this trend.

By personal experience I have watched as fundamentalist and Arminian themes creep into the life of a congregation through songs that undermine the sermon. This is how it usually goes: the minister takes a seat up front, lets the sermon cool off, and waits for the song service to run its course. Sometimes it happens in the middle of the service with the same effect. I have seen good, biblically Reformed sermons get undermined before they even get underway by songs popularized through fundamentalist radio broadcasts, through the impact of summer chapels that our people attend while on vacation, and through the atmosphere of the conference grounds they visit for spiritual uplift. Soundly Reformed preaching cannot stand that kind of competition. It has been said that the Reformation sang its way into people's hearts. It can also sing its way out. A former colleague used to say, "You may write the creeds we recite, let me write the songs we sing."

Truncated Education

Third, fundamentalism brings about a decline in a biblically directed view of culture in our Christian schools. For over a century now, we have been busy developing a Calvinist philosophy of education. Some of its distinctive hallmarks are the creation-fall-redemption story line, the creation ordinances, the cultural mandate, general and special revelation, humanity bearing the image of God, the sovereignty of God and the kingship of Jesus Christ, and Christian calling in every area of life. Under fundamentalist influences I often sense that these deeply and broadly religious perspectives are shrinking badly. In their place comes a narrowed down, rather truncated, soteriological concern with piety and morality, often accompanied by excessive concern with personal conduct, hairdress, grooming, and saluting the flag. Undergirding such fundamentalist ideas of schooling is a facts/value scheme of education: facts are facts, but we ice them

over with Christian values.

Traditionally, fundamentalism has been strongly committed to public education. Only recently has a major shift taken place. The impetus for the adverse attitude toward public education centers on questions of evolution, sex education, and values clarification, together with the problems of drugs, violence, and racial tension. It is therefore a largely negative motivation which lies behind the fundamentalist school movement that initiates an average of three new schools every day all year long. Usually they are church-owned, operated, and controlled, with the local pastor as the principal, and with a heavy emphasis on child evangelism under the guise of Christian education. The danger is not imaginary, it seems to me, that Calvinist Christian schools may become identified with this growing fundamentalist school movement with its dubious learning theory, methodology, pedagogy, and educational objectives.

Financial Contributions

Fourth, growing concern has been expressed over the divergence of CRC charitable contributions into fundamentalist causes. The magnitude of this drain-off is difficult, if not impossible, to access. But responsible people estimate that it is a considerable amount of good CRC money that gets channeled into the causes sponsored by Jerry Falwell, Jimmy Swaggart, Pat Robertson, Oral Roberts, and all the rest. The impact is felt financially as well as in other ways. In the meantime, many solidly Reformed causes and other worthwhile ecumenically Christian causes go begging and limping along for lack of support.

Americana

Finally, fundamentalism brings with it a strong temptation to link orthodox Christianity with American nationalism. As noted earlier, fundamentalism is an indigenously American movement. It has always tended to identify itself with the true American spirit of the founding fathers. That confidence has been severely

tested in recent decades by nation-wide, overt departures from the Christian heritage. Yet, undaunted, fundamentalists reach back over these evidences of decadence to the faith of the founding fathers, calling us back to the divine destiny entrusted to this nation. For a strong Christianity and the original American dream go hand in hand. There is, accordingly, a constant tendency to view the American ideology with a Christian eye. On dispensational terms, America can be strong only in the measure that it supports Israel. When those two causes come together, we can fulfill our role in biblical prophecy.

One result is a spiritually enculturated Christianity. The church can then no longer take sufficient distance from its own culture to raise its truly prophetic voice in critique upon it. Some of this mentality is rubbing off on us. We see it in the tendency to draw false lines of antithesis between the East and the West, between capitalism and socialism, between us and them, as though these were the lines of demarcation between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness. When that happens, we cease looking seriously for Christian alternatives to these false dilemmas, including the false dilemmas of rightist-leftist positions in whatever sector of life.

In conclusion, many among the CRC are too quick in giving up on the Reformed tradition with its rich resources, seeking instead new inspiration from other sources, including fundamentalism. But fundamentalism offers no hope to those who insist on holding out for a full-orbed biblical Christianity. My concern is that the CRC not become just another mainline American church community with fundamentalist leanings.

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