

CLASS 11

Intellectual Challenges and Fundamentalism

- Modernism & Fundamentalist Response
- The Scopes Trial
- Divisive Effects in Churches



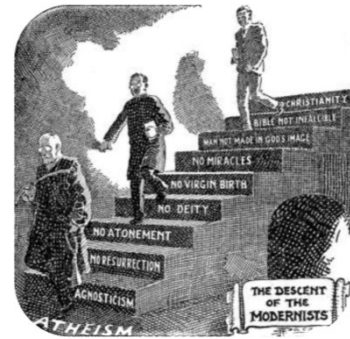
Modernism & Fundamentalist Response

- In the late 1800s and into the early 1900s, the evangelical character of American Christianity was eroded by a number of factors.
 - Continued immigration from Europe created an era of urbanization in the eastern U.S., lessening the impact of the western settlements which had fostered devotion to Christian culture and values.
 - More commercial pressures from the rise of the industrial economy lessened focus on religious participation and changed the emphasis of religious ideas.
 - Increased day-to-day contact with people of diverse ethnicities and religions made people more open to homogenizing religious ideas.
- As important, though not always as visible, were changes taking place in the academic culture of the nation.



Modernism & Fundamentalist Response

- Prior to the Civil War, colleges and universities in America were primarily founded as religious institutions. The majority of the faculty and trustees were clergymen who taught and governed in order to shape the character of the student as a spiritual person.
- However, with the increased wealth of the industrial economy after the war, new universities – both state-funded and private institutions – began to see higher education as a means to advance society.
- With this shift in the purpose of university, clergy were slowly phased out as faculty and trustees in favor of entrepreneurial businessmen and politicians.



Modernism & Fundamentalist Response

- In addition, under the influence of an Enlightenment-based educational system in Europe (especially Germany), the focus of many university programs became advanced and specialized scholarship rather than training of the individual for public service.
- Especially significant in bringing about this shift was the introduction of the Scientific Method as the universal tool of Rationalism.

Of Cornell University: "[it will]...afford an asylum for Science – where truth shall be sought for truth's sake, where it shall not be the main purpose of the Faculty to stretch or cut sciences exactly to fit 'Revealed Religion'" – Andrew Dickinson White



Modernism & Fundamentalist Response

- This shift toward scientific commitments, came be referred to as 'modernism,' and it clashed with Christianity on two main issues: Evolution and Biblical Criticism.
- Evolution:
 - In 1859, *On the Origin of Species* introduced Charles Darwin's theory of evolution by 'natural selection,' which many scientists alleged undercut the classic Christian argument for God from the design.
 - Some social scientists applied the principal of natural selection to Christianity itself, suggesting that faith was a primitive crutch for social survival that was no longer useful to enlightened humanity.



Modernism & Fundamentalist Response

- Biblical Criticism:
 - Advanced scholarship and archeology of the ancient world brought new understanding to the world of Scripture, and advances in the study of ancient texts which changed ideas about how the Bible was written and transmitted.
 - These issues caused many intellectuals to question the reliability of the Bible to convey truth - factual or religious.
- With these issues, as well as the changing social landscape in the country, atheism, agnosticism, and a lack of commitment to religious values became an accepted intellectual position.
- Christian intellectuals responded to these issues with varying levels of acceptance and accommodation.



Modernism & Fundamentalist Response

- Charles Augustus Briggs
 - In 1891, he became the chair of the Biblical Theology Department at Union Theological Seminary in New York.
 - In a speech early in his time in that position, he suggested that the Bible may contain errors in its historical record, especially of the OT
 - Briggs presented these ideas not to denounce the Bible, but to propose new approaches to the faith it revealed

“Let the light shine higher and higher, the bright clear light of day. Truth fears no light. Light chases error away. – Charles Augustus Briggs



- Briggs would eventually be suspended from his position and expelled by the Presbyterian church for his positions.

Modernism & Fundamentalist Response

- In the 20th century, new liberal theologies began to develop in the academy which moved away from Bible-based teaching towards faith that self-consciously adjusted to the norms of the changing culture.
- Modernists held that revelation was progressive, and that God works within human societies, not outside of them. Further that changes in modern life and culture, not the miraculous, were the revelation of God's work.
- Jesus was valued for his moral teachings rather than his (unreliable) miracles or atoning death.
- In this context, salvation of the individual from sin becomes less important than salvation of the society, or the world through social reform.

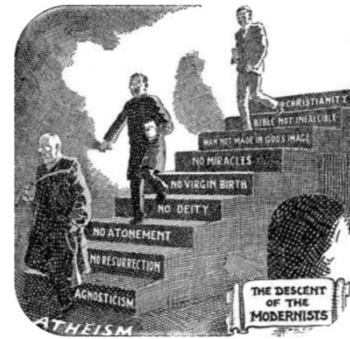


Modernism & Fundamentalist Response

“Everything in nature is a puzzle until it finds its solution in man, who solves it in some way with God, and so completes the circle of creation.” – Theodore Mungler

Of Jesus, “...a vivid realization of God as his father and the father of his brethren, and an attitude of perfect trust and joyful devotion...” – Arthur Cushman McGiffert

“The world needs new control of nature and society and is told that the Bible is verbally inerrant. It needs a means of composing class strife and is told to believe in the substitutionary atonement...it needs faith in the divine presence in human affairs and is told it must accept the virgin birth of Jesus Christ.” – Shailer Mathews



Modernism & Fundamentalist Response

- Some Christians in academic circles, and many more educated preachers and missionaries, regarded the capitulation to modernist ideas as not just bad theology, but as anti-Christian.
- Between 1910 and 1915, a series of booklets were published under the title *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*. These contained articles from leading evangelicals which defended the basic tenants of Christianity against Modernism:

- | | |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| • Creationism | • Christ as God in Flesh |
| • Mosaic Authorship of Pent. | • Atonement for Sin |
| • Biblical Inerrancy | • Resurrection / Ascension |
| • Miracles | • Second Coming |



Modernism & Fundamentalist Response

- These 'Fundamentalist' Christians were not the only conservative Christians during the era, but were defined by their sense of crisis within American civilization, and attacks on rational ideology.
- It was not uncommon for this brand of evangelical speech to invoke the notion of America as 'God's New Israel' fighting off the influence of the 'Babylon' of modernist thought.
- Fundamentalism brought together many different forms of conservative theology, including premillennialism, dispensationalism, holiness movements, Calvinism, and members of both denominational and sectarian groups.



Modernism & Fundamentalist Response

"Fundamentalism is a protest against that rationalistic interpretation of Christianity which seeks to discredit supernaturalism...This rationalism, when full grown, scorns the miracles of the Old Testament...laughs at the credulity of those who accept many of the New Testament miracles, reduces the resurrection of our Lord to the fact that death did not end his existence, and sweeps away the promises of his second coming as an idle dream." – Curtis Lee Laws

"Annihilation is the heaven of the evolutionist. From such a stenchful and damnable doctrine, turn away." – T. DeWitt Talmage

"...the Scriptures not only contain, but ARE THE WORD OF GOD, and hence...all their elements and all their affirmations are absolutely errorless, and binding the faith and obedience of men."
– B.B. Warfield



The Scopes Trial

- For the most part through the early 1900s, the actual debates between Modernists and Fundamentalists stayed out of the daily life of everyday churchgoers. But that changed in 1925 with the ‘Scopes Trial.’
- John T. Scopes was a Tennessee teacher brought to trial for violation of a state law banning teaching evolution in schools.
- The trial, held in the small town of Dayton, TN, grew to national prominence in part because the two sides were represented by two of the most prominent public figures of the era:
 - Clarence Darrow was the U.S.’s most famous trial lawyer
 - William Jennings Bryan was the form Secretary of State and noted defender of Christianity.



The Scopes Trial

- The arguments of the attorneys did not touch on whether Scopes taught evolution (he did), but were contested over whether Evolution represented an academically viable account of human life.
- The defense relied on expert witnesses to testify to Evolution’s compatibility with the Bible. But the judge, despite accusations of bias, declared those accounts irrelevant to the case.
- With all his witnesses dismissed, on the final day of the trial, Darrow surprisingly called on Bryan to testify as a ‘biblical expert’ (a claim which Bryan did not deny). The interrogation questioned Bryan on his belief in the ‘literal’ interpretation of Scripture.



The Scopes Trial

- Darrow's examination drew continued objections from Bryan and others in the courtroom, but Darrow's strategy was to attempt to show up the supposed foolishness of Bryan's belief in the accounts of Scripture.
- After discussing Jonah, Noah's Ark, elements of the creation narrative, etc., the judge abruptly ended the testimony, and adjourned the court. The next day, the defense gave their closing argument, and the jury was given the case for a verdict.
- The jury was instructed not to judge the merits of the law, but the facts of case. They returned a verdict of guilty in just 9 minutes. Scopes was ordered to pay a fine of \$100.



The Scopes Trial

- Despite the minimal practical stakes of the trial, its lasting impact was due to its media coverage, dubbing it 'The Monkey Trial.'
- More than 200 newspapers from across American and England covered the trial. More than 165,000 words per day were transmitted via telegraph. It was broadcast by WGN Radio in Chicago, and two movie cameras recorded it on film.
- Although Bryan's prosecution case carried the day in court, media coverage painted Bryan as an insincere 'buffoon,' and the rural inhabitants of Tennessee as ignorant, backwater 'morons.' The most syndicated columnist covering the trial, was openly critical of Creationism and the Bible.



The Scopes Trial

- Other media outlets ridiculed the trial itself and the law that brought it about. Time Magazine called it “the fantastic cross between a circus and holy war.”
- Shockingly, five days after the conclusion of the trial, Bryan died in his sleep. Some historians have tried to connect his death to the strain of the trial.
- After Bryan’s death, fundamentalists failed to identify a public successor to champion their cause. As a result, the aftermath of the trial seemed to sway the general public against conservative biblicism.



Divisive Effects in Churches

- As liberal approaches to Scripture and faith began to pervade churches, many conservative factions broke away from larger denominational bodies which had capitulated to Modernism.
 - In 1932, the General Assn. of Baptist divided from the Northern Baptist Convention
 - In 1936, separate groups of militant Presbyterians split from the Presbyterian Church
 - Similar divisions occurred in other churches and Christian groups in the era.
- As a result, a recognizable divide developed in America between liberal ‘mainline’ churches, and conservative ‘evangelical’ churches.



Statistics

Percentages are of the total US population

▼ Evangelical Protestant	25.4%
▶ Baptist Family (Evangelical Trad.)	9.2%
▶ Methodist Family (Evangelical Trad.)	< 0.3%
▶ Nondenominational Family (Evangelical Trad.)	4.9%
▶ Lutheran Family (Evangelical Trad.)	1.5%
▶ Presbyterian Family (Evangelical Trad.)	0.8%
▶ Pentecostal Family (Evangelical Trad.)	3.6%
▶ Episcopal/Anglican Family (Evangelical Trad.)	< 0.3%
▶ Restorationist Family (Evangelical Trad.)	1.6%
▶ Congregationalist Family (Evangelical Trad.)	< 0.3%
▶ Holiness Family (Evangelical Trad.)	0.7%
▶ Reformed Family (Evangelical Trad.)	< 0.3%
▶ Adventist Family (Evangelical Trad.)	0.6%

Statistics

Percentages are of the total US population

▼ Mainline Protestant	14.7%
▶ Baptist Family (Mainline Trad.)	2.1%
▶ Methodist Family (Mainline Trad.)	3.9%
▶ Nondenominational Family (Mainline Trad.)	1.0%
▶ Lutheran Family (Mainline Trad.)	2.1%
▶ Presbyterian Family (Mainline Trad.)	1.4%
▶ Episcopal/Anglican Family (Mainline Trad.)	1.2%
▶ Restorationist Family (Mainline Trad.)	0.3%
▶ Congregationalist Family (Mainline Trad.)	0.5%
▶ Reformed Family (Mainline Trad.)	< 0.3%

Divisive Effects in Churches

- The fundamentalist-modernist debates, along with the social gospel that went hand-in-hand with liberalism, eroded the influence of Protestant Christianity in American life.
- The resulting divisions, often public and harmful, have had last effects on the self-understanding of many Christians today who in part define their faith in opposition to the alternate theology.
- Since the 1930s, fundamentalists have been driven to sectarianism and anti-intellectualism, while modernists have continued to define their ideas in terms that align less and less with Scripture and historic Christianity.



Review Questions

A) Why was a Modernist denial of the inspiration of Scripture a threat to traditional Christian ideas about who Jesus is?

The meaning of salvation?

B) What parallels do you see between the issues of the Scopes Trial (e.g. literal biblical interpretation, media repudiation of those ideas) and expression of Biblical beliefs in the public sphere today?

C) Why were the church divisions of the 1930s so harmful? To the extent that they were more permanent than those of the 1850-60s regarding issues of slavery, why was that the case?

