

Week Eleven Handout

“Christian History in America: Visions, Realities, and Turning Points”

Tim Castner



Class 11: The Rise of Fundamentalism and the Scopes Trial

Class 11 Goals

*Explore the Fundamentalist movement that arose within the church
in response to Modernist religious ideas.*

Examine the classic clash between Fundamentalism and Darwinism at the Scopes Trial.

Look at the continuing legacy of this debate within the Church and American Society as a whole.

Opening Table Discussion

How would you define Fundamentalism?

How would you distinguish between Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism?

What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of Fundamentalism as a religious movement?

Premillennial Dispensationalism

Begins around 1830 in England with the Plymouth Brethren and John Nelson Darby.

Most distinctive teaching: the secret pretribulation “rapture” of the church.

No evidence of this doctrine prior to 1830

Grows in popularity after the Civil War in the United States

Promoted by D.L. Moody, C. I. Scofield, Billy Sunday, the Moody Bible Institute and regular prophecy conferences.

Princeton Theologians

B. B. Warfield

Leading professor at Princeton

Known for his vigorous intellectual defense of the inerrancy and inspiration of the Bible

Claimed that Calvin accepted a form of evolution and did not see a contradiction between evolutionary theory and Genesis.

J. Gresham Machen

Fought to maintain the Westminster Confession at Princeton Theological Seminary

Helped to create the Orthodox Presbyterian Church

Left Princeton and helped found Westminster Theological Seminary

Fundamentalist Fears

Societal Changes

Rapid Immigration of Catholics and Jews, declining Protestant influence, rapid urbanization and industrialization. The spread of high schools and secular colleges

Higher Criticism

New German ideas that questioned Mosaic authorship of the Torah and other cherished beliefs.

Suggested that only trained scholars could understand the Bible

Evolution

Darwin's ideas threatened literal readings of Genesis and the unique place of humanity in Nature.

Fundamentalist Responses

Publication Efforts

The Fundamentals: Designed to rally the base – not a thorough response to the critical or scientific challenges

More recent radio, television, and internet empires

Political Action

Associated with Nativist movements of the 1920s

Banning of evolution from public schools

More recent rise of the Christian Right – 1970s to present

Separatism

Withdrawal into separate communities

Fundamentalist theme parks, colleges, science museums etc.

Fundamentalist thinking tends to become more rigid over time.

Converging Forces at the Scopes Trial: the Prosecution

Fundamentalism

Anti-modernist: opposed biblical modernism and higher criticism

Opposition to undirected, purposeless evolution (survival of the fittest)

Opposition to Eugenics - human directed evolution -prevent certain classes of people from reproducing

Populist Majoritarianism

Legacy of populists and progressives, the majority should rule be more democratic

Local control over schools and education

Little regard for cultural and religious minorities

The Textbook – Hunter's Civic Biology

The Races of Man. -- At the present time there exist upon the earth five races or varieties of man, each very different from the other in instincts, social customs, and, to an extent, in structure. These are the Ethiopian or negro type, originating in Africa; the Malay or brown race, from the islands of the Pacific; The American Indian; the Mongolian or yellow race, including the natives of China, Japan, and the Eskimos; and finally, the highest type of all, the caucasians, represented by the civilized white inhabitants of Europe and America. . . .

The Remedy. -- If such people were lower animals, we would probably kill them off to prevent them from spreading. Humanity will not allow this, but we do have the remedy of

separating the sexes in asylums or other places and in various ways preventing intermarriage and the possibilities of perpetuating such a low and degenerate race. Remedies of this sort have been tried successfully in Europe and are now meeting with some success in this country.

Converging Forces: The Defense

Scientific Secularism

Based on the idea that there has been a war between science and religious belief since Galileo

Often militantly anti-clerical: especially Darrow who sought to ridicule religious belief

Naturalism - things are only real if they can be sensed by humans or through scientific instruments, no room for faith

Individual Liberty

Major goal - protect the individual against mob rule

ACLU - grew out of the defense of Quakers and other pacifists in WWI -After the war controlled by liberal New Yorkers, concerned with labor rights, free speech, and academic freedom, defended many radicals - but lacked success in the courts

The first amendment was much more limited then

Background on Key Figures

William Jennings Bryan

Leading Presbyterian Layman

Three time Democratic Presidential Candidate

Famous for "Cross of Gold" Speech

Leading anti-imperialist

Secretary of State for Wilson – resigned when drift to WWI violated his pacifist principles.

Clarence Darrow

Leading Defense Attorney in America

Influential agnostic thinker

Took controversial cases like "Big" Bill Haywood and the Leopold and Loeb murder.

Strategies – The Prosecution

William Jennings Bryan

The goal of his Anti-evolution crusade was always to make a statement, not enforce his beliefs -did not want any penalties attached to the law, (avoid challenges)

During trial he wanted to bolster anti-evolutionism

Fundamental question for Bryan, "Do parents have the right to control what is taught in the schools that they pay for and their children are required to attend?"

Strategies - Defense

Clarence Darrow

Darrow entered to battle Bryan and ridicule religious beliefs (the ACLU was uncomfortable with this)

Fundamentalists seen as a great threat to liberty and academic freedom

Goal bring in scientific and biblical experts to demonstrate that evolution and the Bible are compatible -have the law ruled unconstitutional.

Trial of the Century

Initial Defense strategy: dismiss on constitutional grounds - fails - consistent with then current constitutional theory

Prosecution's presentation

Showed that Scopes broke the law, 2 line opening statement, 2 hour presentation of evidence on cross examination defense tried to show that students had not been harmed

Defense presentation

Their case hung on the admissibility of expert scientific and religious witnesses - both Darrow and Bryan got ovations for their presentations, but no witnesses were allowed

Darrow was cited for contempt for his subsequent outburst

Central Drama - Examination of Bryan

Under Darrow's questioning, retreated from Fundamentalism, and was made to look foolish, but stood up for basic beliefs

Verdict (directed by defense for appeal) Guilty

Aftermath

Bryan

Geared up for a new round of his crusade with his closing statement that he was unable to give in the trial

Major points: Evolution, 1. Contradicted the Biblical account of creation, 2. Destroyed faith in God and love for others, e.g. Nietzsche, 3. Distracted from spiritually and socially useful pursuits, 4. Its determinism undermined reform efforts

Died 5 days after the trial, no evidence that it was of despair

He became a bigger hero in the South, Bryan College was founded in Dayton, and four more states adopted anti- evolution policies

Darrow

Was blamed for being too cynical and mean, objecting to prayer and badgering Bryan.

The verdict was overturned on a technicality but the law was not overturned by the State Supreme Court

By the end of the 1920's fundamentalism was alive and well

Rewriting History

Only Yesterday:

leading book about the twenties released in 1931

Implied that Bryan's humiliation was a turning point for fundamentalism (fundamentalist political activity had declined, mostly because they reached natural boundaries)

Most fundamentalists had turned inward, and created their own institutions

Inherit the Wind:

Written in response to McCarthyism, no claim to be history
Was panned at the time for historical inaccuracies: seriousness of trial, jail time for Scopes, hostility of town, foolishness of Bryan, etc.
The play and movie have created most people's impression of the trial

Repeal and Continuing Controversy

Steps toward repeal:

Gradual adoption of the ACLU's views on individual liberty and the belief that the 1st amend. was binding on the states
1948 - religious instruction in Public Schools banned
1962 - school prayer banned
1963 - compulsory Bible reading banned.
1967 - Tennessee repealed its anti-evolution law
1967 - Supreme Court struck down a similar Arkansas law based on a violation of the establishment clause

Continuing Controversy

Fundamentalists then returned to the public stage, fighting for equal time for "creation science"
Passed laws in three states that were later struck down
In 1982 - 80% of Americans supported teaching both Creationism and Evolution in public schools.
1999 Kansas removed evolution from state frameworks
2005 PA judge rules Int. Design can't be taught in science

Thought Questions

How do we maintain faithfulness to Christ and the call of the Gospel without getting stuck in the past or becoming overly rigid in our interpretation of Scripture?
How do we become as wise as serpents and as innocent as doves as we discern which trends in modern thought can be embraced, which should be resisted, and which we should seek to modify?
How can we demonstrate the love of a Savior who died to save the world if all the world sees is us battling against it?

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