

## THE LANGUAGE OF FUNDAMENTALISM: A LANGUAGE OF THE PAST OR A REALITY OF THE FUTURE?

The rise and growth of Fundamentalism is obvious to all. What is not obvious is how one should classify Fundamentalism. (When we use the term Fundamentalism without any explanation we have in mind American Biblical Fundamentalism. The reason for this designation becomes obvious in the course of the workshop.) In other words, whether one should see it as an anti-intellectual aberration or as a conservative religious movement with its own identity and perspective of life? The works of Sandeen and Marsden make clear that Fundamentalism is not an aberration, but rather a conservative tradition that has deep roots in American soil. Through an examination of the language of Fundamentalism we hope to disclose not only the broad foundation in which it is built, but also come to some understanding with regard to its future. Making use of Hal Lindsey's work we shall illustrate our point as well.

In broad terms one may describe the language of Fundamentalism as a language of militant defense and separation. Falwell describes Fundamentalists as "militant defenders of the faith."<sup>1</sup> Its militant defense is in favor of the five fundamentals at the heart of the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy. They are: (1) the inspiration and infallibility of Scripture; (2) the deity of Christ (including the Virgin birth); (3) the substitutionary atonement of Christ's death; (4) the literal resurrection of Christ from the dead; (5) the literal return of Christ in the Second Advent. The strength of this defense becomes more obvious in the comparison that Falwell makes between Fundamentalism and evangelicalism. He criticizes evangelicalism as too ambiguous in contrast to the clarity present in Fundamentalism. The militant dimension of Fundamentalism is also influenced by the dynamics of Revivalism with its Calvinist heritage. Furthermore, history is viewed through the lens of scripture and interpreted against the background of common sense realism and Baconian analysis.

Closely linked with the language of militant defense is the language of separation. This emphasis on separation as having a biblical basis brings out the uniqueness of American Biblical Fundamentalism. The focus is individual salvation and the need to separate oneself from the worldliness and pollution of the world in order to achieve one's goal. Falwell and others criticize scholars such as Barr and Marty for failing to recognize this fact.

Together with the language of militant defense and separation there is the language of dispensational premillennialism. Its creators were convinced that Amer-

---

<sup>1</sup>Jerry Falwell et al., *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon* (New York: Doubleday, 1981) 170.

ica was falling so deeply into apostasy that it could only signal the approach of the last days. Dispensational premillennialism brings to the Bible its own convictions that an age of tribulation will precede the millennium of righteousness. John Nelson Darby with his doctrine of secret rapture or 'the any moment coming of Christ' on the one hand, and his belief that the scriptures are a source for both Jewish and Christian truths on the other hand, contributed greatly to its formulation. It was developed by C. I. Scofield with his emphasis on distinctive dispensations. Besides, Scofield believed that not only is there a radical distinction between Jews and Christians, but that the restoration of Israel is integral to the realization of the millennium. It is for this reason that Falwell has made Israel one of his causes and at the same time can hold that the Jewish people are "spiritually blind and desperately in need of their Messiah and Savior."<sup>2</sup>

Dispensational premillennialism presupposes that the Bible contains God's plan that is waiting to be disclosed. It has some parallels with gnosticism where the emphasis is on attaining secret knowledge not available to others. Through the use of the inductive method of Lord Bacon with its emphasis on observation, classification, and generalization as a tool of scientific exegesis, it was seen as being supportive of a culture that was increasingly devoted to science. The facts of the Bible like propositions in science could be verified empirically. With the rise of modern science much of this thinking was called into question. It is described by Marsden as a paradigm conflict of two scientific worldviews. The result was that "Fundamentalists . . . were proud to establish their own community and sub-culture in which their own ideas of orthodoxy were preserved."<sup>3</sup> In defending its own religious heritage it believed it was defending America.

In this part of the presentation we deal with the work of Hal Lindsey. We would like to demonstrate that as a contemporary writer whose works span from 1970 to 1986 he uses only one of the possible literary genres of the Bible and that is apocalypticism. As a Fundamentalist and a literalist of the Bible he would like to see himself as relying upon the Bible alone. In point of fact, Hal Lindsey only uses part of the Bible. Also, as a dispensational premillennialist Lindsey fits right into the apocalyptic tradition. Regarding this type of interpretation D. S. Russell states, "it discredits the tradition in which the apocalyptists stood and conveniently uses scripture to suit its own purpose."<sup>4</sup>

The common consensus among contemporary writers in the study of apocalypticism is that this genre is nurtured and grows in the rich soil of crisis. It is our contention that the three areas which best provide this rich soil of crisis for the growth of apocalypticism are: (a) politics; (b) economics; and (c) religion. It is not necessary for a crisis to exist in all three areas, but upon consideration of the historical circumstances which have produced apocalyptic works usually there are at least two of these areas in crisis. For the apocalypticist the only possible solution is for God to intervene directly into human history to set aright and to issue

<sup>2</sup>Falwell, *Listen America!* (New York: Doubleday 1980) 98.

<sup>3</sup>George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980) 125.

<sup>4</sup>D. S. Russell, *Apocalyptic: Ancient and Modern* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978) 64.

forth the final kingdom. For the apocalypticist there is nothing which humankind can possibly do to change the course of history.

Through the use of Leon Morris' 13 characteristics of apocalypticism<sup>5</sup> one can readily identify Lindsey as the apocalypticist that he is. Morris compares true Old Testament prophecy with apocalypticism. By juxtaposing these two genres the characteristics of apocalypticism are clearly seen. The characteristics are: (1) revelations; (2) symbolism; (3) pessimism; (4) the shaking of the foundations; (5) the triumph of God; (6) determinism; (7) dualism; (8) pseudonymity; (9) a literary form; (10) rewritten history—in the form of prophecy; (11) ethical teachings; (12) prediction; (13) historical perspective.

In summary fashion we would like to point to some of the more obvious characteristics that Lindsey uses in three of his books, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (New York: Bantam Books, 1970); *The Rapture* (New York: Bantam Books, 1983); *Combat Faith* (New York: Bantam Books, 1986). They are: (1) revelations (*The Late* . . . 48-60, 70-76, 103-23; *The Rapture* 7-17, 159-64); (2) symbolism (*The Late* . . . 48-60; *The Rapture* 7-17, 85-87); (3) pessimism (*The Late* . . . vii-viii; *The Rapture* 174-76; *Combat Faith* 7-19); (4) the shaking of the foundations (*The Rapture* 174-76); (5) the triumph of God (*The Rapture* 155-56, 174-76); (6) determinism/(10) rewritten history/ (13) historical perspective (*The Late* . . . 169-77; *The Rapture* 5-7, 52-67, 105-106, 155-56, 174-76); (12) prediction (*The Late* . . . 8-16, 40-47, *Combat Faith* 106). These very obvious apocalyptic characteristics are found throughout his books.

Even though Lindsey would picture himself as one using the entire Bible, his overuse of the apocalyptic texts such as Ezeq 36-38, the books of Dan and Rev, Matt 24, I Thes 4, I Cor 15 and the crisis texts of II Tim 3-4, II Pet 2, II Thes 2, reflect the fact that he is attuned to only one literary genre. Also, his understanding of prophecy is limited to that of prediction.

Hal Lindsey is an apocalypticist with a dispensational premillennialist view, a strong advocacy for a militant defense of the faith and a view of the separation of the true believer from the world. This theological perspective also has its effect for contemporary Fundamentalism. For example, because world history is determined and since the world is in such a pessimistic state there is essentially nothing which humankind can possibly do to help itself: humankind, whether it be an individual, a government, an agency, or governments trying to work together, is basically impotent. For Lindsey, as a Fundamentalist and an apocalypticist, history is the working out of a pre-determined plan. Why bother working against apartheid, the nuclear arms race, economic injustices? Why bother taking a stand on the ecology, peace, or world hunger? Nothing that humankind can do can change the direction of the world. The only thing that matters is that one has faith in what God has done through Jesus Christ. One stands as an individual with no responsibility or culpability to the world or one's fellow person or the church. Essentially, the church consists of those who are united through their faith in Jesus Christ. Lindsey believes that the Sermon on the Mount does not apply until after Christ comes again. Where is the Our Father for Lindsey?

<sup>5</sup>Leon Morris, *Apocalyptic* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1972) 34-67.

Fundamentalists today, like Falwell and Lindsey, believe we are in an age of apostasy just as at the beginning of the century and it can only mean that the end is near. Likewise, their serious approach and interpretation of the Bible against the background of dispensational premillennialism offers consolation to many. Due to the influence of Calvinism, Fundamentalists are able to move from being separatists some of the time to being involved in politics at other times. Recently, the work of Bellah and others indicates that utilitarian individualism and withdrawal into private spirituality are alive and well in our society. These features of our society provide a support base for the future of Fundamentalism and its sub-culture.

GERALD GRACE and STEPHEN BOSSO

*St. Vincent de Paul Regional Seminary, Boyton Beach, Florida*