

The Journal of  
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History

Volume 102 • Number 1 Spring/Summer 2024

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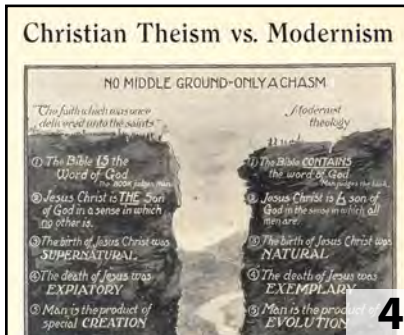
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# The Journal of Presbyterian History

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Front cover: Faculty, Grove City Bible Conference, 1910. Grove City College Archives.

Back cover: (Top left) Harry Emerson Fosdick, about 1922. (Top right) Painting of Isaac Ketler. (Bottom) Insert from *Fundamentalism vs. Liberalism... A Letter to Rev. Harry Emerson Fosdick*, 1923.

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## Editors' Message

### In This Issue

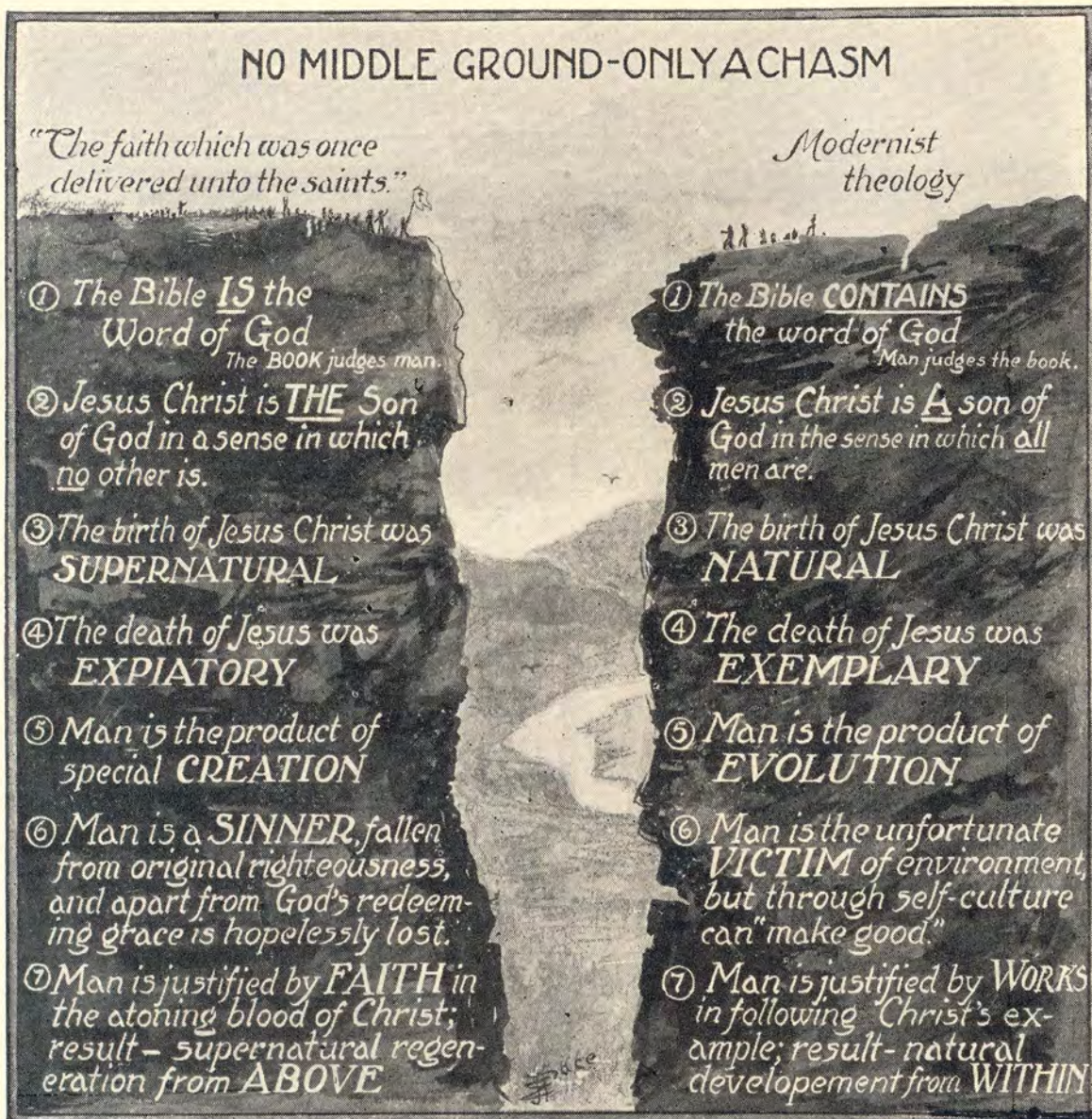
One hundred years ago Presbyterians across the United States were embroiled in a wrenching fight about the very substance and meaning of their faith. Historians have often written about the fundamentalist-modernist controversy as one that pitted doctrinal conservatives against those who were willing to accommodate Christianity to modernity. Bradley J. Longfield's essay reintroduces us to the life and ministry of one of this infamous conflict's most influential characters. Harry Emerson Fosdick's 1922 sermon, "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?," remains a defining statement of the modernist position. While a Baptist himself, Fosdick was the pastor of New York City's First Presbyterian Church when he delivered this famous address. He would go on in 1930 to become the founding minister at The Riverside Church, which quickly became known as a bastion of Liberal Protestantism. Fosdick is remembered as a partisan modernist, but as Longfield points out, "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" in fact called for a "spirit of tolerance and Christian liberty" to prevail within the evangelical churches—of which, notably, Fosdick considered himself a part. It was the fundamentalists' exclusionary definition of a true Christian, even more so than their traditional ways of reading the Bible, that he found unacceptable.

Such deep-seated ecumenism had long been a defining feature of the evangelical tradition. P. C. Kemeny's piece illustrates this fact through what might strike many today as the unlikely story of Isaac Ketler. As President of Grove City College, Ketler maintained a traditional faith in the "integrity of the Word of God" even as he hosted Bible conferences that featured a wide variety of theological perspectives. In 1908 he went so far as to give a pro-Social Gospel address at Union Theological Seminary, a theological school which would have already struck many conservatives as renegade to say the least.

Ketler did not live to see the height of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy, but his story nevertheless complicates how we think about the history of American Protestantism. If evangelicalism and ecumenism no longer go hand in hand, it is because the neo-evangelicals had, by the 1940s, successfully wrested the evangelical label away from the likes of Fosdick. They had grand cultural ambitions but scorned the big-tent faith of their Protestant forebears. That big tent would endure in the Mainline, which has too often been treated as synonymous with Liberal Protestantism. The reality was always much more complex. *The Journal of Presbyterian History* has issued a call for short think pieces on the history of Mainline/Ecumenical Protestantism. We are eager to sustain the rethinking of these stories that is already illustrated in Longfield's and Kemeny's pieces.

In this issue we forgo our usual installment of "Our Documentary Heritage," even as we launch an expanded book review section. Much of the credit for the latter goes to Casey Smith, PhD candidate at Princeton Theological Seminary, whose remarkable contributions as editorial assistant have made a lasting impact on the *Journal*. *P*

# Christian Theism vs. Modernism



Reprinted by Courtesy of Moody Bible Institute, Chicago, Ill.

B.

## On Which Side of the Chasm Are You?

Insert that accompanied *Fundamentalism vs. Liberalism, Evangelicalism vs. Rationalism, Christian Theism vs. Modernism, Old Theology vs. New Theology: A Letter to Rev. Harry Emerson Fosdick, D.D.* by Bible Champion editor, Rev. William H. Bates, D.D. (Reading, PA?, 1923).

# “Shall the Fundamentalists Win?”: A Centennial Anniversary Retrospective

By Bradley J. Longfield

*In May of 1922, renowned liberal Baptist, Harry Emerson Fosdick, preached the most famous sermon of his career, “Shall the Fundamentalists Win?” in First Presbyterian Church, New York City. Later described as a “plea for good will,” the sermon kicked off the fundamentalist-modernist conflict in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. The conflict, which would profoundly influence the development of American Presbyterianism in the next century, resulted in the church broadening its doctrinal boundaries and set the stage for growing divisions between liberal and conservative Presbyterians in the coming century.*

By May 21, 1922, Harry Emerson Fosdick, a liberal Baptist minister who had been preaching since 1918 by special arrangement at First Presbyterian Church, New York City, had had enough. Spurred by the increasing criticism of conservative Baptists and Presbyterians over such issues as biblical authority, foreign missions, and evolution, Fosdick decided to launch a counter-offensive. Following the sermon he preached that day, “Shall the Fundamentalists Win?”, American Protestantism, particularly American Presbyterianism, would never be the same.

This day had been a long time coming. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. (PCUSA) had witnessed growing tension between an increasingly assertive liberal movement and its more theologically conservative siblings. Though Union Theological Seminary in New York, which leaned clearly to the theological left, had broken official ties with the PCUSA in 1892, it continued to train many candidates for ministry in the

Presbyterian Church and had a powerful influence on New York Presbyterians. In addition to acceptance of historical criticism of the Scriptures, liberals insisted that theology must accommodate to the intellectual currents of the time, and they stressed a high view of humanity, the authority of religious experience, and the importance of ethics over doctrine. Indeed, by the 1920s, New York Presbytery was the most aggressively liberal presbytery in the nation.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast, Princeton Theological Seminary across the Hudson in New Jersey, remained staunchly orthodox and had had an important influence on efforts by conservative Presbyterians to resist liberal encroachments. In 1892, the General Assembly of the PCUSA adopted a deliverance that affirmed the Princeton doctrine of biblical inerrancy, claiming, “Our church holds that the inspired Word, as it came from God, is without error.”<sup>2</sup> Then, in 1910 and 1916, disturbed by the liberal views of some ministerial candidates, the General Assembly affirmed that all candidates for ordination should be able to affirm

the inerrancy of Scripture and the virgin birth, substitutionary atonement, miracle-working power, and bodily resurrection of Christ.<sup>3</sup> While theological moderates were able to help keep the peace between liberals and conservatives prior to World War I, in the midst of the cultural crisis that followed the war, these tensions exploded in the fundamentalist-modernist conflict.

In retrospect, Fosdick was an unlikely candidate to precipitate a major crisis in the Presbyterian Church. Fosdick had been born in upstate New York in 1878, baptized at the Westfield, New York, Baptist Church at the age of seven, and educated at Colgate University and Hamilton and Union Theological Seminaries, before being ordained at the Madison Avenue Baptist Church in 1903.<sup>4</sup>

A “short, stocky, dynamic figure,” Fosdick was called to the First Baptist Church in the New York suburb of Montclair, New Jersey, and spent the next eleven years establishing himself as a vibrant preacher, opponent of beverage alcohol, popular author, and upcoming leader of liberal Christianity. Many of Fosdick’s

**Bradley J. Longfield** is Professor of Church History at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa. His works include *Presbyterians and American Culture: A History* and *The Presbyterian Controversy: Fundamentalists, Modernists, and Moderates*.



Harry Emerson Fosdick, about 1922. (Bain News Service photo, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, LC-B2-6368-9 [P&P]).

books, based on sermons or lectures, introduced him to the nation as a voice to be reckoned with.<sup>5</sup> The Union Seminary administration, impressed with the increasing prominence of their alumnus in Montclair, appointed Fosdick as lecturer in Baptist Principles and Polity in 1908 and instructor in Homiletics in 1911.<sup>6</sup>

Fosdick's success in pulpit and print resulted in his appointment to Union's newly established Morris K. Jessup Professorship of Practical Theology in 1915.<sup>7</sup> In his inaugural address he argued that "the staggering problem of the modern minister" was that "the historic sense of the Scriptures is cast in forms of thought that does not make modern sense at all."<sup>8</sup> As such, in his English Bible courses he sought to translate the "ancient and often outgrown ways of thinking used in Scripture" into the "abiding truths and experiences which those ways of thinking enshrined." In this he captured a key to his modernist theology, the need for theological accommodation to modern culture, that found expression in all his work.<sup>9</sup>

Though Fosdick would later become a pacifist, in the 1910s he was a fervent supporter of American

intervention in World War I, and served as a pastor for the troops under the auspices of the YMCA.<sup>10</sup> He summarized his thoughts after the war in an article published in *Atlantic Monthly* in 1919, "The Trenches and the Church at Home."<sup>11</sup> In the essay, Fosdick argued that since soldiers, having experienced the war, would never accept the doctrines and mores of traditional Christianity, the church needed to abandon old doctrines and mores and "make some vital changes in their life."<sup>12</sup>

Clarence Macartney, conservative pastor at Arch Street Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, could not let such sentiments go unchallenged. He wrote:

If men like Dr. Fosdick have ceased to feel the grip of Christian truth, we shall be sorry because of that fact; we regret their falling out of the ranks. But when they call upon the church to reform herself by abandoning all that is distinctively Christian in her teaching, and put this demand of their own into the mouth of lads returning home from the battlefields of Europe, it is the privilege and duty of those who love the church and would be loyal to their Master to let men know what they think and feel.<sup>13</sup>

In the coming years, Macartney would continue to let Fosdick know exactly what he thought and felt.

In 1918, Old First, University Place, and Madison Square Presbyterian Churches in Manhattan decided to merge as many congregational members moved uptown, leading to declining membership.<sup>14</sup> The retirement of the pastors of each church left an opening, and Fosdick, at first invited to preach as a pulpit supply, was asked to become a permanent guest preacher when John Timothy Stone, Pastor of Fourth Presbyterian Church, Chicago, turned down an invitation.<sup>15</sup> Many prominent members of the church were members of the board at Union Theological Seminary, so, though Fosdick was a Baptist, the arrangement seemed a natural fit. This allowed Fosdick to maintain his full-time position at Union and to avoid adherence to the Westminster Confession and Presbyterian polity required of all Presbyterian pastors.<sup>16</sup> The Presbytery of New York, dominated by liberal Presbyterians, was happy to welcome Fosdick into their midst.<sup>17</sup>

Fosdick's preaching drew throngs Sunday after Sunday. It was not unusual for lines of hopeful worshipers to extend around the block while church members were seated.<sup>18</sup> Fosdick's increasing prominence was recognized in the early 1920s by the bestowing of honorary doctorates from New York University,

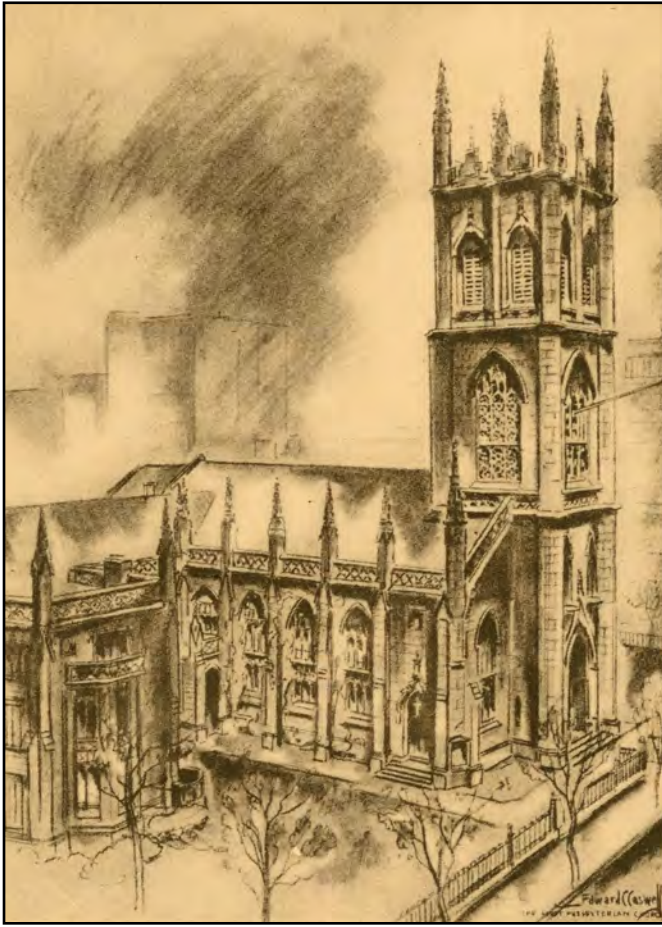


# Shall the Fundamentalists Win?

BY  
HARRY EMERSON FOSDICK, D.D.

A SERMON PREACHED AT THE  
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, NEW YORK  
MAY 21, 1922

(Stenographically Reported by Margaret Renton)



The First Presbyterian Church in the City of New York, Artvue Postcard Co., no date, PHS postcard collection, RG 428.

Brown, Yale, and Glasgow, among others.<sup>19</sup> But not all within the Presbyterian and Baptist folds embraced Fosdick with such enthusiasm.

As early as 1916, J. Gresham Machen, then an assistant professor at Princeton Seminary, had condemned Fosdick's preaching as "dreadful! ... undogmatic Christianity."<sup>20</sup> Then, as previously noted, Clarence Macartney had roundly criticized Fosdick's *Atlantic Monthly* article, "The Trenches and the Church at Home."<sup>21</sup> Finally, in early 1922, Presbyterian layman and three-time presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan went head-to-head with Fosdick in the *New York Times*, debating biological evolution.<sup>22</sup>

Conservative opposition to Modernism was also a growing force among Northern Baptists in the years after World War I. In 1920, 150 Baptist leaders warned of "an immediate and urgent duty to restate, reaffirm, and reemphasize the fundamentals of our New Testament faith." And in June 1920, Baptist Curtis Lee Laws coined the term "fundamentalist" to describe those "who mean to do battle royal for the Fundamentals [of the faith]."<sup>23</sup> Despite such activity, it was not until

1921, when Fosdick travelled to Japan and China to speak to missionaries, that Fosdick later claimed, he "saw fundamentalism for the first time in its full intensity. The missionary community," he continued, "was split wide open—on one side some of the largest personalities and the most intelligent views one could meet anywhere; on the other, such narrowness and obscurantism as seemed downright incredible."<sup>24</sup>

## Engaging the Issue

Both denominations with which Fosdick was associated, Baptist and Presbyterian, had significant and articulate coalitions of militant conservatives or fundamentalists on the one hand, and liberals or modernists on the other. On May 21, 1922, Fosdick decided to confront the growing division in what would become the most famous sermon of his career, "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" "This morning we are to think of the Fundamentalist Controversy which threatens to divide the American churches," he opened, "as though already they were not sufficiently split and riven."<sup>25</sup> While liberals, he insisted, were sincere evangelical Christians who sought to reconcile "the new knowledge" in science, history, and religion with "the old faith," fundamentalists were intolerant conservatives who sought to "shut ... the doors of Christian fellowship" against those who would modify traditional doctrines.<sup>26</sup> In the face of a world with "colossal problems, which must be solved in Christ's name and for Christ's sake," Fosdick insisted, it was "immeasurable folly" for fundamentalists to seek to drive liberals from the church.<sup>27</sup>

Most influential among Presbyterians and Baptists, fundamentalists had particularly drawn the line, Fosdick allowed, at such doctrines as the inerrancy of the scripture, the virgin birth, substitutionary atonement, and the second coming of Christ.<sup>28</sup> Fosdick specifically addressed all but the third of these "opinions," comparing the "points of view" of fundamentalist Christians with their more progressive siblings.<sup>29</sup> While fundamentalists argued that the virgin birth was a "historical fact," Fosdick claimed, liberals, while sure that Jesus "came specially from God," could not accept this "biological miracle."<sup>30</sup> While fundamentalists insisted on the inerrancy of the scriptures, liberals understood the Bible "as the record of the progressive unfolding of the character of God."<sup>31</sup> While fundamentalists looked to the second coming of Christ as "literally coming, externally on the clouds of heaven," liberals, having embraced theistic evolution, believed Christ would

come as God's "will and principles" were "worked out ... in human life and institutions."<sup>32</sup>

Since these two groups coexisted in the church and fundamentalists would not succeed in driving liberals out of the church, Fosdick insisted, what was needed was a "spirit of tolerance and Christian liberty."<sup>33</sup> If the church was going to attract the young, educated members of society, it would have to abandon its infighting. It was shameful, he argued, "that the Christian church should be quarreling over little matters when the world is dying of great needs."<sup>34</sup> "Never in this church," he told the members of First Presbyterian Church, "have I caught one accent of intolerance. God keep us always so and ever-increasing areas of the Christian fellowship; intellectually hospitable, open-minded, liberty-loving, fair, [and] tolerant."<sup>35</sup>

If the sermon had remained within the walls of First Presbyterian Church, reaction might have been muted. But the sermon, slightly edited, was quickly published in various journals under a new title, "The New Knowledge and the Christian Faith," and distributed to Protestant clergy across the nation.<sup>36</sup> Conservatives reacted quickly and energetically.

Fosdick later described the sermon as a "plea for good will," but many conservative Presbyterians and Baptists saw only a full-frontal attack on the faith of the church.<sup>37</sup> Though Fosdick did not explicitly endorse any of the liberal doctrines he described, his position was all too clear to those who had witnessed his growing popularity in the preceding years. When Fosdick proclaimed in a Presbyterian pulpit that liberal views of biblical authority or the virgin birth of Christ ought to be tolerated in the church, conservative Presbyterians felt compelled to answer.<sup>38</sup>

Clarence Macartney took up the challenge with the sermon "Shall Unbelief Win?," which was also published and widely distributed.<sup>39</sup> Answering Fosdick point by point, Macartney defended the historicity of the virgin birth as a doctrine declared by the scriptures and articulated in the Westminster Confession, the doctrinal standard of the Presbyterian Church.<sup>40</sup> The Scriptures, he insisted, are the inspired and authoritative Word of God, and though premillenarian Christians, criticized by Fosdick, might be mistaken in their biblical interpretation, the Scripture's view of the second coming was "something far different from Dr. Fosdick's mild working out of the tangles of life."<sup>41</sup> Liberal Christianity, which sought to strip the supernaturalism from the Christian faith, Macartney concluded, was "slowly secularizing the church and if permitted to go unchecked and



Portrait of J. Gresham Machen, circa 1920. (RG 414, PHS).

unchallenged, will ere long produce in our churches a new kind of Christianity, a Christianity without worship, without God, and without Jesus Christ."<sup>42</sup>

Having sounded the alarm, Macartney rallied conservative forces in the Presbytery of Philadelphia, which asked the PCUSA General Assembly to "direct the Presbytery of New York to take such action as will require the preaching and teaching in the First Presbyterian Church of New York to conform to the system of doctrine taught in the [Westminster] Confession of Faith."<sup>43</sup> Fosdick had challenged conservative Christians to tolerate liberal theological views in the church, but conservative Presbyterians, seeing a profound threat to the faith and culture, would hear none of it. Having convinced the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. to endorse biblical inerrancy in 1892 and endorse the five fundamentals in 1910 and 1916, they were not about to back down now.

At the same time New York Baptists, led by fundamentalist pastor John Roach Straton, led a countercharge against Fosdick. Straton, like Macartney, preached a sermon countering Fosdick's sermon, calling on "all good soldiers of Jesus" to "do battle" against the forces of modernism in general and Fosdick in particular.<sup>44</sup> Though the battle over the sermon would play out in the Presbyterian Church, Straton and conservative New York Baptists would offer their moral support to conservative Presbyterians in the years ahead.<sup>45</sup>

With the stage thus set, William Jennings Bryan began testing the waters for a run as moderator of the General Assembly in the spring of 1923. He announced his candidacy just before the assembly convened in May.<sup>46</sup> While the Fosdick controversy

was expected to be the major issue to confront the assembly, Bryan's candidacy suddenly thrust his campaign against biological evolution into the spotlight.

Bryan ended up losing the battle for moderator to Charles Wishart, president of the College of Wooster, which taught biological evolution as part of its curriculum. Even so, Bryan took his anti-evolution crusade to the floor of the assembly, where his motion to restrict funding to any school that taught Darwinism was defeated in favor of a more moderate substitute motion.<sup>47</sup>

But the fight over evolution was only a mild prelude to the debate concerning Fosdick. The Bills and Overtures Committee, which considered the overture to discipline First Church, brought both a majority and minority report to the floor. The majority report recommended no action, since the Presbytery of New York was already investigating the matter. The minority report, signed by only one committee member, reaffirmed the five fundamentals, the inerrancy of Scripture and the virgin birth, substitutionary atonement, miracle-working power, and bodily resurrection of Christ, and directed the Presbytery of New York "to take such action ... as will require the preaching and teaching in the First Presbyterian Church of New York City to conform to the system of doctrines taught in the Confession of Faith."<sup>48</sup>

A heated and energetic debate on the motions before the assembly consumed the body for the next five hours. Those who favored the majority report argued that any action of the assembly would be inappropriate given New York Presbytery's ongoing investigation. But opponents of Fosdick saw little reason to believe that the liberal New York Presbytery would seriously address the doctrinal anomalies in Fosdick's sermon.<sup>49</sup>

Clarence Macartney, who was a commissioner to the assembly, closed the debate for the minority report. He warned the body that compromise could not stop this conflict. This was not merely a denominational fight, he insisted. Rather, Macartney declared, this was a national issue:

[T]he eyes of the whole church and the whole nation are upon this Assembly. They are waiting to hear what you will say. If you answer the Philadelphia overture in the affirmative you rejoice the hearts and strengthen the arms of thousands of followers of Christ throughout the land. ... But if you answer the overture in the negative, you disappoint thousands of praying men and women, you discourage them in their battle for Christ and his kingdom.<sup>50</sup>

Bryan, noting the profound import of this decision, demanded that the final vote be taken by roll call.<sup>51</sup> The minority report passed by a vote of 439 to 359.<sup>52</sup>

Friends and allies of Fosdick could not tolerate such a decision. On the closing day of the assembly, eighty-five commissioners, led by William P. Merrill, pastor of the Brick Presbyterian Church in New York, protested the decision of the assembly, claiming that "the assembly's decision was based on unsubstantiated allegations, addressed a matter not properly before the body, and sought to impose upon church officers 'doctrinal tests other than, or in addition to, those solemnly agreed upon in the Constitution of our church.'" At the same time, Henry Sloane Coffin, pastor of Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York, publicly declared that he did not accept the five fundamentals enumerated in the report and claimed, "I feel I owe it to my congregation and to the Presbytery to state plainly that if any action is taken which removed Dr. Fosdick from the pulpit of First Church on account of his interpretation of the Christian Gospel, I cannot honestly be allowed to remain in the pulpit of Madison Avenue Church, for I fully share his point of view."<sup>53</sup> While differences had been growing in the church for decades, differing responses to Fosdick's sermon divided the church into opposing factions. Modernists, convinced that they, like Fosdick, had every right to remain in the church, were not going to sit still in the face of fundamentalist opposition.

In the wake of the General Assembly, supporters of Fosdick quickly set out to galvanize their constituency. In June, thirty-three ministers gathered in Syracuse, New York, and, using as its foundation a paper written by Robert Hastings Nichols, a professor at Auburn Theological Seminary, adopted a statement condemning the assembly's decision on theological and ecclesiastical grounds. Over the following six months, this paper evolved into *An Affirmation Designed to Safeguard the Unity and Liberty of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America*, commonly called the Auburn Affirmation. The Affirmation argued that Presbyterians had long enjoyed doctrinal liberty; averred that doctrinal declarations such as the endorsement of the five fundamentals could be "declared only by concurrent action of the General Assembly and the presbyteries;" and insisted that "the assembly's action against First Church, New York, was irresponsible, unpastoral, and unconstitutional."<sup>54</sup> "In the face of a world so desperately in need of a united testimony to the gospel of Christ," the document closed, this ecclesiastical infighting was a travesty.<sup>55</sup> The Affirmation was published with 150 signatories in January 1924, and would be republished in May with over 1,000 signatories.<sup>56</sup>

Meanwhile the Presbytery of New York pursued its investigation of Fosdick.<sup>57</sup> When Edgar Work, chair of the investigative committee, privately asked Fosdick to revise some of his claims in the sermon, Fosdick adamantly refused. He wrote to Work, “I am profoundly sorry that the sermon has been misinterpreted; I am profoundly sorry that it has caused disturbance; but I cannot honestly be sorry at all that I preached the sermon. When I get to heaven, I expect it to be one of the stars in my crown.”<sup>58</sup> In a public letter to the committee, Fosdick held fast to his modernist commitments, claiming he sought to “lead men to the Scriptures as the standard and norm of religious experience—the progressive self-revelation of God in the history of a unique people, culminating in Christ.”<sup>59</sup>

In February of 1924, the presbytery adopted the report of the Work committee indicating that, while it allowed the title of Fosdick’s sermon was “objectionable,” and preaching the sermon perhaps unwise, essentially exonerated Fosdick of any wrongdoing and proposed no change in his position in the church.<sup>60</sup> This action of the presbytery followed its approval in June 1923 of two ministerial candidates, Henry P. Van Dusen and Cedric O. Lehman, who refused to accept the virgin birth of Christ, in direct contradiction of the directives of the 1923 General Assembly.<sup>61</sup> Militant conservatives, offended by both these actions, responded accordingly.

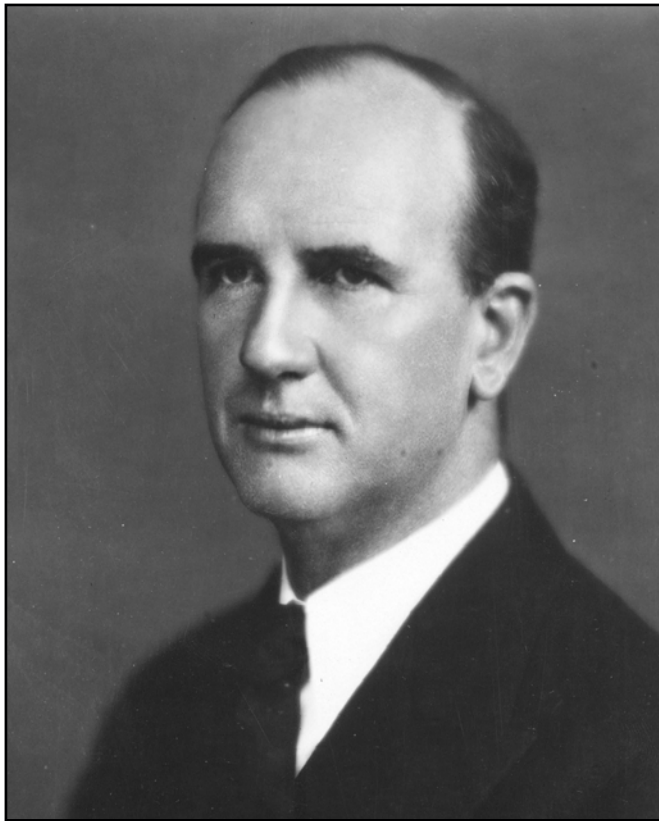
Walter Buchanan, pastor of Broadway Presbyterian Church, along with twenty-one other members of the presbytery, filed a complaint to the General Assembly alleging that the presbytery’s decision failed to fulfill the mandate of the 1923 assembly and that Fosdick’s preaching, contrary to the presbytery’s conclusion, did violate the doctrinal standards of the church.<sup>62</sup> Clarence Macartney, likewise outraged, drew the lines as clearly as possible. The root of the conflict, he told a rally in Pittsburgh, lay in “the presence in the Protestant churches of two groups, calling and professing themselves Christians, who hold views as to Christ and the Scriptures so divergent and so irreconcilable as to constitute two different religions. With two such groups in the same church,” he insisted, “collision and conflict are inevitable.” “The question now before the Presbyterian Church,” he concluded, “is not merely, Have ministers a right to interpret the Confession of Faith to suit themselves, rejecting and accepting what they please? But something far more than that. It is (think of it! This in the Presbyterian Church!): Can the minister of the Presbyterian Church deny with impunity the most carefully recorded facts of the Gospel about the Lord Jesus Christ?”<sup>63</sup>



William Jennings Bryan at the White House, 1923. (Harris & Ewing, photographer, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, LC-H234- A-7495.)

In addition to the appeal of the Fosdick decision and the licensing of Van Dusen and Lehman by New York Presbytery, the Presbytery of Philadelphia, in March 1924, passed an overture to the General Assembly that no one who could not affirm the “five fundamentals” would be allowed to “serve as a member or paid officer of any Board or General Council of the Presbyterian Church.” Concurrently, the Presbytery of Cincinnati called the Auburn Affirmation to the attention of the assembly to encourage the assembly to address the document. All eyes were on the General Assembly in Grand Rapids in May 1924, to see whether or not the fundamentalists would win.<sup>64</sup>

Clarence Macartney was elected moderator of the assembly by a close vote, leading New York liberals to despair. But they were hardly in a mood to retreat. While William Merrill, liberal pastor of the Brick Church in New York, was ousted from the Board of Foreign Missions, the assembly chose not to address



Clarence Edward Noble Macartney, about 1930 (RG 414, PHS).

the Auburn Affirmation. On New York Presbytery's licensing of two candidates who could not affirm the virgin birth of Jesus, the assembly sent the matter back to the Synod of New York.<sup>65</sup>

Regarding Fosdick, the assembly chose to move the discussion away from matters of theology to matters of polity. So, rather than discuss the doctrine proposed in "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" the assembly decided that the real problem was Fosdick's unusual relationship with First Presbyterian Church, New York. It argued,

If he [Fosdick] desires to occupy a Presbyterian pulpit for an extended period of time he should enter our Church through the regular method and become subject to the jurisdiction and authority of the Church. ... We therefore recommend that the Presbytery of New York be instructed, through its committee or through the session of the First Presbyterian Church, to take up with Dr. Fosdick this question to the end that he may determine whether it is his pleasure to enter the Presbyterian Church and thus be in a regular relationship with the First Presbyterian Church of New York as one of its pastors.<sup>66</sup>

While the conservative Mark Mathews moved that Fosdick be removed immediately, the assembly adopted a more moderate stance and sought to let Fosdick determine his fate.<sup>67</sup>

Henry Sloane Coffin and the liberals of New York Presbytery were overjoyed by this invitation. But Fosdick was less than happy. When he received the news in Scotland, his suspicions were aroused.<sup>68</sup> He later wrote to Coffin, "I simply could not make the sort of even formal assent required of all candidates for your denomination's ministry. I would choke, for, rightly or wrongly, I should feel as if I were lying like a rogue."<sup>69</sup> And to George Alexander, Fosdick's colleague at First Church, he wrote, "The same men who have been attacking me will attack me still. Hosts of Presbyterians do not want me to be a Presbyterian; they want me out. From the day I come up for ordination and Dr. Buchanan and others begin asking my views on the Virgin Birth and like matters, the trouble would begin."<sup>70</sup> Fosdick, a "convinced interdenominationalist," was constitutionally opposed to creedal subscription and, though he had many liberal Presbyterian friends, could not, in good conscience, join them in affirming the Westminster Confession, the doctrinal standard of the Presbyterian Church.<sup>71</sup> No, he would, he insisted, have to resign.

Though leaders of the congregation argued that virtually "the entire membership would support the Church in declining to accept his resignation," Fosdick would not encourage schism from the denomination.<sup>72</sup> While delaying tactics were used to postpone the decision and perhaps convince Fosdick to stay, Fosdick submitted his letter of resignation on September 5, 1924, and on October 22, the congregation accepted it. Fosdick's last Sunday at First Church, the presbytery determined, would be March 1, 1925.<sup>73</sup>

In his last sermon, Fosdick was unrepentant. He declared:

These are the things we have stood for: tolerance, an inclusive church, the right to think religion through in modern terms, the social applications of the principles of Jesus, the abiding verities and experiences of the gospel. And these are right. ... We have stated an issue that no man nor denomination is strong enough to brush aside. ... We say farewell to each other, but let no man say farewell to the things we have been standing for!<sup>74</sup>

In the wake of the resignation, many in First Church continued to hope for a return of their beloved

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# AN AFFIRMATION

designed to safeguard the unity and liberty of the  
Presbyterian Church in the United States of America

with all signatures and  
the Note Supplementary

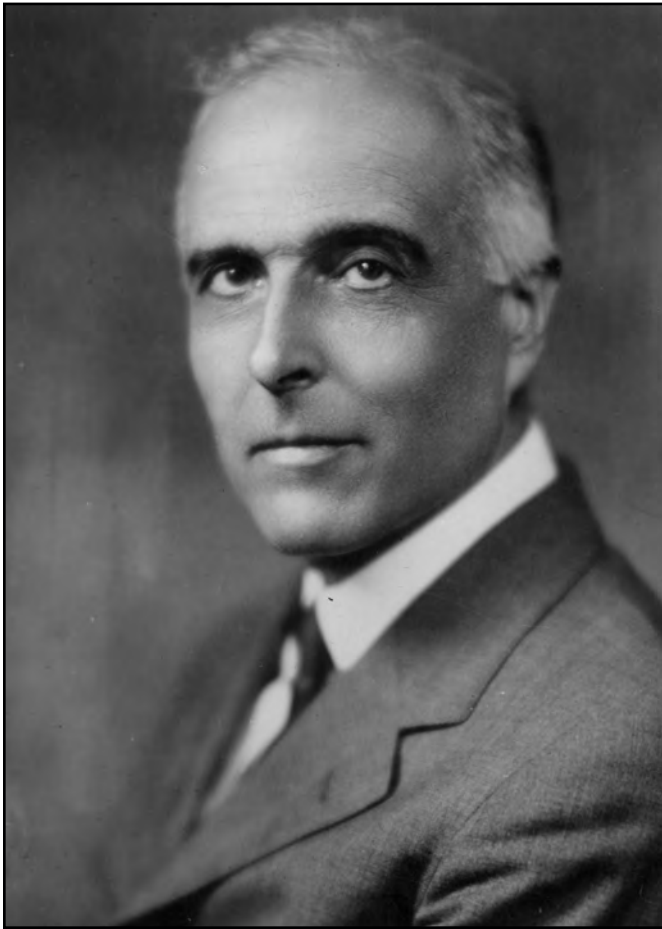
May 5, 1924

*Ex libris*

*James Shackelford Dauerty.*

The Jacobs Press  
Auburn, N. Y.

This copy of the Auburn Affirmation is from the library of Rev. James Shackelford Dauerty, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Moorestown, New Jersey, from 1918 to 1945.



Henry Sloane Coffin (1877-1954), undated. RG 414, PHS.

preacher, but Fosdick, encouraged by the Baptist layman John D. Rockefeller Jr., accepted the call of Park Avenue Baptist Church (while continuing as a professor at Union Seminary) as a first step to becoming pastor of the newly conceived Riverside Church.<sup>75</sup> Fosdick knew that while his sermon had precipitated, it had not caused, the conflict. And though many were happy to have Fosdick out of the denomination, the controversy that his sermon occasioned continued unabated while he took a sabbatical overseas.<sup>76</sup>

### The Conflict Continues

Both liberals and conservatives pressed their positions in the wider Presbyterian church before the 1925 General Assembly. Liberals published three pamphlets in the spring, most notably “Freedom in the Presbyterian Pulpit” by Fosdick’s good friend Henry Sloane Coffin.<sup>77</sup> Here Coffin reiterated the stance that liberalism was the only live option for thinking Christians, that liberals only wanted freedom long allowed in the church, and that separation would only harm the mission of the church.<sup>78</sup>

Conversely, Macartney continued to warn the church, “We are not contending for Presbyterian peculiarities, but for the great facts of the Everlasting Gospel.”<sup>79</sup> And Machen, the Princeton professor who had become a prominent leader in the struggle, warned in pulpit and print about the modernist threat to Christianity.<sup>80</sup>

The 1925 General Assembly meeting in Columbus, Ohio, elected Princeton Professor Charles Erdman as moderator. Erdman was conservative theologically but tolerant of theological differences, and had the support of modernists in the church.<sup>81</sup> Liberals from the Presbytery of New York, smarting from Fosdick’s resignation and angry about the repeated challenges to its decisions concerning the licensing of candidates, had requested that the assembly “determine by its Judicial Commission, the proper status of the Presbytery in its Constitutional powers in the matter of the licensing of candidates.” As a case study, the licensing of Henry P. Van Dusen and Cedric O. Lehman, who could not affirm the virgin birth of Christ, was now before the assembly again.<sup>82</sup> Coffin met privately with Erdman before any decisions were handed down and warned him that a decision against the Presbytery of New York “would cause a split in the church.”<sup>83</sup>

When the General Assembly’s Permanent Judicial Commission ruled that the Presbytery of New York had erred in licensing the two candidates who could not affirm the virgin birth, liberals moved from defense to offense. Coffin read a prepared statement insisting that the Presbytery of New York would “stand firmly upon the Constitution of the Church ... which forbids the Assembly to change or add to the conditions for entrance upon or continuance in the holy ministry, without submitting such amendment to the Presbyteries for concurrent action.”<sup>84</sup> As one observer noted, the atmosphere “was charged with the danger of revolt and schism.”<sup>85</sup>

Determined to avert such an outcome, Erdman surrendered the moderator’s chair and moved the appointment of a commission to study the causes of unrest in the church and report to the next General Assembly “to the end that the purity, peace, unity, and progress of the Church may be assured.”<sup>86</sup> Though some fundamentalists, such as Bryan and Mark Mathews, supported this plan, others, notably Machen, were not pleased. Liberals, though unhappy with the decision of the Permanent Judicial Commission, saw the formation of the Special Commission of 1925 as a promising sign for the future of liberalism in the church.<sup>87</sup>

When the commission reported in 1926, the die was cast. The report stated that there was no radically liberal party in the church and agreed with the Auburn



## INTRODUCTORY NOTE

THE Correspondence Committee, a group of some thirty Presbyterian ministers from coast to coast, united in a common desire to maintain the unity, liberty and peace of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, has appointed a sub-committee, of which the Rev. James E. Clarke, D.D., of Nashville, Tennessee, is chairman, to issue a series of pamphlets with these great ends in view.

The officers of the Correspondence Committee are: Chairman, Rev. Wendell Prime Keeler, Yonkers, N. Y.; Secretary, Rev. Prof. Robert Hastings Nichols, D.D., Auburn, N. Y.; Treasurer, Rev. Philip S. Bird, D.D., Utica, N. Y.

This pamphlet is No. 1 of the Committee's series. Copies may be had by addressing the secretary, at 10 Nelson St., Auburn, N. Y., for 3 cents a copy or \$1.50 a hundred copies.

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The author of this pamphlet, the Rev. Henry Sloane Coffin, D.D., is pastor of the Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church of New York City. The pamphlet is a sermon preached in this church on November 16, 1924.

2

## FREEDOM IN THE PRESBYTERIAN PULPIT

I Corinthians 9:1.—“Am I not free?”

Let us take as our text the words with which St. Paul, after speaking of the obligations which bind him in the fellowship of the Church of his day, asks: “Am I not free?”

Recent events have turned the thought of all Protestant Christians, and particularly of Presbyterians, to the questions of freedom in the pulpit. The determined effort, on the one hand, of a large and dominant group in our Church to exclude from the ministry any who do not share their interpretation of the Gospel, and on the other hand the refusal of a most brilliant and useful preacher to accept the vows required of Presbyterian ministers on the ground that to subscribe an ancient creed and interpret it in modern terms is “perilous to honesty and hampering to the free leadership of the Spirit,” make it fitting that all our people should know what our constitution requires in this matter of their ministers and other office-bearers. If a young man is thinking of giving himself to the ministry, to what must he subscribe? If men are elected elders or deacons, what does the vow exacted of them imply? If one is a member of a Presbyterian Church, what freedom of teaching may he expect from its pulpit?

At the Reformation the uppermost question in the minds of Christians was, Where is the supreme authority in religion? The Roman Catholic answered, “In the Church speaking

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“Freedom in the Presbyterian Pulpit: A Sermon by Henry Sloane Coffin” (Auburn, NY: The Jacobs Press, 1925), pages 2-3.

Affirmation that only the General Assembly acting concurrently with the presbyteries could change the constitution. While the report did not draw any conclusions from this yet, the meaning was apparent to all: the five fundamentals were non-binding on the presbyteries. The commission asked the assembly to receive the report and extend its mission for another year, which it did overwhelmingly.<sup>88</sup>

The following year the commission explicitly drew out the lesson from the previous report: judicial decisions of the General Assembly “cannot be made to rest properly upon a merely declaratory deliverance of a former Assembly.” In short, the five fundamentals declared by the General Assemblies of 1910, 1916, and 1923 were declared nonbinding. Though Fosdick had already moved on to Baptist pastures, tolerance for liberal evangelicals in the Presbyterian Church was, for all intents and purposes, assured.<sup>89</sup>

## Legacy

While related conflicts in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. surrounding Princeton Seminary and foreign missions would continue for the better part of a decade, the major battle precipitated by Fosdick's sermon was resolved by 1927. The ramifications of the conflict and its resolution, however, would continue well into the future.

In his autobiography, published in 1956, Fosdick reflected on the controversy kicked off by his 1922 sermon with these words:

The liberal theology of my generation ... was consciously, deliberately, sometimes desperately trying to adapt Christian thought to, and harmonize it with, the intellectual culture of our time. That was the only way in which we

could save our faith. ... Split clean in two by the conflict between science and contemporary religious thought, we became schizophrenic when we tried to be both Christian traditionalists and modern intellectuals.

Fundamentalists saw that issue and made their choice. ... We, too, saw the issue but found no peace in such obscurantism. We were out to reformulate Christian thinking so that it could take modern knowledge in. We won our battle.<sup>90</sup>

As Fosdick was well aware, the fundamentalists did not win, at least not in the PCUSA. But even so, by the 1930s, he was not quite sure that an unalloyed modernism was any longer a good idea. As the United States witnessed a stock market crash, a deepening economic depression, and the rise of fascism in Europe, many liberals took a turn toward what came to be called neo-orthodoxy with a stronger emphasis on God's transcendence, humanity's sinfulness, the authority of Scripture, and the person and work of Christ. Fosdick did not quite make this turn, but in 1935 he preached the sermon "The Church Must Go Beyond Modernism" to his congregation on Riverside Drive.<sup>91</sup>

In this sermon, Fosdick did not apologize for liberalism, but did allow that liberalism "started by taking the intellectual culture of a particular period as its criterion and then adjusted Christian teaching to that standard," and that therein lay "modernism's tendency toward shallowness."<sup>92</sup> He insisted that the liberal belief "in inevitable progress" was "illusory" and that "Sin is real."<sup>93</sup> "We have adapted and adjusted and accommodated and conceded long enough. We have at times gotten so low down that we talked as though the highest compliment that could be paid Almighty God was that a few scientists believed in him," Fosdick declared.<sup>94</sup> Likewise, he contended that "modernism has too commonly lost its ethical standing-ground and its power of moral attack."<sup>95</sup> And so, while acknowledging the liberal victory in the major northern denominations, he closed:

The future of the churches, if we will have it so, is in the hands of modernism. Therefore let all modernists lift a new battle cry: We must go beyond modernism! And in that new enterprise the watchword will be not, Accommodate yourself to the prevailing culture! but, Stand out from it and challenge it!<sup>96</sup>

The theology of many Presbyterian liberals, such as Fosdick's friend Henry Sloane Coffin, likewise took

a more chastened turn in the middle decades of the twentieth century. "It did not occur to these earnest Christians [the modernists]," Coffin wrote in 1940, "that there might be something faulty in the spirit of their day and in their own ideals."<sup>97</sup>

Indeed, Fosdick, by the 1930s, became increasingly disillusioned with what he called the "undisciplined paganism" of the nation.<sup>98</sup> As historian William Best has recently noted, regular themes in Fosdick's sermons "included excessive drinking, premarital sex, adultery, and 'loose morals.'"<sup>99</sup> Best summarizes,

Fosdick bemoaned that excessive drinking had led to a sex craze, observed on the stage, in movies, and in everyday life. Even within the Christian Church well-crafted "justifications" for sexual promiscuity had emerged, he claimed. Popular culture was the root of the problem, promoting irreligious theories, "sex and cynicism" in a country that had become morally loose, atheistic, and "heathen."<sup>100</sup>

In the sermon "When Life Reaches Its Depth," Fosdick claimed, "our modern world is shot through and through with a gross, debasing paganism that springs from, and is supported by ... irreligion."<sup>101</sup> Given such a view of the culture, it is perhaps no surprise that Fosdick thought modernist theological accommodation to the culture had gone too far.

The decision of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. in the 1920s to abandon the five fundamentals in order to maintain institutional unity did work for a while, and theological cohesion in the mid-twentieth century was provided by the wide adoption of neo-orthodoxy in Presbyterian circles. But by the late twentieth century, the Presbyterian Church, like other mainline or oldline churches, was experiencing significant membership loss. The reasons for this decline are numerous and complex, but one apparent contributor to the malaise of the Presbyterian Church was its unfocused theological identity.

In 1976, sociologist Dean R. Hoge described the United Presbyterian Church (successor to the PCUSA) as "pluralistic and Culture-Affirming" and continued:

The policy [of pluralism] has effectively been in force since the 1920s. Ecclesiastical and creedal statements have been written abstractly enough, or with enough internal pluralism, to include all shades of theology in the denomination. The concept of "mission" has been defined so broadly that its usefulness as a meaningful word is

threatened. One problem with this policy in any denomination is lack of identity. The question Who are we? or What do we believe? Is not satisfactorily answered by a recitation of diverse viewpoints current in the church. Evangelism is barely possible when the identity of the church and its gospel are difficult to state clearly.<sup>102</sup>

As Hoge notes, the theological confusion in the church had its roots in the 1920s when the church, in the wake of Fosdick's sermon, opted for institutional unity rather than shared doctrinal commitments. The General Assembly chose to address the conflict as a matter of polity rather than theology. That is, rather than deciding on the validity of the doctrines enumerated in the five fundamentals, doctrines assailed by Fosdick, the assembly decided that the fundamentals were non-binding without concurrent approval of the presbyteries. As James Moorhead and David McCarthy have shown, as theological pluralism in the church grew, the church increasingly tended to address most controversial issues as questions of polity rather than theology.<sup>103</sup>

Indeed, even in the mid-1950s when church membership was swelling, historian Lefferts Loetscher worried about the ramifications of the church's decision in the 1920s:

In sweeping away by a stroke of interpretation much of the previously exercised power of the General Assembly to define and thus to preserve the church's doctrine, the commission established a principle which has much broader implications than the church has had occasion to draw from it. If the church now has no means of authoritatively defining its faith short of the amending process—which could hardly function in the midst of sharp controversy—ecclesiastical

power is seriously hindered in the future from preventing more radical theological innovations than those discussed in the "five points."<sup>104</sup>

This threat only increased when the church adopted the Confession of 1967 which, as historian James Moorhead argued, "clearly presaged a looser style of confessional identity" and unintentionally "gave a potential charter to redefine Presbyterian theological identity by retail."<sup>105</sup> Indeed, historian David Hollinger has recently noted that the inclusiveness and diversity of liberal or "ecumenical Protestantism" "enabled its community of faith to serve, among its other roles, as a commodious half-way house to what for lack of a better term we can call post-Protestant secularism."<sup>106</sup>

Most fundamentalists in the Presbyterian Church in the wake of the fundamentalist-modernist conflict remained in the denomination and emerged later in the century as neo-evangelicals or evangelicals. For years, in the mid-to-late twentieth century, conservatives and liberals would sit side by side in churches on Sunday morning.<sup>107</sup> But recently, it seems, more and more, liberals and conservatives have sorted themselves out either by congregation or by denomination. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Presbyterian Church in America, Evangelical Presbyterian Church, and Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians have all divided from the more liberal Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).<sup>108</sup> While before Fosdick's sermon in 1922, denominations—Presbyterian, Congregational, Methodist, Baptist, Episcopalian—manifested the major theological divisions in American Protestantism, since that time the differences between conservative and liberal Christians have become far more prominent and solidly ensconced than denominational distinctives. In this, Fosdick's sermon, a self-described "plea for good will," certainly seems to have missed his goal. *ℙ*

### For Further Reading

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> On this and significant aspects of the following see Bradley J. Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy: Fundamentalists, Modernists, and Moderates* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 22ff.

An earlier version of this essay was delivered at First Presbyterian Church, New York City, in May 2022. I thank the pastor, Dr. Greg Stovell, members, and friends of the congregation for their helpful

questions and comments.

<sup>2</sup> *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.* [hereafter *Minutes of GA*] (Philadelphia: Office of the General Assembly, 1892), 2 vols., 1:179-180. See also Lefferts A. Loetscher, *The Broadening Church: A Study of Theological Issues in the Presbyterian Church since 1869* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1954), 56.

<sup>3</sup> Loetscher, *Broadening Church*, 97-99.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Moats Miller, *Harry Emerson Fosdick: Preacher, Pastor, Prophet* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 3-4, 41, 43, 51, 54; Robert T. Handy, *A History of Union Theological Seminary in New York* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 133.

<sup>5</sup> Harry Emerson Fosdick, *Riverside Sermons* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), vii; Miller, *Fosdick*, 56-58, 62, 68-70.

<sup>6</sup> Harry Emerson Fosdick, *The Living of These Days* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956), 112.

<sup>7</sup> Fosdick, *Living of These Days*, 112.

<sup>8</sup> Harry Emerson Fosdick, *A Modern Preacher's Problem in His Use of the Scriptures* (New York: Union Theological Seminary, 1915), 20.

<sup>9</sup> Fosdick, *Living of These Days*, 118.

<sup>10</sup> Miller, *Fosdick*, 79-87.

<sup>11</sup> On Fosdick's pacifism see Miller, *Fosdick*, 490-532.

<sup>12</sup> See Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 113; Harry Emerson Fosdick, "The Trenches and the Church at Home," *Atlantic Monthly* 123 (January 1919), 33.

<sup>13</sup> Clarence E. Macartney, "In the House of My Friends," *Presbyterian*, March 6, 1919, 31; Fosdick, *Living of These Days*, 120-127, 131; Miller, *Fosdick*, 76; William Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976; reprint, New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 238.

<sup>14</sup> Dorothy Ganfield Fowler, *A City Church: The First Presbyterian Church in the City of New York: 1716-1976* (New York: First Presbyterian Church, 1981), 153-155; David Pultz, ed., *A Preaching Ministry: Twenty-One Sermons by Harry Emerson Fosdick* (New York: First Presbyterian Church in the City of New York, 2000), 21.

<sup>15</sup> Miller, *Fosdick*, 93-94.

<sup>16</sup> Fosdick, *Living of These Days*, 132-133.

<sup>17</sup> Miller, *Fosdick*, 95. Many leaders of First Church were members of the Board of Union Seminary. Fosdick, *Living of These Days*, 134.

<sup>18</sup> Miller, *Fosdick*, 95-96.

<sup>19</sup> Miller, *Fosdick*, 104.

<sup>20</sup> Letter of J. Gresham Machen, March 14, 1916, quoted in Ned B. Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1954), 230.

<sup>21</sup> Macartney, "In the House of My Friends," 31.

<sup>22</sup> Miller, *Fosdick*, 115.

<sup>23</sup> Stewart G. Cole, *The History of Fundamentalism* (New York: R. R. Smith, 1931), 67; George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and*

*American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 159.

<sup>24</sup> Fosdick, *Living of These Days*, 135.

<sup>25</sup> Harry Emerson Fosdick, "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" in *American Protestant Thought in the Liberal Era*, ed. William R. Hutchison (Lanham: University Press of America, 1968), 170.

<sup>26</sup> Fosdick, "Fundamentalists Win?" in *American Protestant Thought*, 172-173.

<sup>27</sup> Fosdick, "Fundamentalists Win?" in *American Protestant Thought*, 181.

<sup>28</sup> Fosdick, "Fundamentalists Win?" in *American Protestant Thought*, 172, 173. This follows Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 9-10.

<sup>29</sup> Fosdick, "Fundamentalists Win?" in *American Protestant Thought*, 173-174.

<sup>30</sup> Fosdick, "Fundamentalists Win?" in *American Protestant Thought*, 174-175.

<sup>31</sup> Fosdick, "Fundamentalists Win?" in *American Protestant Thought*, 175-177.

<sup>32</sup> Fosdick, "Fundamentalists Win?" in *American Protestant Thought*, 177-178.

<sup>33</sup> Fosdick, "Fundamentalists Win?" in *American Protestant Thought*, 179.

<sup>34</sup> Fosdick, "Fundamentalists Win?" in *American Protestant Thought*, 180.

<sup>35</sup> Fosdick, "Fundamentalists Win?" in *American Protestant Thought*, 182.

<sup>36</sup> Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 10, 239, fn. 8; Miller, *Fosdick*, 115-117.

<sup>37</sup> Fosdick, *Living of These Days*, 145. For the response of fundamentalist Baptist John Roach Straton, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Manhattan, see Wallace Best, "Battle for the Soul of a City: John Roach Straton, Harry Emerson Fosdick, and the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy in New York, 1922-1935," *Church History* 90 no. 2 (June 2021), 376.

<sup>38</sup> Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 10-11.

<sup>39</sup> Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 11.

<sup>40</sup> Clarence E. Macartney, "Shall Unbelief Win," in *Sermons in American History: Selected Issues in the American Pulpit 1630-1967*, ed. Dewitte Holland (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), 352-356.

<sup>41</sup> Macartney, "Shall Unbelief Win," 356-359.

<sup>42</sup> Macartney, "Shall Unbelief Win," 364.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Miller, *Fosdick*, 119.

<sup>44</sup> Best, "Battle for City," 376.

<sup>45</sup> Best, "Battle for City," 377.

<sup>46</sup> Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 57, 58.

<sup>47</sup> Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 72-74.

<sup>48</sup> Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 74; *Minutes of GA*, 1923, 2:253.

<sup>49</sup> Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 74.

<sup>50</sup> "Excerpts from Dr. Macartney's Closing Argument," 8-9, quoted in Delwin G. Nykamp, "A Presbyterian Power Struggle: A Critical History of Communication Strategies Employed in the

Struggle for Control of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., 1922-1926," (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 1974), 149.

<sup>51</sup> *New York Times*, May 24, 1923, 6.

<sup>52</sup> Nykamp, "Power Struggle," 151.

<sup>53</sup> Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 76; *New York Times*, May 25, 1923, 10.

<sup>54</sup> Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 78; Charles Evans Quirk, "The Auburn Affirmation: A Critical Narrative of the Document Designed to Safeguard the Unity and Liberty of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America in 1924," (PhD diss., University of Iowa, 1967), 395.

<sup>55</sup> Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 79; Quirk, "Auburn Affirmation," 399.

<sup>56</sup> Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 79, 100.

<sup>57</sup> See Miller, *Fosdick*, 127-130.

<sup>58</sup> Quoted in Best, "Battle for City," 378-379.

<sup>59</sup> Quoted in Miller, *Fosdick*, 129.

<sup>60</sup> Miller, *Fosdick*, 130.

<sup>61</sup> Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 100.

<sup>62</sup> Miller, *Fosdick*, 130.

<sup>63</sup> Clarence E. Macartney, "The Irrepressible Conflict," *Presbyterian*, February 14, 1924, 7.

<sup>64</sup> Edwin H. Rian, *The Presbyterian Conflict* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1940), 36-37, 53-54; Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 100-103.

<sup>65</sup> Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 125-126.

<sup>66</sup> *Minutes of GA*, 1924, 1:195-196.

<sup>67</sup> Miller, *Fosdick*, 132.

<sup>68</sup> Miller, *Fosdick*, 132, 133.

<sup>69</sup> Quoted in Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 126.

<sup>70</sup> Quoted in Miller, *Fosdick*, 134.

<sup>71</sup> Fosdick, *Living of these Days*, 171-174.

<sup>72</sup> Miller, *Fosdick*, 135.

<sup>73</sup> Miller, *Fosdick*, 138-140.

<sup>74</sup> Quoted in Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 127.

<sup>75</sup> Miller, *Fosdick*, 144; Fosdick, *Living of these Days*, 181-182, 187; Matthew Bowman, *The Urban Pulpit: New York City and the Fate of Liberal Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 268-269.

<sup>76</sup> Fosdick, *Living of These Days*, 183.

<sup>77</sup> Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 129.

<sup>78</sup> Henry Sloane Coffin, "Freedom in the Presbyterian Pulpit" (Auburn, NY: Jacobs, 1925), 12, 15-16.

<sup>79</sup> Clarence E. Macartney, "The Moderator's Message," *Presbyterian*, January 8, 1925, 10-11.

<sup>80</sup> Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 148-149.

<sup>81</sup> Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 132, 143, 151.

<sup>82</sup> Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 151.

<sup>83</sup> Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 150.

<sup>84</sup> Quoted in Loetscher, *Broadening Church*, 127.

<sup>85</sup> Robert Hasting Nichols, "Leader of Liberal Presbyterianism," in *This Ministry: The Contribution of Henry Sloane Coffin*, ed.

Reinhold Niebuhr (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946), 52; Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 152.

<sup>86</sup> Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 152.

<sup>87</sup> Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 152-153.

<sup>88</sup> Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 159-160; Bowman, *Urban Pulpit*, 274

<sup>89</sup> Longfield, *Presbyterian Controversy*, 161.

<sup>90</sup> Fosdick, *Living of these Days*, 244.

<sup>91</sup> Fosdick, *Living of These Days*, 245-246; Halford R. Ryan, *Harry Emerson Fosdick: Persuasive Preacher* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1989), 45ff.

<sup>92</sup> Harry Emerson Fosdick, "The Church Must Go Beyond Modernism," in Holland, ed., *Sermons in American History*, 371.

<sup>93</sup> Fosdick, "Church Beyond Modernism," 373, 374.

<sup>94</sup> Fosdick, "Church Beyond Modernism," 375-376.

<sup>95</sup> Fosdick, "Church Beyond Modernism," 376.

<sup>96</sup> Fosdick, "Church Beyond Modernism," 377.

<sup>97</sup> Henry Sloane Coffin, *Religion Yesterday and Today* (Nashville: Cokesbury Press, 1940), 52.

<sup>98</sup> Quoted in Best, "Battle for City," 394.

<sup>99</sup> Best, "Battle for City," 394.

<sup>100</sup> Best, "Battle for City," 394.

<sup>101</sup> Fosdick, *Riverside Sermons*, 50. See also *Riverside Sermons*, 163, where Fosdick claims, "Here is the actual world, blood-drenched, pagan, filled with tragedies so cruel that even in this church they are the hardest things your ministers have to face." Or *Riverside Sermons*, 196, "We have a family problem in this nation, broken homes a public menace, with moral standards cracking and marital infidelity a national disgrace, yet made a joke of in popular movies and best-selling novels."

<sup>102</sup> Dean Hoge, *Division in the Protestant House: The Basic Reasons Behind Intra-Church Conflict* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 126.

<sup>103</sup> James Moorhead, "Redefining Confessionalism: American Presbyterians in the Twentieth Century," in *Confessional Mosaic: Presbyterians and Twentieth-Century Theology*, ed. Milton Coalter, John Mulder, Louis Weeks (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 78; David McCarthy, "The Emerging Importance of Presbyterian Polity," in *The Organizational Revolution: Presbyterians and American Denominationalism*, ed., Milton Coalter, John Mulder, Louis Weeks (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 281-282, 299-300, 302-306.

<sup>104</sup> Loetscher, *Broadening Church*, 135.

<sup>105</sup> Moorhead, "Redefining Confessionalism," 70.

<sup>106</sup> David A. Hollinger, *After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Protestant Liberalism in Modern American History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 46.

<sup>107</sup> Ferenc Morton Szasz, *The Divided Mind of Protestant America: 1880-1930* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1982), 137.

<sup>108</sup> On this see Bradley Longfield, *Presbyterians and American Culture: A History* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2013).



Faculty, Grove City Bible Conference, 1910. Isaac Ketler is in the back row, far left. Grove City College Archives.

# The Ecumenical Evangelicalism of Isaac Ketler

By P. C. Kemeny

*Between 1895 and 1913, Grove City College president Isaac Ketler (1853-1913) welcomed prominent conservative and liberal pastors and scholars to his annual Bible conferences. By the standards established during the fundamentalist-modernist controversies of the 1920s and 1930s, Ketler was too evangelical in his theology to be characterized as a liberal and too ecumenical to be considered a fundamentalist. Examining Ketler's work and the conferences shows that before the tumultuous ecclesiastical conflicts of the next decades, many northern Presbyterians in the early twentieth century were not proto-fundamentalists but rather non-sectarian evangelicals.*

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, theologically conservative and liberal Protestants gathered at Grove City College for President Isaac Ketler's annual Bible conferences. In 1904, for example, two theological conservatives—Francis Landey Patton, the theologian and president of Princeton Seminary, and John Davis, an Old Testament scholar at Princeton—joined two theological liberals—Borden Parker Bowne, the Boston University idealist philosopher, and Hugh Black, pastor of the University Free St. George's Church in Edinburgh and soon-to-be professor of homiletics at Union Theological Seminary in New York—to spend ten days preaching and teaching together. Several hundred ministers and laypeople attended the conference. Such ecumenism was very important to the evangelical Ketler, who also gave the opening address in a lecture series on the Social Gospel at Union Theological Seminary in 1908.

That Ketler welcomed both conservatives and liberals to his Bible conference and spoke at Union Seminary challenges the conventional “two-party”

interpretation of twentieth-century American Protestantism. The fundamentalist-modernist controversies of the 1920s and 1930s that caused schism in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. (PCUSA) (and in many other Protestant denominations) has sometimes been read backward into the forty years before 1920. Ketler, however, does not fit the standard terms used to describe participants in the fundamentalist-modernist controversies; he was too evangelical in his theology to be characterized as a liberal, and too ecumenical to be considered a fundamentalist. A number of recent studies, most notably works by Darren Dochuk, Timothy Gloege, Barry Hankins, and David Hollinger, demonstrate that the “two-party” interpretation of American Protestantism does not accurately capture the entire theological or ecclesiastical landscape of early twentieth-century mainline Protestantism.<sup>1</sup> In other words, not all who remained in mainline churches were militant modernists. Nor were all evangelicals fundamentalists. Instead, the ecumenism of the mainline represented a far wider range of theological positions

than the binary fundamentalist-modernist interpretive framework allows. Such a perspective does not deny the real conflicts between fundamentalists and modernists. But it does indicate that the fundamentalist-modernist controversy does not capture the whole picture of twentieth-century American Protestantism. Ketler's career, like his annual Bible conferences, shows that before the tumultuous ecclesiastical conflicts of the 1920s and 1930s, many northern evangelical Presbyterians were not proto-fundamentalists but rather non-sectarian evangelicals who stood squarely within the mainstream of the Anglo-American evangelical tradition of the early twentieth century.

## Ketler and the Founding of Grove City College

Isaac Ketler (1853-1913) did not follow the track characteristic of many college presidents in the late nineteenth century. Like many of the students who would attend Grove City College during his presidency from 1876 until 1913, Ketler hailed from modest origins but harbored high ambitions. He was born

**P. C. Kemeny** is Professor of Religion and Humanities and Dean of the Calderwood School of Arts and Letters at Grove City College.



Rev. Dr. Isaac Ketler, [1890s], Grove City College Archives.



Isaac Ketler, his wife Matilda, their older son William, and baby Weir Ketler [late 1889 or early 1890], Grove City College Archives.

in Northumberland County, Pennsylvania, where his family operated a general store. When his father refused to allow him to continue his schooling after his sixteenth birthday, he ran away and worked in a lumber camp and then a brick yard to earn money to finance his own education. After graduating from Edinboro Normal School in Pennsylvania (now Pennsylvania Western University), he taught briefly in public schools in Pennsylvania and Ohio.<sup>2</sup>

In 1876, Ketler arrived in Pine Grove, Pennsylvania, to establish Pine Grove Normal Academy. In less than a decade, the school had a campus with 684 students and thirteen faculty. In 1883, local officials renamed the town Grove City. In 1884, Ketler partnered with community leaders to secure a charter from the state to establish Grove City College.<sup>3</sup> When Ketler died in 1913, the college had 772 students and fulltime faculty of 20.<sup>4</sup>

While serving as college president, Ketler earned a PhD in philosophy in 1884 from the University of Wooster (now the College of Wooster), a Presbyterian

school in central Ohio. He then enrolled in Western Theological Seminary (now Pittsburgh Theological Seminary) and in 1888 graduated with a Bachelor of Divinity degree, after which he was ordained a Presbyterian minister in Butler Presbytery.<sup>5</sup>

### **Grove City College and the PCUSA**

Grove City was one of more than fifty colleges founded by the PCUSA that served students from their respective regions. Grove City's 1884 charter defined the college as "an undenominational but evangelical Christian school." In the late nineteenth century, "undenominational" meant that the college was not legally under the authority of any specific religious body. Grove City's charter stipulated that the trustees had to be members of a "Christian sect or creed" but no more than ten of the thirty trustees could be ministers. The charter also stated that students would be admitted "without regard to religious test or belief" and faculty would be hired



“without regard to creed or religious belief.”<sup>6</sup> Although the college had no confessional statement to which faculty had to subscribe, Ketler hired professors in agreement with its evangelical but nondenominational character.

While technically nondenominational, Grove City was a *de facto* PCUSA college. Ketler regularly preached on Sunday mornings at local Presbyterian churches and served on the Board of Directors of Western Theological Seminary for twenty-three years.<sup>7</sup> Ketler also frequently appealed to the PCUSA for financial support. In 1909, for instance, he asked the denomination’s Board of Education for \$50,000. While “not organically a Presbyterian institution,” he explained, the college “is to all intents and purposes ... devoted to the interests of the Presbyterian Church” by “educating Presbyterian youth and ... providing of candidates for the Ministry and missionary work, home and foreign, under the auspices of the Presbyterian Church.”<sup>8</sup> The PCUSA certainly considered Grove City a Presbyterian school. The Board of Education listed Grove City as one of the church’s fifty-four colleges throughout this period. It also provided scholarships to pre-ministerial students and regularly sent officials to visit the school to interview candidates for the pastorate.<sup>9</sup>

### **Ketler’s Stout Evangelical Theology**

Although a rising tide of skepticism, manifested most notably in scientific naturalism and historicism, questioned the intellectual credibility of traditional Protestant theology’s supernaturalism in the late nineteenth century, Ketler affirmed traditional Presbyterian convictions throughout his life. In an 1886 sermon, for example, he proclaimed that “the power of the Gospel and the power of prayer” were “as forcible, as dynamic and as real as the force which propels the railroad train.”<sup>10</sup> He repudiated the materialism underlying French philosopher Auguste Comte’s positivism. In his 1888 baccalaureate sermon, he complained that positivism identifies “the nobler qualities of humanity” as “the highest possible object of worship.” Such an object, however, could not “meet the demands of reason, or satisfy the wants of the human heart.”<sup>11</sup>

Ketler also maintained a high view of the inspiration and authority of Scripture. In a 1910 sermon, he asserted:

I believe in the Bible. I accept, and offer its truths to others without equivocation. ... I

know too much of the power of the Gospel to doubt that the Bible was written by holy men of old as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. ... I will never stand before a student body ... and intentionally minimize the integrity of the Word of God. If this College stands for any thing it stands for the integrity of the Bible and for the Gospel of the Son of God.

Ketler criticized “German Rationalism” for reducing the Bible to a mixture of “fables,” “myths,” and “errors” that “human reason” needed to sift through to find inspiring moralisms.<sup>12</sup>

In a 1910 sermon, Ketler observed that sin separates people from God.<sup>13</sup> Ketler embraced the prevailing nineteenth-century Protestant Whig-Republican tradition that affirmed a communal or organic view of the nature of society; he was not a pietist who thought in radically individualistic terms. “God has made us social beings,” he explained, who live in various social relations, most importantly, “the family, the church, the school and the state.” Since people were communal beings, sin had social ramifications. Ketler attributed the conflicts between various groups—“extreme dogmatic belief” and “rigorous scientific skepticism,” “social purity and licentiousness,” “capital and labor,” or “Saloon Keepers” and “men of principle and common decency”—to the ubiquity of sin.<sup>14</sup> To Ketler, the “great gospel” of Jesus Christ provided a remedy for both individual and corporate sin. “If men are sinners,” he argued, “justification by faith is the only way” they “can be put right with God.”<sup>15</sup>

While some theologians questioned the penal substitutionary atonement theory and Christ’s bodily resurrection, Ketler did not. “The Vicarious suffering of the Saviour, which rendered plenary satisfaction to the justice of God,” he wrote in 1894, “will only avail as the Holy Spirit awakens an appropriating and justifying faith in the righteousness of Christ.”<sup>16</sup> In a 1903 sermon, he complained about “foolish people” who profess to be Christians but “think it is a mark of culture or mental virility to be just a little doubtful” about Christ’s bodily resurrection.<sup>17</sup> Ketler’s sermons expressed a robust theology espoused by many evangelical Presbyterians at the turn of the twentieth century.

Ketler seemed nonplussed over the evolution debate raging among many Protestants in the late nineteenth century. In an 1894 sermon, he told students:



Main College Building, Grove City, Pa.

Main Building, Grove City College, 1909. Grove City College Archives.

Whether God by successive acts of His creative might called into being each and every form in which life manifests itself; whether through long ages of physical and spiritual environment ... evolved our complex intellectual and spiritual life, is a question for speculation, but not for dogmatic statement. God in His written Word has given us the fact, but not the method of His creative power. Whether on scientific grounds it can be proved that the hypothesis of evolution is the divine order of nature, is a problem which appeals to the spirit of scientific inquiry. It is a question entirely aside from the doctrines of evangelical Christianity. ... It is not a problem for the theologian. It is a question of physical science. It has no vital relation to Christian theology.<sup>18</sup>

Ketler was open to either a theistic understanding of evolution or the day-age theory. Ketler clearly did not advocate the so-called six 24-hour day interpretation of Genesis. During Ketler's presidency, the science faculty shared his views. In geology classes, for instance, students

read works by James Dana and Joseph LeConte—committed Christians who unabashedly advocated theistic evolution.<sup>19</sup>

One trend among Protestants, however, did make Ketler anxious: thoughtless adherence to an anti-intellectual faith. As Ketler explained in an 1894 sermon,

Scepticism [*sic*] and unbelief, doubt and spiritual unrest, under the guidance of the Spirit work out an intelligent faith in the righteousness of Christ. Feeling our way intelligently, testing at every step the foundations upon which we stand, doubting where doubt is possible, following truth as a loving devotee wherever truth may lead, enables us intelligently and lovingly to receive the Gospel of the Son of God. ... Fear not the doubt, but fear the self-complacency of blind belief. Fear not the doubt, but fear the deadening influence of a traditional and intolerant faith.<sup>20</sup>

To Ketler, Christian scholars should engage, not flee from, these contemporary challenges to the intellectual credibility of the faith.

## Ketler and Idealist Philosophy

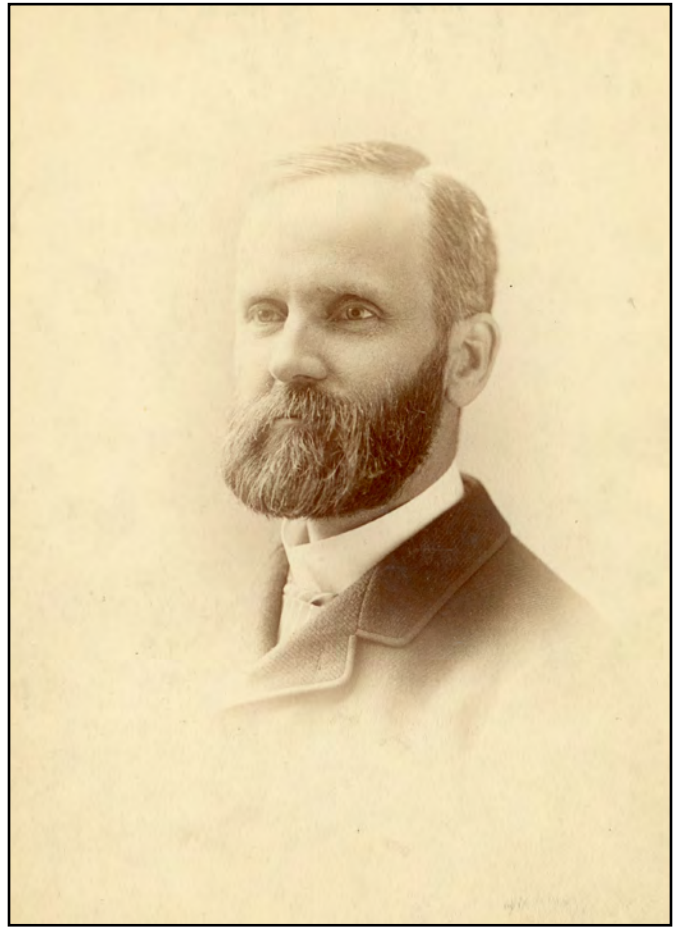
While firmly committed to evangelical theology, Ketler was also an independent thinker who selectively adopted several important developments then gaining acceptance in the academy and the church. For much of the nineteenth century, Scottish Common Sense Realism had dominated the American intellectual landscape. It was distinctly practical and anti-metaphysical—both characteristics which appealed to many Americans—and, most importantly, it answered the skepticism of Scottish philosopher David Hume. When Ketler began teaching, he used the old staples of the Common Sense tradition, including Yale president Noah Porter’s popular *The Elements of Intellectual Science: A Manual for Schools and Colleges*, Brown University president Francis Wayland’s *The Elements of Moral Science*, and the conservative Princetonian Lyman Atwater’s *Manual of Elementary Logic*.<sup>21</sup>

Darwinism’s mounting criticisms of the Bible, along with the positivist philosophy behind it, led many intellectuals to find the prevailing Scottish Common Sense Realism wanting. While some continued to defend the Scottish philosophy, others drew inspiration from the idealism flourishing in German universities. Labeled neo-Kantianism by some academics, idealism taught that the ultimate foundation for understanding reality is grounded in the mental world of the mind, not the material world as Common Sense philosophy taught. Consequently, the truthfulness of Christianity did not depend upon scientific scrutiny or historical facts but instead rested upon an inward spiritual experience that was beyond empirical investigation.<sup>22</sup>

Ketler tacked his philosophical sails to these new winds and drew the college into the main currents of a philosophy reshaping America’s intellectual landscape. As the college bulletin put it in 1912, “For twenty-five years Grove City College has identified itself with the general idealistic movement in Philosophy, and has made no small contribution to the advancement of this better way of conceiving fundamental truth.”<sup>23</sup>

Ketler’s philosophy courses reflected this shift. In 1895, for example, Ketler taught required courses entitled “Ethics—Bowne,” and “Theism and Christian Evidences—Bowne.”<sup>24</sup> That Ketler identified Borden Bowne as a key source in his ethics and apologetic classes signaled a significant change in Ketler’s thinking.

Bowne advocated what he eventually termed Personalism. While his criticisms of materialism, Comtean positivism, Herbert Spencer’s agnosticism,



Dr. Borden Parker Bowne, 1888; photo by H. F. Holland. Boston University Photograph file for Borden P. Bowne. Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University.

and secular Darwinian views of reality were similar to those of the Scottish tradition, Bowne’s idealist epistemology was a bold departure from the Scottish philosophy.<sup>25</sup> Thought, he argued,

is an organic activity which unfolds from within, and can never be put together mechanically from without. ... Knowledge is no longer something originating outside the mind, ... it is rather something built up by the mind within itself in accordance with principles immanent in the mental nature. Nothing is nearer to us than thought, and yet nothing is harder to grasp. The reason is that spontaneous thought deals with its objects rather than with itself, and the work of reflection is difficult.<sup>26</sup>

Ketler shared Bowne’s starting point. As he explained, the mind is not a “*tabula rasa*,” a passive receiver of impressions from a world which exists independent of

consciousness.” Instead, he insisted, “knowledge is a synthesis—a building up *within the mind* of objects of permanent conceptual meaning and of *objective* value.”<sup>27</sup>

Changes to Ketler’s apologetics course also reveal his use of idealism to defend Christian theism. Ketler replaced Albert Barnes’ *Evidences of Christianity in the Nineteenth Century*, which rested upon the Scottish philosophy, with Bowne’s *Philosophy of Theism* (1887), a popular college textbook. Bowne provided metaphysical and moral arguments to justify belief in God. If one reflected properly upon how the world operates according to natural laws and forms a larger intelligible system, which has the attributes of unity, unchangeability, omnipresence, eternity, omniscience, and omnipotence, it would be seen to be built upon what he termed the “world-ground” that had identifiable intelligence and personality. A materialistic conception of reality could not account for the “world-ground’s” intelligibility and personality, but theism could. Bowne based his moral argument for theism on evidence found in individuals’ moral nature, the structure of society, and the course of human history. For example, recognition that they have moral scruples leads people to conclude that there must be “a supreme justice and righteousness in the heavens.”<sup>28</sup>

The impact of idealism on Ketler is also evidenced in both his preaching and his metaphysics textbook. In an 1894 sermon published in *Homiletics Review*, for example, Ketler waxed poetic about the almost mystical power of the mind to construct truth. “Truth,” he said,

is not imparted. Truth is evoked. Truth is subjective, not objective. ... The material world with its myriad beneficent forms and adaptations has no power to read truth into the human mind. It is the mind which reads truth into nature. Truth is of God and divinely implanted in the soul.<sup>29</sup>

In *Studies in Metaphysics: A Text Book for College Students* (1913), Ketler’s posthumously published philosophy book, he also advocated a decidedly idealist metaphysics. “Common Sense philosophy,” Ketler asserted, “is the philosophy of spontaneous and uncritical thinking, at least so judged by its conclusions.” By the standards of Common Sense realism, Ketler sarcastically mused, anyone could be “an accredited philosopher.” Like Bowne, Ketler opposed Comtean positivism because it limits knowledge to sensory experience. To Ketler, metaphysics starts with the assumption that the “real” world is “not a picturable world” that can be “touched or heard” but instead is

“present in thought” as one reflects upon the ideas the mind generates. Ketler even criticized the commitment of respected Old School Presbyterian theologian Charles Hodge to Common Sense philosophy. Hodge was the “ablest expounder of the Augustinian or Calvinist system,” Ketler noted, but he was not “a skillful logician.”<sup>30</sup>

### **Ketler’s Social Gospel Address at Union Theological Seminary**

Ketler not only blended evangelical theology with idealistic philosophy, but he promoted ecumenism. In 1908, Union Theological Seminary in New York hosted a lecture series on “The Kingdom of God: The Social Message of Christianity.” Union’s president, Charles Cuthbert Hall, invited Ketler to give the opening address titled “The World’s Need of a Social Gospel.” Hall asked Ketler to treat the subject “in a catholic and reverent spirit, with an irenic and constructive view.” The lecture series also included Bowne, Arthur Cushman McGiffert, a Presbyterian minister and church historian at Union, and Harry Emerson Fosdick, who later would gain notoriety for his stinging critique of fundamentalism in his 1922 sermon “Shall the Fundamentalists Win?” and his many books expositing liberal theology.<sup>31</sup>

Theological debates between traditionalists and modernists over the proper interpretation of the Bible produced controversy within many Protestant denominations in the late nineteenth century. Union Seminary was the site of one of the first major skirmishes between the diverging parties when Union’s Bible professor and PCUSA minister Charles Augustus Briggs was tried for heresy in 1892. Briggs advocated using higher criticism of the Bible to help make the evangelical faith appealing to modern thinkers. Briggs, for example, denied the inerrancy of Scripture and held that the prophet Isaiah wrote only the first thirty-nine of the sixty-six chapters traditionally ascribed to him. Such views, however, put him at odds with conservatives. After two years of ecclesiastical wrangling, the PCUSA General Assembly suspended Briggs from the ministry. Five years later, conservatives in New York Presbytery charged McGiffert with heresy. Although exonerated by the General Assembly, McGiffert decided to leave the denomination and become a Congregationalist when conservatives appealed the verdict.<sup>32</sup>

In “The World’s Need of a Social Gospel,” Ketler gently chided both evangelicals and ardent Social Gospelers for their shortcomings. Christ, he observed,

fulfilled Old Testament prophecy by inaugurating the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom starts with the conversion of individuals. Turning “men and women from their sin and unto righteousness” produced joy, he proclaimed, but “[t]here is much more in the gospel than justification by faith.” Ketler then criticized the rising tide of conservative individualism. The excessive devotion to the individual, Ketler argued, led those who followed this approach to ignore the “wider purposes of God.”

Ketler’s understanding of the church’s role in society, like his understanding of the impact of sin on culture, was rooted in the nineteenth-century Whig-Republican tradition. The church, is “a spiritual community.” It is “not an aggregation” of individuals but “an organism.” As an organism, Ketler reasoned, the Social Gospel manifests the Kingdom of God when it promotes righteousness in society. Unlike more thoroughgoing Social Gospelers, most notably Walter Rauschenbusch in his 1917 *Theology for the Social Gospel*, Ketler was reluctant to identify the Social Gospel with a particular political theory. The Social Gospel “is not a gospel of socialism or of communism. Christ stands committed to no theory of government or political teaching.” And yet Ketler did not retreat into individualistic pietism. He candidly called for a Social Gospel that would resolve “[s]ocial and class antagonisms” through “reconciliation.” To drive his point home, he quoted Theodore Roosevelt’s 1904 presidential campaign promise to reconcile capital and labor. “In all the economic relations of life,” Ketler insisted, the Social Gospel “must stand for the rights of men—the doctrine of the ‘square deal.’”<sup>33</sup>

Ketler’s 1908 address at Union suggests that the “great reversal” may not have taken place or occurred as thoroughly among all evangelical Protestants as some historians have suggested. Throughout the nineteenth century, most Protestants believed that the church should pursue both evangelism and social reform. Promoting revivalism, “blue laws,” Sunday schools, temperance, prohibition, moral purity and, most prominently, abolition were different means that Protestants used to convert unbelievers and improve cultural practices. But as the division between theological conservatives and liberals hardened in the 1910s and 1920s, some historians have argued that evangelicals severely curtailed efforts to reform society while liberals’ interest in personal evangelism largely disappeared.<sup>34</sup> The very term “Social Gospel” became among some fundamentalists a dog whistle for a liberalism—whether theological or political—that advocated an expansionist state that regulated



Painting of Dr. Charles Cuthbert Hall, from the book *About Face: Portraits at Union Theological Seminary* by Cathy Busby (New York: The Institute for Art, Religion & Social Justice, Union Theological Seminary, 2012). Used under the terms of the Creative Commons license.

all aspects of American society. For some modernists, efforts to convert people became a misguided effort to promote otherworldly spiritual imperialism. Ketler’s address demonstrates, however, that interest in social reform among traditional Presbyterians had not waned.

### **Evangelical Ecumenism**

Like Ketler’s participation in the Social Gospel lecture series at Union, the annual summer Bible conferences held at Grove City College reflect Ketler’s evangelical ecumenism. Bible conferences were popular among Protestants in the late nineteenth century. For example, hundreds of college students gathered annually at the evangelist D. L. Moody’s Northfield Bible Conference in Massachusetts. Mainline Protestants met every summer at the Chautauqua Institute in southwestern New York.



Bible Conference faculty, 1908, Grove City, Pa. Isaac Ketler is seated in the first row, far right. Grove City College Archives.

For Ketler, the Bible conference served three purposes. First, the annual gathering gave local pastors the opportunity to hear leading intellectuals address important academic topics. Second, Ketler had launched a PhD degree in philosophy at the college in 1891. Much like the one he completed at Wooster, the doctoral program offered courses only during the ten-week summer term. This allowed pastors to take a sabbatical to fulfill their classwork and then complete their comprehensive exams and dissertation in absentia. Ketler recruited faculty from major research universities to help him teach philosophy courses during the summer session and to give lectures at the Bible conference.

Finally, Ketler effectively used the Bible conferences to raise the college's profile by inviting prominent scholars and well-known pastors to campus. Sir William Ramsey, a professor of classical archaeology at Oxford and later Aberdeen, lectured at the 1910 and 1913 conferences. Ketler so impressed Ramsey that he penned a short biography of Ketler. With an eye toward criticizing the elitism of Oxford and Cambridge and the four major Scottish universities, Ramsey held up Ketler and the college as

illustrative of how higher education could cultivate a responsible citizenry essential to a healthy democracy. Ramsey praised Ketler's "indomitable energy" and "unconquerable idealism" that "elevated and guided" the entire community's "aspirations" for greater knowledge.<sup>35</sup> In Ramsey's estimation, Ketler had put Grove City College on the map of American higher education, and academics in the British Isles could learn from his example.

Ketler relentlessly promoted his Bible conferences. He sent hundreds of letters to distinguished professors and pastors. Ketler also made several trips to the British Isles to recruit preeminent preachers and respected scholars to speak at his conferences. Among others, he secured the participation of James Orr, the conservative Scottish theologian at the Free Church College in Glasgow; Herbert G. Wood, the Quaker and Cambridge New Testament scholar who defended the historicity of the person of Jesus against detractors who described him as a historical myth; and G. A. Johnston Ross, who pastored Saint Columba's Church, Cambridge, England, and later Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church in Pennsylvania and then taught homiletics at Union Seminary in New York.<sup>36</sup> To

induce speakers to make the trip to rural, western Pennsylvania, Ketler sometimes arranged for them to speak at Grove City in conjunction with other summer speaking engagements in the states. For example, Ketler convinced James Denney, the conservative Scottish theologian at the Free Church College Glasgow, to combine his trip to Moody's Northfield Bible Conference with a visit to Grove City.<sup>37</sup>

The Bible conference was a major event in the life of Grove City College. Speakers typically spent several days together. Conferees rented dormitory rooms, and lectures began at 8:00 a.m. and ended at 4:00 p.m. Daily activities culminated after dinner with a worship service and a sermon by a prominent preacher. On Sundays, Ketler arranged for the lecturers to preach at the morning and evening services at local churches.<sup>38</sup> The conference quickly grew in popularity. In 1902, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* said the conference "now ranks with the greatest in the United States."<sup>39</sup> That description seems accurate. In 1908, more than 800 people attended the conference.<sup>40</sup>

The ecumenical nature of Ketler's Bible conferences is manifest in the roster of speakers he invited to campus. The 1904 conference was rather typical. In addition to Francis Patton, John Davis, Hugh Black, and Borden Parker Bowne, Ketler invited Matthew Brown Ridder, a New Testament professor at Western Theological Seminary; J. C. Hartzell, a Methodist bishop in Africa; H. A. Buttz, a New Testament scholar and president of Drew Theological Seminary, a Methodist institution in New Jersey; and Forrest E. Dager, rector of St. Paul's Reformed Episcopal Church in Philadelphia, to lecture.

The 1904 conference was not only ecclesiastically eclectic but also, judging by the standards of the later fundamentalist-modernist controversies, theologically diverse. The fact that Francis Patton and Borden Bowne shared the dais illustrates this point. As a Princeton professor and then as president of the university and later the seminary, Patton ranked among the day's ablest defenders of Scottish Common Sense Realism. Years earlier, Patton had reviewed Bowne's magisterial *Metaphysics: A Study in First Principles*. Not surprisingly, Patton criticized the idealist Bowne for denying the ontological status of the material world separate from one's mind. On this point, Patton complained that Bowne "dogmatizes without warrant." Yet Patton praised Bowne's "keen dialectic," and, more importantly, the "great service" his critique of materialism offered "the cause of theism."<sup>41</sup> Patton's reputation as a staunch advocate of Old School Princeton theological orthodoxy, however, exceeded

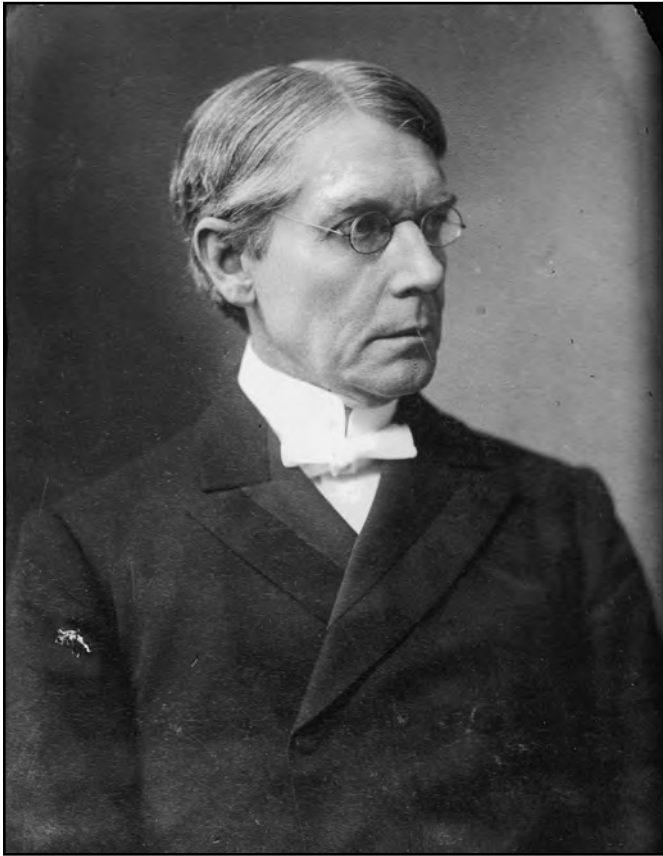


Grove City Recitation Hall, about 1902. Grove City College Archives.

his notoriety as a philosopher. As a Chicago pastor, he had successfully prosecuted his fellow Presbyterian minister David Swing for heresy in 1874. Two decades later, Patton played a decisive role in ousting Briggs from the Presbyterian ministry.<sup>42</sup>

Bowne not only advocated a modified version of German idealist philosophy but also took a very different stance on theology when compared to Patton. Bowne was a theological liberal who stood on the cutting edge of the modernist movement. Just weeks before the 1904 Bible conference, the New York East Conference of the Methodist Church put Bowne on trial for heresy for allegedly denying the Trinity, Christ's substitutionary atonement, original sin, justification by faith, and the Bible's divine inspiration. In private correspondence to Ketler, Bowne denounced the heresy accusations as "farcical." His Methodist conference found him not guilty on all five charges because of the incompetent nature of the prosecution and Bowne's eloquent defense of his views. Bowne's exoneration, however, was more a testimony to the liberal direction of the Methodist Church than the philosopher's orthodoxy.<sup>43</sup>

Although Patton and Bowne clearly sat on opposite sides of the philosophical and theological aisle, the differences between the Old School Presbyterian Patton and the liberal Methodist Bowne did not prevent



Dr. Francis L. Patton, 1913. Digital file from original glass negative, Bain News Service photograph collection, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, LC-B2- 2656-8.

Ketler from inviting them to teach at Grove City. Both gave lectures to doctoral students as part of the conference. Ketler repeatedly invited both scholars to the conference. Patton participated only once during Ketler's tenure, but he did return in 1916 and 1917. Bowne spoke almost every year between 1902 and his death in 1910. Bowne privately praised Ketler for giving "the new leaven of reverent and progressive scholarship" a prominent place in his Bible conferences.<sup>44</sup>

The 1904 Bible conference was not the only time that theological progressives, to use Bowne's term, and conservatives joined together. In 1908, for example, Hugh Black, who had become a professor at Union Seminary in New York, served as the conference's guest preacher. Charles Cuthbert Hall, who had defended Briggs at his trial, gave a series of lectures on world missions. Willis Beecher, an Old Testament scholar at Auburn Theological Seminary who also defended Briggs and attacked Princeton Seminary professors' views of higher criticism, lectured on King David and his times. Ketler invited two Princeton Seminary professors, the Old Testament scholar Robert Dick Wilson and the practical theology professor Charles R.

Erdman, to participate. Wilson gave seven lectures on the book of Daniel, while Erdman lectured on practical ministry for pastors and laypeople.<sup>45</sup>

The 1911 conference offers another telling example of Ketler's evangelical ecumenism. He invited Rochester Baptist Theological Seminary theologian Cornelius Woelfkin to offer seven lectures on "The Permanent Christian Ideals." The conference also featured three prominent Social Gospellers. Charles Stelzle, a Presbyterian minister, supervisor of the PCUSA Department of Church and Labor, and well-known labor advocate, discussed sociological issues. Warren Wilson, the leader of the Presbyterian country life movement, lectured on "religious sociology for rural community and the church." A. A. Tenney, a professor of sociology at Columbia University, gave ten lectures on "general sociology." Noted conservatives Robert Dick Wilson and Princeton philosopher Alexander Ormond appeared: Wilson presented four lectures on the Aramaic papyri and four lectures on the Mosaic Codes and Babylonian monuments, and Ormond lectured on philosophy.<sup>46</sup>

No one in the Grove City College community was scandalized by the ecumenical composition of the Bible conferences. The Board of Trustees actively supported Ketler's ecumenical approach. The college's two greatest benefactors, J. Newton Pew and Samuel Harbison, helped underwrite the cost of the Bible conferences. They also paid for Ketler's trips to the British Isles to recruit speakers for the conferences.<sup>47</sup>

After Ketler died on the eve of the 1913 Bible conference, Ormond succeeded Ketler as college president. But he served less than two years before he too died suddenly. Isaac Ketler's son, Weir, succeeded Ormond as president in 1916. Both men continued to sponsor the annual Bible conference. During the 1920s, however, the number of speakers declined and after 1929, as Weir Ketler reported to the trustees, attendance was smaller due to the "depressed economic conditions."<sup>48</sup> World War II brought an end to the annual Bible conferences as the college supported the war effort by providing space for future pilots and navigators to train for military service.

During the fundamentalist-modernist controversies of the 1920s and 1930s, some Grove City Bible conference speakers became outspoken modernists who criticized the fundamentalist movement. For example, Cornelius Woelfkin left Rochester Seminary to become pastor of Park Avenue Baptist Church in New York City in 1912. When fundamentalist Presbyterians ousted Harry Emerson Fosdick from the pulpit of First Presbyterian Church



in New York City in 1922, Woelfkin hired him as an assistant pastor. Both men became militant critics of fundamentalists.<sup>49</sup> William R. Farmer, a New Testament professor at Western Theological Seminary who spoke at Grove City in 1913, signed the 1924 Auburn Affirmation. This document deemed it unconstitutional to require ministerial candidates to affirm certain doctrines in the Westminster Confession as essential, such as Christ's substitutionary atonement or bodily resurrection. Instead, the Affirmation stated that such traditional interpretations of the Bible's teaching were "not the only theories allowed by the Scriptures" and the denomination's standards. Union Seminary's Hugh Black and G. A. Johnston Ross also actively promoted the liberal movement inside the PCUSA. While Black dismissed fundamentalist theology as "harmless," he chastised fundamentalists for "always" railing "against something" and called their insistence that the truths of Christianity can be delineated with "finality" a "damnable heresy."<sup>50</sup>

Other Grove City Bible conference speakers became fundamentalists. For example, A. C. Dixon, pastor of Ruggles Street Church in Boston, addressed the conference in 1902. Dixon later became the pastor of the Moody Church in Chicago and then Charles Spurgeon's Metropolitan Tabernacle in London, and coedited *The Fundamentals*, a series of booklets published from 1910 to 1915 defending conservative Protestant theological views. Although *The Fundamentals* advocated theological positions not quite as militantly anti-modernist as fundamentalists would demand in the next decade, Dixon proved to be a forceful critic of liberalism.<sup>51</sup> After a special commission's investigation into the internal conflicts among Princeton Seminary's faculty in 1929, the PCUSA reorganized the Board of Trustees. The new board included two members who signed the Auburn Affirmation. In response, Princeton professor J. Gresham Machen resigned in protest. That year, Robert Dick Wilson left Princeton and joined Machen in founding Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia where, as he wrote, he could make a "fight for God's Word to a finish" by offering "an intelligent defense of the fundamentalists of the Christian religion" over against "infidelity."<sup>52</sup>

Still other speakers at Grove City's Bible conferences tried to maintain the traditionally evangelical Presbyterian theological orientation without becoming separatist fundamentalists. Charles Erdman, for example, remained a professor at Princeton after Machen left the seminary in protest. Likewise, retired president Francis Patton joined the



Painting of Isaac Ketler, frontispiece from *An Adventure in Education: 75 years of Grove City College, 1876-1951* by Weir C. Ketler (New York: Newcomen Society in North America, 1953).

reorganized Board of Trustees in 1929. Notably, Weir Ketler also joined the reorganized Princeton board in 1929.<sup>53</sup>

Since Isaac Ketler died before the fundamentalist-modernist controversies divided the PCUSA, it is unclear where he would have stood on the theological issues that racked the denomination. Ketler, however, lacked one major trait during his long tenure at Grove City that came to characterize many Presbyterian fundamentalists during the late 1920s and 1930s: an impulse to separate from those with differing theological outlooks. The theologically conservative and irenic Ketler was comfortable hosting ecumenical gatherings that included theological liberals. By contrast, later separatist fundamentalists refused to participate in any organization that tolerated theological liberals.

The source of Ketler's ecumenism was his evangelical theology. Ketler's confidence in the

compelling nature of truth fueled his engagement with the contemporary intellectual landscape. To him, genuine knowledge could be ascertained only by directly engaging the arguments that challenged Christian beliefs. He harbored no Pollyanna delusions about the intellectual challenges that traditional Christianity faced. “The immediate future is not so bright, at least to all eyes,” Ketler told the audience at Union Seminary in 1908. “But pessimism is no part of the gospel. The good will far outshine the ill. Truth will prevail.”<sup>54</sup> Sir William Ramsey argued that “No person ever had a deeper reverence for true knowledge than Ketler. It was almost a religion with him to respect knowledge.”<sup>55</sup> His robust evangelical convictions fueled Ketler’s confidence. He was not

driven by fear but instead by his love to obtain a deeper and broader understanding of truth. For Ketler, pursuing truth through constructive engagement with ideas across the theological and philosophical spectrum was one constitutive purpose of a Christian liberal arts college. That prompted him to welcome scholars and prominent pastors to Grove City College who represented a diverse range of theological perspectives. While conservatives and liberals might have been sitting at different theological tables at Ketler’s annual Bible conference, they were still gathering under the same tent. Although the tumultuous controversies of the next two decades would lead some to depart, others remained. Another generation would pass before this ecumenical tent would collapse. *℟*

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> On the “two-party” interpretation see Martin Marty, *Righteous Empire: The Protestant Experience in America* (New York: Dial Press, 1970). For recent challenges to that line of interpretation, see Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sun Belt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: Norton, 2011); Timothy Gloege, *Guaranteed Pure: The Moody Bible Institute, Business, and the Making of Modern Evangelicalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Barry Hankins, “Marsden and Modern Fundamentalism,” in *American Evangelicalism: George Marsden and the State of American Religious History*, ed. Darren Dochuk, Thomas Kidd, and Kurt Peterson (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014), 141-165; David Hollinger, *Christianity’s American Fate: How Religion Became More Conservative and Society More Secular* (Princeton University Press, 2022); Nathan Finn, “Evangelical History after George Marsden: A Review Essay,” *Themelios* 40 (2015), <https://media.thegospelcoalition.org/documents/themelios/Themelios40-1.pdf>. Although focusing upon Canada, Phyllis Airhart makes a similar point in *A Church with the Soul of a Nation: Making and*

*Remaking the United Church of Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Lee McCandles, “History of Grove City College,” Master’s Thesis (Grove City College, 1925), 13-14; Robert Scott Calder, “An Appreciation of Dr. Ketler and His Work,” *Presbyterian Banner*, August 21, 1913, 10.

<sup>3</sup> Grove City College, *A Historical Sketch with Charter and By-Laws* (n.p., 1884), 3-6.

<sup>4</sup> *Grove City College Bulletin Catalogue 1912-1913* (Grove City: Issued Quarterly by the College), 7-8, 126.

<sup>5</sup> “Historical Sketch of the Post-Graduate Department,” *Post-Graduate and Wooster Quarterly*, 1 (1887), 115; *In Memoriam Joseph Newton Pew and Isaac Conrad Ketler* (Grove City: Grove City College, 1913), 23.

<sup>6</sup> Grove City College, *A Historical Sketch with Charter and By-Laws*, 11, 12.

<sup>7</sup> *General Biographical Catalogue, The Western Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1827-1927* (n.p., 1927), 10.

<sup>8</sup> Isaac Ketler to The College Board of the Presbyterian Church

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<sup>9</sup> *Ninety-fourth Annual Report of the Board of Education of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (Philadelphia: Published by the Board, 1913), 15.

<sup>10</sup> Isaac Ketler, "The Power of Prayer," Ketler Papers, Grove City College Archives.

<sup>11</sup> Isaac Ketler, "Baccalaureate Sermon 1888," Ketler Papers.

<sup>12</sup> Isaac Ketler, "Annual Address before the YMCA in Butler, PA, November 1888," Ketler Papers.

<sup>13</sup> Isaac Ketler, "Religion and Life," Ketler Papers.

<sup>14</sup> Isaac Ketler, "The Great Conflict," Ketler Papers.

<sup>15</sup> Isaac Ketler, "The Gospel of the Kingdom!" Ketler Papers.

<sup>16</sup> Isaac Ketler, "The Problem of Life," *Homiletic Review* 27 (1894), 132.

<sup>17</sup> Isaac Ketler, "The Deity of Christ," Ketler Papers.

<sup>18</sup> Ketler, "The Problem of Life," 130.

<sup>19</sup> *Annual Catalogue ... for the College Year 1884-85*, 21; *The Nineteenth Annual Catalogue ... for 1895-96-97*, 10. On Dana and LeConte, see Jon Roberts, *Darwinism and the Divine in America: Protestant Intellectuals and Organic Evolution, 1858-1900* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988); Ronald Numbers, *The Creationists: From Scientific Creation to Intelligent Design* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

<sup>20</sup> Ketler, "The Problem of Life," 134.

<sup>21</sup> Charles Cashdollar, "The Social Implications of the Doctrine of Divine Providence: A Nineteenth-Century Debate in American Protestantism," *Harvard Theological Review* 71 (1978), 268-284.

<sup>22</sup> Bruce Kuklick, *Churchmen and Philosophers: From Jonathan Edwards to John Dewey* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 117-146; William Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 111-144, 208-210.

<sup>23</sup> *Grove City College Bulletin Catalogue 1912-1913*, 37.

<sup>24</sup> *The Nineteenth Annual Catalogue ... for 1895-96-97*, 9-10, 12.

<sup>25</sup> Borden Bowne, *The Philosophy of Herbert Spencer* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1874).

<sup>26</sup> Borden Bowne, *Theory of Thought and Knowledge* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1897), iii-iv.

<sup>27</sup> Isaac Ketler, *Studies in Metaphysics: A Text Book for College Students* (Grove City, PA: Robinson Print Shop, 1913), 25. In private correspondence, Bowne recommended that Ketler use his metaphysics textbook. Borden Bowne to Isaac Ketler, Ketler Correspondence Collection, Folder: "Letters – Dr. Borden Bowne & Mrs. Kate Bowne," Ketler Papers.

<sup>28</sup> Borden Bowne, *Philosophy of Theism* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1887), 25, 217. Charles Cashdollar, *The Transformation of Theology, 1830-1890: Positivism and Protestant Thought in Britain and America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press,

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<sup>29</sup> Ketler, "The Problem of Life," 131.

<sup>30</sup> Ketler, *Studies in Metaphysics*, 154, 2-3, 198-199, 154.

<sup>31</sup> Charles Cuthbert Hall to Isaac Ketler, November 19, 1907, Folder: "Letters: Bible conference A-J," Ketler Papers; Charles Ripley Gillett, comp., *General Catalogue of Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York 1836-1908* (New York: Trow Press, 1908), xxv-xxvi.

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<sup>33</sup> Isaac Ketler, "The World's Need of a Social Gospel," *Homiletic Review* 56 (1908), 390, 393, 390, 391, 394, 395.

<sup>34</sup> Gary Scott Smith, *The Search for Social Salvation: Social Christianity and America, 1880-1925* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2000), 333-362; George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 85-93; David Moberg, *The Great Reversal: Evangelism versus Social Concern* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1972), 23-45.

<sup>35</sup> William Ramsey, *The Making of a University: What We Have to Learn from Educational Ideals in America* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1915), 9, 10, 11.

<sup>36</sup> James Denney to Isaac C. Ketler, October 6, 1905, Box: Ketler Correspondence Collection, Folder: "Letters: Bible Conference – Cobett, Denney, Dubose," Ketler Papers; Herbert G. Wood to Isaac Ketler, April 30, 1910, Box: Ketler Correspondence Collection, Folder: "Letters: Bible Conference – R,S,W," Ketler Papers.

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<sup>40</sup> "Grove City Bible School," *Mercer Dispatch and Republican*, August 4, 1911, 1; "The Grove City Bible School," *Presbyterian Banner*, August 20, 1908, 31.

<sup>41</sup> Francis L. Patton review of "Metaphysics: A Study in First Principles," by Borden Bowne, *Presbyterian Review* 3 (1882), 636-638.

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<sup>43</sup> Borden Bowne to Isaac Ketler, [1904], Ketler Correspondence Collection, Folder: "Letters – Dr. Borden P. Bowne & Mrs. Kate Bowne;" Harmon Smith, "Borden Parker Bowne Heresy at Boston," in *American Religious Heretics: Formal and Informal Trials* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), 148-187.

<sup>44</sup> Borden P. Bowne to Isaac Ketler, May 16, 1908, Box: Ketler Correspondence Collection, Folder: "Letters – Dr. Borden P. Bowne & Mrs. Kate Bowne."

<sup>45</sup> "Grove City Bible School," *The Daily Notes* (Cannonsburg, PA), July 24, 1908, 5; Willis J. Beecher to Isaac C. Ketler, February 4, 1908, Box: Ketler Correspondence Collection, Folder: "Letters: Bible Conference A-J;" "The Grove City Bible School," *Presbyterian Banner*, August 20, 1908, 31.

<sup>46</sup> "Grove City Bible School," *Mercer Dispatch and Republican*, August 4, 1911, 1.

<sup>47</sup> Weir Ketler, *An Adventure in Education: 75 Years of Grove City College (1876-1951)* (New York: Newcomen Society in North America, 1953), 19-20; "Will Make Foreign Tour," *Mercer Dispatch and Republican*, September 8, 1905, 1.

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<sup>49</sup> Wallace Best, "Battle for the Soul of a City: John Roach Straton, Harry Emerson Fosdick, and the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy in New York, 1922-1935," *Church History* 90 (2021), 367-397; "Dr. Fosdick Called by Park Av. Baptists

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<sup>50</sup> *An Affirmation designed to safeguard the unity and liberty of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America with all signatures and the Note Supplementary* (Auburn, NY: Jacobs Press, 1924), 6, 12-13; "Fosdick Foresees Peaceful Reforms," *New York Times*, May 19, 1925, 9.

<sup>51</sup> "Grove City Bible Conference," *Mercer Dispatch and Republican*, July 11, 1902, 1; John Stackhouse, "Not Fundamentalist, not Conservative, and not Liberal: *The Fundamentals* and the Mainstream of American Evangelicalism," *Christian Scholars Review* 52 (2022), 7-24; P. C. Kemeny, *American National Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), s.v., "Amzi Clarence Dixon."

<sup>52</sup> James Moorhead, *Princeton Seminary in American Religion and Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 340-369; Bradley Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy: Fundamentalists, Modernists, and Moderates* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 162-180; Robert Dick Wilson, "The Study and Defense of the Bible in Westminster Seminary," *Christianity Today*, June 1930, 6.

<sup>53</sup> "Princeton Seminary Adds 22 to Its Board," *New York Times*, February 5, 1930, 48.

<sup>54</sup> Ketler, "World's Need of a Social Gospel," 395.

<sup>55</sup> Ramsey, *Making of a University*, 25.

## Book Reviews



*An Odd Cross to Bear: A Biography of Ruth Bell Graham.* By Anne Blue Wills. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2022. 273 pp.)

Describing one's marriage as a "cross to bear" may not seem romantic, but for Ruth Bell Graham, being the wife of the world's most famous evangelist was not easy. When she accepted Billy Graham's marriage proposal, she gave up her dream of becoming a missionary to Tibet and spent the rest of her life living in her husband's shadow—which included raising five children largely by herself while her husband traveled the globe, preaching to millions.

Anne Blue Wills's biography explains why Ruth chose to make that sacrifice, but it portrays her as more than "Mrs. Billy Graham." Though she was a devoted wife who saw herself as Billy's "helpmeet," her greatest love was for the Lord. She saw everything in life—her dreams of missionary work, her decision to marry Billy, her work as a mother, and her own writing—as service to Jesus.

Unlike her Baptist husband, Ruth was a lifelong Presbyterian whose early views of God were formed through catechetical study while on the mission field in China, the country where she was born. Her father,

L. Nelson Bell, was a medical missionary affiliated with the Presbyterian Church in the U.S. (PCUS), and—like many other missionary kids—Ruth learned from an early age to sacrifice her own desires for the sake of the gospel. When she met Billy Graham as a student at Wheaton College, she agonized over whether she should give up her missionary dreams to marry the young evangelist. But she made the choice because she believed in Billy's mission and saw it as a fulfillment of her calling.

She did not, however, accept Billy's pressure to get baptized by immersion as an adult believer. She still held a Presbyterian view of the sacraments and thought her own infant baptism was sufficient. This became the pattern for the rest of their marriage: Ruth was self-sacrificial, and she believed in what today would be called complementarian gender roles, but she refused to compromise on matters of principle. Billy could be headstrong, but over time, he came to respect the woman who edited his books, oversaw the construction of their log-cabin home in the North Carolina mountains, and took care of their five children while he was away for weeks at a time. Ruth balanced Billy's extroverted idealism with an introverted practicality, and at crucial moments, her sage advice may have saved Billy from misguided schemes he was considering (such as running for political office).

For much of the early years of their marriage, Ruth found her primary calling in raising her children to know the Lord. Born in 1920, she was from the same generation as Betty Friedan (born in 1921) and Phyllis Schlafly (born in 1924)—which meant that she was a middle-aged homemaker at the time that American women began debating second-wave feminism. Ruth aligned herself with the anti-feminists. She believed that God had called men and women to different roles, and that women needed to be liberated not from patriarchy but from sin. As a conservative Presbyterian with a deep sense of original sin, she did not believe that such liberation could ever completely occur in this life, but she looked forward to the day when it would in the presence of God. Her tombstone epigraph expresses her desire to be remembered not as a saint but as a

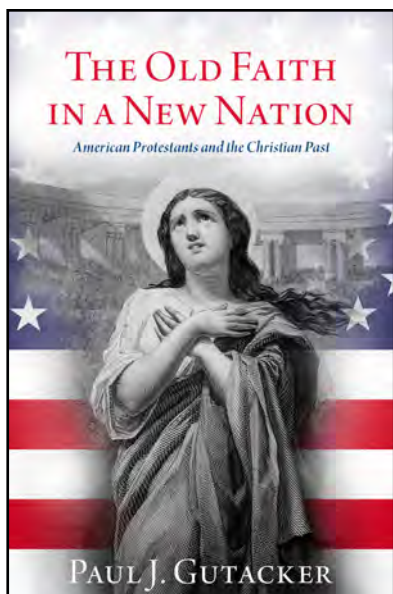
redeemed sinner whose life was a sanctification project in anticipation of a heavenly city. “End of construction,” her gravestone reads. “Thank you for your patience.”

Wills’s book is a thoughtful, sympathetic reconstruction of Ruth Bell Graham’s life that takes her own theological beliefs and values seriously. As Wills states, she chose not to apply a feminist lens to this study or adopt any other critical approach that would have been foreign to the way that Ruth understood her own life in relationship to God.

Some might wish that the biography said more about issues of race. One might wonder, for instance, what Ruth thought of her segregationist father’s condemnations of the civil rights movement in the 1960s or her husband’s attempt to navigate the racial challenges of that era. But the book’s brief treatment of race is, I suspect, a reflection of the silence of the

primary sources on which this biography is based. Ruth’s own writings may have glossed over the issue, so rather than comment on this silence, Wills’s book instead focuses on what those writings talk about—Ruth’s marriage and parenting, and, above all, the mission of God. That, after all, is how Ruth understood her own life. In adopting this interpretive approach, Wills has shed new light not only on Ruth Bell Graham but also on the lives of many other American evangelical women of her generation who responded to the cultural currents of their time by finding divine meaning in their own “crosses”—and ultimately, in their own relationships with God and their expectations for eternity.

Daniel K. Williams  
Ashland University  
Ashland, Ohio



*The Old Faith in a New Nation: American Protestants and the Christian Past.* By Paul J. Gutacker. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023. 247 pp.)

“Evangelical Protestants are biblicists,” historian Paul Gutacker contends, but they are also historians. The Bible may function as an “unrivaled authority for evangelicals,” he argues, but once those same evangelicals have exhausted “the available exegetical arguments,” they often turn to the Christian past for support, inspiration, and precedent. Such a claim may unsettle both the popular and academic portrayals of evangelical Protestants in the United States as relying on “Scripture alone” and denigrating tradition, but *The Old Faith in a New Nation* convincingly shows how nineteenth-

century evangelicals frequently appealed to, popularized, and adapted Christian history in order to resolve difficult questions around matters of national identity, religious liberty, race, and more.

Gutacker’s narrative unfolds across seven chapters, which span from the late eighteenth century through the American Civil War. In Chapters 1 and 2, Gutacker shows how some Protestants used Christian history to make the case for religious disestablishment, arguing that the American project could “overturn the great error of Christendom” and allow for a return to the unadulterated “primitive” Christianity of the apostolic era. In Chapter 3, Gutacker contends that these same interpretations of Christian history were used by various actors to make the case for American exceptionalism: the idea that the United States enjoyed a unique, unparalleled place in divine history where the ideals of the Reformation could be worked out and the last vestiges of Constantinian and medieval corruption vanquished. For many white Protestants, such histories upheld white, Protestant supremacy as well; by contrast, Black Protestants often used these histories in their arguments for the end of race-based chattel slavery. In this sense, appeals to the Christian past “worked both to support and subvert the construction of the nation as Anglo-Saxon and Protestant.”

The second half of the book reveals how Christian history was deployed in some of the most contentious political debates of the nineteenth century. In Chapter 4, Gutacker examines Protestant use of Christian history to argue for the incompatibility of Catholicism and American liberty. In Chapter 5, he shows how the Christian past was deployed similarly by both advocates

for women's rights and advocates of domesticity. Finally, Chapters 6 and 7 consider the place of Christian history in debates over slavery and, more generally, race in America before and during the American Civil War.

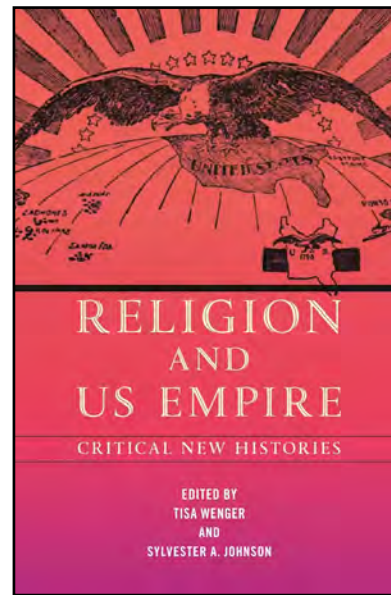
Gutacker roots his analysis in the scholar Jan Assmann's concept of mnemohistory, which is concerned not with the work of scholarly historians but rather with the idea that the "past is modeled, invented, reinvented, and reconstructed by the present." This theoretical framework allows Gutacker to include a wide cast of historical actors in his study, from ministers and scholars to politicians, lawyers, reformers, educators, and activists. It also allows him to engage with a range of different kinds of sources in which the Christian past was narrated: sermons, speeches, legal arguments, political petitions, textbooks, and more. These are all great strengths of the project.

A number of questions emerged for me in the reading of this book. The first relates to Gutacker's periodization: Why stop at the American Civil War? All historical monographs must establish start and end dates for their analysis, but I wondered what is gained and what is lost by the approach taken in this book.

Second, and relatedly: Why focus solely on *textual* history? The period in which Gutacker ends his narrative was, in fact, an intense and prolific period of commemoration in the United States—a time in which a great many Americans (including American Protestants) preserved and disseminated their pasts in public spaces, in forms such as monuments, memorials, archives, historical societies, and more. Indeed, the Presbyterian Historical Society was formed in 1852, and other Protestant denominations soon followed suit. The American centennial in 1876 set off a flurry of material and textual history-making by Protestants, from the publishing of congregational histories to the erection of historical plaques and markers. One wonders how Gutacker's conclusions might have been deepened or extended by engaging with *material* history as well as textual history.

I offer these questions not as criticism but as generative wondering. There is much more to be said about this subject, and I hope future scholars will build on the insights of this book. Gutacker has made an important contribution to the field of American religious history generally and to the historiography of nineteenth-century American Protestantism specifically with this incisive, eye-opening study.

Devin C. Manzullo-Thomas  
Messiah University  
Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania



*Religion and U.S. Empire: Critical New Histories.* Edited by Tisa Wenger and Sylvester A. Johnson. (New York: New York University Press, 2022. 384 pp.)

In their introduction to *Religion and U.S. Empire*, Tisa Wenger and Sylvester Johnson argue that religion (a) has been "integral to structuring and administering colonial power;" (b) "been a site for contesting or [...] subverting colonial power;" and (c) "functioned as a chief means of organizing alliances and boundaries of imperial identities." While acknowledging that religion, imperialism, and settler-colonialism are prevalent inquiries in Indigenous, ethnic, postcolonial, and secular studies, this volume examines these topics within U.S. imperial history, arguing that U.S. imperial expansion and Christian mission worked conjunctively in the American landscape and beyond its shores. Divided into thirteen essays and structured under four sections, this volume provides a fresh historical-critical account of how religion structured, enabled, and challenged U.S. imperialism, serving as an important read for scholars of American religious history.

Section one of this volume offers a solid framework to understand the conjunctive relationship between Christianity and settler-colonialism in the early period of the United States. Titled "Formations," this section examines how Christianity was marked as the "correct" religion under the new American secular nation-state, which fueled tensions and violence throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as U.S. settler-colonies clashed with Indigenous polities over land. Wanting to racially "up-lift" Indigenous communities, settlers converted Native Americans to Christianity and domesticated their lands through settler township

development. Sylvester Johnson, in his essay on Liberia, writes of a similar settler establishment in the West African region. There, Black American Protestants—in their departure from the racist American landscape—established the settler-colony of Liberia to practice Black democratic freedom. In doing so, Indigenous Africans were forcefully converted into Christianity, mirroring the violence deployed by Christians against Native Americans since the inception of America.

Section two of this volume challenges the popular assumption of government data collection practices as “neutral enterprises,” suggesting that they functioned as a mechanism for population management and security through expert knowledge production on subjects under U.S. political control. In her essay on Native Americans in late nineteenth century U.S. Census data, Sarah Dees argues that data collection agencies narrated Indigenous people as a “racially inferior” and “declining” population, warranting governmental assimilation efforts, land acquisition, and cultural erasure of Native Americans. Demographic information used to advocate for infrastructural improvement was also applied by government agencies on those living within a city’s limits. Such was the case as described in Cara Lea Burnidge’s essay on twentieth-century Chicago settlement houses aimed at documenting the poor living and working conditions of working-class, immigrant communities. This section complicates the simplistic framing of historical actors working either “for” or “against” U.S. imperialism, revealing how population data collection projects, even when “well-intended,” became inextricable from the imperial functions they performed.

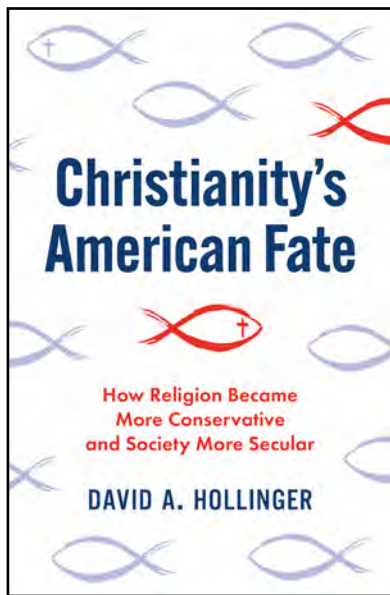
While U.S. imperial history often charts rigid distinctions between the colonizer/colonized and metropole/peripheral, a strength of this volume is the intentional obfuscation of these binary-framed relations of power. Sections three and four showcase how religion functioned to both enable and subvert U.S. imperial power on a global scale in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Government-sponsored Christian industrial schools emerged in the American South, Hawai’i, and the Philippines to domesticate colonized subjects through Christian conversion and

gendered workforce training. In the Caribbean, Anglo-Christian supremacy informed imperial expansion efforts while the United States sought to incorporate the Dominican Republic under a new “Pan-American” identity. White U.S. missionaries and “Europhile Dominican elites” ran campaigns to disassociate the “non-Black Latin” Dominican Republic from its Black Haitian counterpart. In contrast, Heather Curtis’s essay on Ida B. Wells and Georgia E. L. Patton’s Christian theology of liberation showcases how religion was used to combat systems of racial domination domestically and globally.

This volume expands the current literature on American religious history through emphasizing religion’s critical function(s) in the U.S. imperial landscape. Lucia Hulsether’s concluding essay rightly leaves the reader with an unsettling anxiety regarding how religion operates within a liberal-multicultural society. Hulsether reveals how “religious pluralism” functions to brand the U.S. empire as “culturally diverse” and “inclusive,” while relying on cultural erasure and assimilation to sustain Euro-Protestant identity. As Hulsether’s essay calls us to reconsider how liberal-multiculturalism and neoliberal efforts to “decolonize” operate under the guise of religious pluralism and diversity, readers are left with a cliff-hanger regarding the actual possibility of religion doing anything to “dismantle” U.S. imperialism. Could religion actually serve as a mechanism to liberate colonized subjects? Or is the liberal American democracy always successful in re-securing itself by “celebrating” religious difference as a means to manage political insurrection? How does Euro-Protestant exceptionalism haunt public religion and civic/political order in our contemporary moment? These questions expand American religious studies through incorporating critical, decolonial, and ethical inquiry and analyses. What we do with religion is up to us, and this volume successfully highlights its complex role in the U.S. imperial landscape.

Nathan Samayo  
Princeton Theological Seminary  
Princeton, New Jersey





*Christianity's American Fate: How Religion Became More Conservative and Society More Secular.* By David A. Hollinger. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022. 216 pp.)

More than a century ago, the British atheist-turned-Christian apologist G. K. Chesterton quipped that “The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult; and left untried.” The distinguished intellectual historian David A. Hollinger makes a similar argument about a particular type of Christianity, ecumenical Protestantism, in his latest book, *Christianity's American Fate*.

Since at least 1972, when Dean M. Kelley published *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing*, the prevailing explanation for evangelical resurgence and mainline decline has been to identify the former with rigorous, demanding faith and the latter with milquetoast gentility. Conservative Christianity grew because it was muscular. Liberal (Hollinger prefers the term *ecumenical*) Christianity faded because it was weak.

Hollinger turns that interpretation on its head. Evangelicalism did not flourish because it was demanding, he writes, but because it offered (white) Americans a cozy refuge from the challenges of modern life. Ecumenical Protestant leaders, by contrast, assigned their churches the much harder task of grappling with such issues as economic inequality, racism, sexism, pluralism, and the truth claims of science. The religious path of engagement with this complexity was deemed too difficult by most Americans, so they veered off in other directions. Consequently, mainline membership, funds, and cultural capital all plummeted.

As ecumenical Protestants vacated the dominant place they had held in American society for generations, evangelicals seized the national Christian franchise. To be Christian in the United States, over the past fifty years, has increasingly meant being “Bible-believing,” pro-life, nationalist, antifeminist, anti-antiracist, and, above all, Republican. Americans who rejected that compound identity grew increasingly willing to tell pollsters their religion was “none.” Hence Hollinger’s subtitle—the American brand of religion, as promoted by the country’s loudest Christian voices, became more conservative, while American society as a whole became more secular.

Although the book’s title is broader, Hollinger mostly writes about white American Protestantism in the twentieth and early twenty-first century. He does not invoke definitions of evangelicalism that stretch back to the First Great Awakening nor those that cast evangelicalism as a global faith. The evangelicalism he addresses grew out of fundamentalism, and it is inextricably linked to its historical context. He writes, “Evangelicalism flourished not so much as the elongation of an old conservative theological tradition but as an aspect of social and economic modernization, closely tied to business and up-to-date methods of communication.” That tradition coalesced alongside businessmen’s opposition to the New Deal and then became a political juggernaut through alliance with the Republican Party’s Southern Strategy. Hollinger dissents as sharply from David Bebbington’s or George Marsden’s definition of evangelicalism as he does from Dean Kelley’s explanation of why the tradition thrived. He aligns instead with the work of scholars such as Kristin Kobes Du Mez and Darren Dochuk.

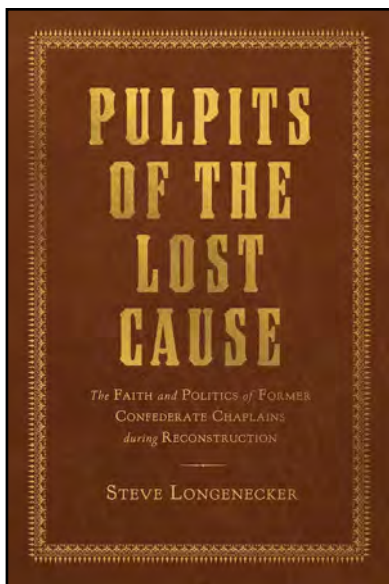
In some ways, ecumenical Protestants (including Presbyterians) are the heroes of Hollinger’s story. They are the ones who learned from their encounters with American Jews and with people of other faiths on mission fields, emerging from those encounters with broader minds and humbler hearts. They are the ones who invented the modern concept of human rights and then fought for those rights to be extended to marginalized communities in the United States and abroad. Yet ecumenical Protestants are unlikely to read Hollinger’s narrative as a triumph because he does not see much of a future for the tradition. The “historic function of ecumenical Protestantism,” according to Hollinger, is “as a way station on the road to post-Protestant secularism.” Hollinger himself, as he has written elsewhere (the essay “Church People and Others,” in his 2013 volume *After Cloven Tongues of Fire*), transitioned out of Christianity, and he considers

that trajectory entirely viable. He writes here that “only if one approaches history as a Christian survivalist is it invidious to recognize ecumenical Protestantism’s historical role as a way station to something else. Was that ‘something else’ really so bad?”

Many ecumenical Christians would see that something else as not invidious, exactly, but a loss, a shift to lament rather than celebrate. Even Hollinger identifies one reason for lament: the next generation. He writes, “The drift to post-Protestantism during the half century between 1970 and 2000 decimated the potential leadership of ecumenical Protestantism. The seminaries had trouble recruiting ministerial students. Able men

and women, Black and white, who might have entered the ministry as late as the 1960s were not interested.” The stream that produced a prophetic political figure such as Senator Raphael Warnock (whom Hollinger cites positively) is drying up. One need not be a “Christian survivalist” to see that development as a truly bad thing—for churches, for American religion, and for the health of the body politic.

Elesha Coffman  
Baylor University  
Waco, Texas



*Pulpits of the Lost Cause: The Faith and Politics of Former Confederate Chaplains during Reconstruction.*  
By Steve Longenecker. (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2023. 272 pp.)

More than forty years ago, historian Charles Reagan Wilson identified the central role that Christian ministers played in explaining Confederate defeat in the American Civil War to white southerners who thought of themselves as God’s chosen people. In recent years, the Lost Cause has been one of the rare academic topics that has broken through into the public consciousness, and historians have appropriately focused on identifying, studying, and debunking it. But reading these histories, one sometimes gets the impression that allegiance to the Lost Cause and white supremacy was both all-encompassing and relatively undifferentiated among white southerners. Even Charles Reagan Wilson, focused on showing how the clergy were the “main

celebrants” of the Lost Cause, was not much concerned with what his subjects were doing when they weren’t eulogizing Robert E. Lee.

The great contribution of Steve Longenecker’s book on how ten former Confederate chaplains navigated the nexus of faith and politics in the years after the war, is that it examines the ideology of the Lost Cause in the context of everyday lives and ministerial careers that had many other competing priorities. In a series of biographical essays, Longenecker emphasizes the theological diversity of the group he examines, as well as their varying levels of attachment to the Lost Cause, ranging from quiet devotion to fervent promotion. One of his most convincing conclusions is that theological belief had little bearing on the intensity of a minister’s loyalty to the Lost Cause.

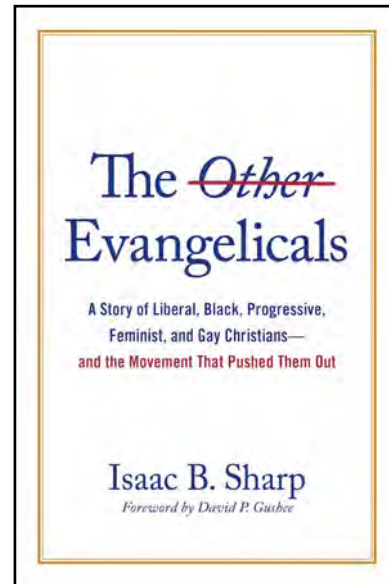
Longenecker describes how some clergy, like Presbyterian ministers John L. Girardeau and Moses Drury Hoge and the Methodist George Gilman Smith, proclaimed a trinity of conservative theology, conservative politics, and devotion to the Lost Cause. These are the figures who populate most academic accounts of the Lost Cause. But as Longenecker also shows, there were ministers like the Presbyterian Lachlan C. Vass—a chaplain to the Stonewall Brigade and then pastor of a church in New Bern, North Carolina, after the war—who struggled to keep Christian religion and devotion to the Lost Cause separate. Vass believed in the righteousness of the Confederate cause and even gave a prayer at the dedication of a Confederate monument in New Bern. But when a visiting minister offered a prayer for the persecuted martyr Jefferson Davis from his pulpit, Vass objected strenuously. Vass “kept Lost Cause politics out of parish life,” writes Longenecker, “and he bristled when others tried to insert it into his congregations” (46).

Despite their common Confederate service, not all those who espoused the Lost Cause were theological conservatives. Episcopalian William Porcher DuBose, from a prominent South Carolina family, served the Confederate cause first as a soldier and then as a chaplain. After the war, DuBose found a home on the campus of the University of the South at Sewanee, Tennessee, where he built a reputation as a liberal academic theologian who, among other things, questioned the biblical account of miracles. Founded by Episcopalians on the eve of the war as an explicitly southern institution and home after the war to a whole cadre of ex-Confederates on its board and faculty, Sewanee was a hotbed of Lost Cause sentiment.

But after the war, the reunification of the Episcopal Church and Sewanee's goal of becoming a truly national institution meant that the Lost Cause was often muted in the interest of maintaining ties to national organizations, and DuBose seems to have conformed to this pattern. "The Sewanee Lost Cause was often low-key," writes Longenecker, since a "full-throttled Lost Cause would have been a disincentive for Northern donors" (129). But while some ex-Confederate Episcopalians like DuBose moderated their Lost Cause views, Longenecker shows that others, like the theologically moderate Randolph H. McKim, decidedly did not.

Longenecker is clear that what united almost all his subjects was their white supremacy, a fundamental tenet of the Lost Cause. And yet even here he highlights the nuance that existed among these ex-Confederates. In his profile of Atticus Haygood, Longenecker describes the Methodist minister as a "born-again, theologically conservative, New South booster who flirted with racial equality" (117). While Longenecker is clear that Haygood's support for black equality and education in the post-Reconstruction South was tepid by our standards, he also points out that Haygood was consistently willing to provoke the ire of his fellow white southerners on these explosive issues. To be sure, Haygood was only a slight exception to a mostly ironclad rule, but as part of Longenecker's careful and insightful study, he shows the theological and political variation that existed, within limits, even among white southern clergy who embraced the Lost Cause.

Robert Elder  
Baylor University  
Waco, Texas



*The Other Evangelicals: A Story of Liberal, Black, Progressive, Feminist, and Gay Christians—and the Movement that Pushed Them Out.* By Isaac B. Sharp. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2023. 257 pp.)

When Union Theological Seminary professor Charles Briggs embraced higher biblical criticism, he did not consider it to conflict with his evangelical Christian faith. In fact, he repeatedly affirmed that the Bible was the only infallible rule of faith and practice. Nevertheless, he was convicted of heresy in 1893 and suspended from ministering in the Presbyterian Church. Similarly, when Tom Skinner helped start the Harlem Evangelistic Association in 1961; when Jim Wallis founded the *Post-American*—which would become *Sojourners* magazine—in 1971; when Nancy Hardesty and Letha Scanzoni published *All We're Meant to Be* in 1974; and when Ralph Blair founded Evangelicals Concerned in 1975, they all considered themselves to be evangelical. As Isaac B. Sharp enumerates in *The Other Evangelicals*, each of these figures was intentionally excised from the evangelical mainstream.

*The Other Evangelicals* intervenes in the history of evangelicalism to address how the mainstream version of evangelicalism—one that is theologically, socially, and politically conservative, as well as culturally and racially homogeneous—became mainstream. According to Sharp, this process was “neither quick nor inevitable.” Sharp argues that primarily during the twentieth century, a group of self-appointed leaders within evangelicalism transformed the definition of evangelicalism from a description of a generally

conservative version of Protestantism to an identity marker with “an increasingly specific set of criteria and implicit connotations.” By demarcating Black, gay, feminist, theologically liberal, and politically progressive Christians who shared similar theologies as outside the bounds of evangelicalism, conservative white evangelicals altered its commonly understood meaning. In Sharp’s words, they added non-theological “accoutrements” to the definition of evangelical, which amounted to a person who “believed like an antimodernist antiliberal inerrantist, thought like an anti-feminist antigay complementation, and voted like a white Republican.”

As the subtitle of the book indicates, Sharp centers on the groups who were marginalized in evangelical institutions and on the “gatekeepers” who sought to make those evangelicals “other,” including “theologians, ethicists, famous pastors, popular authors, and political activists.” It is simultaneously history and historiography. Each of the chapters tells the story of the evangelicals defined out of mainstream evangelicalism, and then assesses the way that this story has been told, or in many cases, failed to be told, in histories of evangelicalism.

The book’s structure is indicated by its subtitle. Framed by a prologue, an introduction, and a conclusion, the body chapters are organized according to the group that is excluded, and are presented in roughly chronological order. The first chapter focuses on the “second-generation fundamentalists” who self-styled themselves as neo-evangelicals to pave a middle path between more isolationist forms of fundamentalism and the modernist, liberal strains of Christianity that dominated the mainline denominations. It discusses the 1940s formation of organizations including the National Association of Evangelicals, Fuller Theological Seminary, *Christianity Today*, and the Evangelical Theological Society as evangelical alternatives to mainline Christian institutions that would play a pivotal role in shaping evangelical identity in the latter half of the twentieth century.

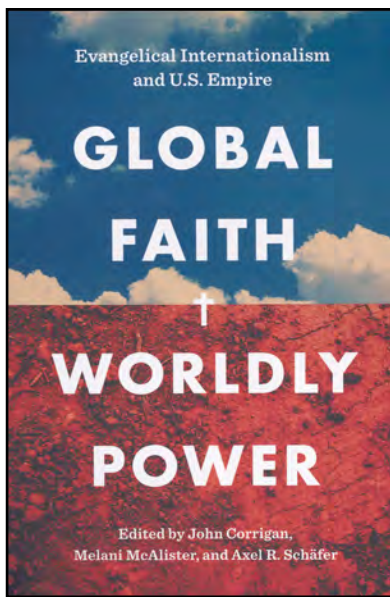
The second chapter tells the story of the radical Black evangelical movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

This chapter argues that Black evangelical figures attempted to forge space for their voices and interests, but were ultimately sidelined insofar as they raised issues that did not align with the cultural whiteness of evangelical institutions. The third chapter brings together stories of politically progressive publications, leaders, and movements that challenged the Republican consensus by advocating for racial and economic justice.

The fourth chapter explores the emergence of evangelical, or biblical, feminism in the 1970s and the increasing resistance to it. The fifth chapter covers the emergence of gay evangelical activism and the rise and fall of the ex-gay movement. The discrete nature of this structure allows for the chronological tracking of particular groups and their critics, though in some cases it belies the relationship between them. For instance, progressive evangelical groups sometimes performed anti-gay rhetoric to prove their evangelical bona-fides.

Sharp’s work contributes to the study of those who find themselves within the theological markers of evangelicalism but outside its cultural and social norms. It builds on previous studies on progressive evangelicals by David Schwartz and Brantley Gasaway and Pamela Cochran’s study of evangelical feminism. By bringing these various histories together, the book examines the common means by which evangelical institutions carve out their boundaries by pushing out dissenting people and movements. In his conclusion, Sharp observes that popular attempts to explain white evangelical support for Trump’s candidacy in 2016 are superficial because they are historically myopic; they identify racism and nationalism in contemporary conservative evangelicalism without tracing these features in past times. *The Other Evangelicals* succeeds in identifying key episodes of the twentieth—and very early twenty-first—century that produced the current version of mainstream evangelicalism.

Kelsey Hanson Woodruff  
Harvard University  
Cambridge, Massachusetts



*Global Faith, Worldly Power: Evangelical Internationalism and U.S. Empire.* Edited by John Corrigan, Melani McAlister, and Axel R. Schäfer. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2022. 398 pp.)

In *Global Faith, Worldly Power*, John Corrigan, Melani McAlister, and Axel Schäfer offer a well-curated exploration of evangelicalism's global dimensions from the nineteenth century to the present. Chapters on the Americas, Africa, and Asia document the various international impacts of U.S. evangelicalism and shed light on transnational networks that have allowed Global South Christians to shape North American Christianity and politics. The thirteen chapters and the editors' historiographical introduction look beyond studies focused solely on the religious right, presenting an alternative evangelical history "that puts internationalism at the center and that accounts for the racial diversity of the U.S. and global evangelical communities."

The Introduction places American evangelical ambitions in transnational context, providing a substantive history of global evangelicalism in three periods, matching with the volume's three sections. Citing continuities with twentieth-century developments, Part 1: America's Missionary Impulse begins with the Protestant missionary movement of the nineteenth century and the complicated ways it both served European and U.S. imperial projects and challenged Anglo-Saxon colonizing logic and racial politics. Emily Conroy-Krutz traces debates about missionaries' evangelistic, humanitarian, and political activities before and after the Boxer Uprising in China

(Chapter 1). Christina Cecelia Davidson documents the African Methodist Episcopal Church's mission in Haiti and the ways Haitian Protestantism survived through ecumenical engagement with Catholics (Chapter 2). Similarly, Tom Smith challenges the perceived distance between evangelicalism and ecumenism in the Philippines, where Protestants' colonial uncertainty led them to consider Catholicism as a vehicle for evangelicalism (Chapter 3). Dana Robert's examination of student mission conferences in the United States and Japan suggests that the motto "Make Jesus King" served conflicting global and nationalistic evangelical ideals (Chapter 4).

Part 2: Global Christianity and the Cold War considers the growth of evangelicalism in the post-World War II, post-colonial era alongside U.S. political, military, and economic ascendancy. Gene Zubovich's study on the anti-racist legacy of educator and clergyman Buell Gallagher reveals how evangelicalism (specifically white Christian nationalism) formed in opposition to ecumenical Protestant globalism from the 1940s to 1970s (Chapter 5). In the same period, according to Sarah Miller-Davenport, American evangelical missionaries used decolonization as an opportunity to expand evangelistic efforts in regions receiving U.S. government aid (Chapter 6). Applying a transpacific lens, Helen Jin Kim revisits the Korean War origins of World Vision and analyzes the racialized dimensions of anti-communist politics that have erased the legacy of key Asian Christian actors like Kyung Chik Han (Chapter 7). David Kirkpatrick points to the equally overlooked Latin American evangelical left, which told stories of violence in post-colonial contexts to rebuke U.S. narratives about persecuted Christians that bolstered the political right (Chapter 8). Lauren Turek reflects on the U.S. right in the Reagan era, during which evangelicals employed the languages of human rights and religious freedom to integrate themselves into American foreign policy and, among other endeavors, lobbied for the Contra cause in Nicaragua (Chapter 9).

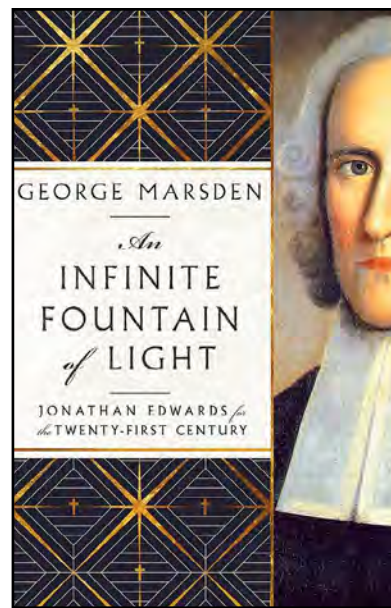
Part 3: Evangelicals in the Neoliberal Order brings the book up to the present after first reviewing existing transnational research on evangelicalism and American foreign policy between the 1940s and the 1970s (Axel R. Schäfer's Chapter 10). Lydia Boyd uses Uganda as a case study exploring the politics of compassion in American evangelicals' shift toward promoting (abstinence-centered) AIDS prevention in Africa in the early 2000s (Chapter 11). Candace Lukasik places evangelical "persecution politics" in contemporary perspective through her ethnographic fieldwork among

Coptic immigrants in the United States who have been both welcomed and racialized by conservative evangelicals and right-wing politicians' narratives of Coptic suffering and anti-Muslim polemics (Chapter 12). Finally, John Corrigan identifies the paradoxes of American evangelical missionary empathy in accounts of marriage that deem Africans and Asians as "just like us" while simultaneously critiquing their failure to conform to white evangelical marital norms and sexual behaviors (Chapter 13).

This stimulating volume is one that many will want to read in its entirety, as the book progresses chronologically to make sense of shifting U.S. evangelical political action in response to global events and in relationship with global Christians. The chapters complement each other, producing a cohesive whole informed by multiple national and cultural contexts and reinforcing the editors' claim that most studies on the religious right do not tell the full story of evangelicalism. Together, the contributors present evangelicalism as a global phenomenon that is fluid, contested, and far more diverse—culturally, politically, and theologically—than most commentators have realized. The volume's attention to the evangelical left in Latin America, for example, leads to further reflection on progressive evangelicalism in the United States.

The first part of the book makes particularly apparent how important women's organizations were in the nineteenth-century Protestant missionary movement. This theme emerges again later in Corrigan's quotations from missionary women, prompting questions about the role of women in broader evangelical politics since the Cold War—a topic that the book does not directly address. Each chapter is short and accessible enough to assign the volume to undergraduates, yet it is also rich in source materials, theory, and analysis—making it a valuable resource for scholars working on evangelicalism, transnationalism, mission history, American religion and politics, and world Christianity.

Deanna Womack  
Candler School of Theology at Emory University  
Atlanta, Georgia



*An Infinite Fountain of Light: Jonathan Edwards for the Twenty-First Century.* By George Marsden. (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2023. 164 pp.)

For those who are familiar with George Marsden's magisterial biography of Jonathan Edwards, nothing new about Edwards's life will be discovered in Marsden's new book, *An Infinite Fountain of Light*. This book's aim is not to offer another historical study of Edwards but rather to make the case for Edwards's relevance to a contemporary audience that might find Edwards anachronistic. While Edwards's time and circumstance—that of eighteenth-century Puritan New England—is startlingly different from the United States of the twenty-first century, Marsden works diligently to show how Edwards has much to offer still, to today's non-religious and especially evangelical Christian communities.

In Chapter 1, Marsden claims that it is precisely in the contrasts between Edwards's life and thought and the prevailing cultural sensibilities of modernity that his enduring relevance can be found. So, in Chapter 2, Marsden sees in Benjamin Franklin and his allies the kindling for what would eventually result in the domestication of transcendence in modern American culture. That led further to the bracketing of God in everyday life, hyper-individualism and the cult of narcissism, and moral relativism and tribalism. In Chapter 3, Marsden outlines how Edwards's theological aesthetics, or account of God's beauty, provides a paradigm shift that opens a view into creation as dependent on God's love.

Chapter 4 sets its sights specifically on evangelical Christianity. Marsden maps how the revivalism of

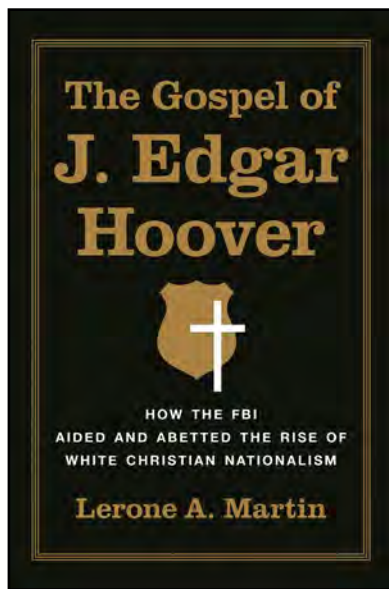
George Whitefield, among others, augmented distrust of institutions, anti-intellectualism, and market-driven religiosity, all of which sowed the seeds for celebrity culture, the primacy of self-promotion, and personal experience as adjudicator of biblical truth. Revivalism and its emotional fervor are not inherently problematic, according to Marsden's reading of Edwards, but the good that revivalism can unleash can be corrupted easily. This implies that evangelicalism's excesses need excising rather than evangelicalism itself. Chapter 5 charts a path for evangelicalism's renewal through Edwards's account of the religious affections (or the marks of genuine conversion). Particularly pointed is Marsden's discussion of Edwards's emphasis on humility as central to Christian love. Christian love also demands just practices, with care for the poor being chief among them.

The fourth chapter is Marsden's most successful. There, his account of the cultural and social forces that eighteenth-century religious revivalism unleashed in the American colonies shines, demonstrating why Marsden is the preeminent historian of American Christianity. Chapter 2's survey of Franklin's legacy on contemporary American political and economic life is also excellent, especially for those who may know him only through the lens of pop culture. But as insightful as these two chapters are, they are also indicative of the book's apologetic limitations. Christian readers may find Marsden's defense of Christian belief convincing, while non-Christians and non-religious persons may not; that may very well depend on how persuasive one finds C.S. Lewis, who is relied upon heavily by Marsden. This reliance raises the question of whether Marsden needs Edwards to make the case for a transcendent God, or whether Edwards brings

anything distinctive to such an argument. Then there is the question of whether a non-believer would necessarily disagree with the Edwardsean insight that our universe is beautiful. How should we make sense of scientists' penchant for using similar metaphors for our cosmos? Lastly, it is not at all obvious that non-Christian thinkers, as Marsden suggests, are unable to respond to the problem of violence (apart from advocating for more violence) because of their inability to grapple with evil and its origins. That requires a lot more substantiation than Marsden provides.

In drawing too sharp a contrast between Edwards and modernity, Marsden sometimes overdetermines Edwards's salience. For example, though it is noteworthy that Edwards preached consistently about attending to the indigent, Edwards can come off as simply doubling down on the duty of individual charity. But charity and social justice are not necessarily the same. Nevertheless, Marsden's book is more than a worthwhile read. Edwards was far from perfect (his ownership of slaves makes that certain), and he is easy to misinterpret, as some sectors of American evangelicalism have done, according to Marsden. But Marsden makes a strong case for why Edwards ought not to be forsaken. For those who worry especially about how American evangelicalism (whether of the Reformed, Pentecostal, or non-denominational kind) has veered off course by embracing "manly militancy," the prosperity gospel, or populist political agendas, re-reading Edwards offers unexpected correctives to such errors.

Ki Joo Choi  
Princeton Theological Seminary  
Princeton, New Jersey



*The Gospel of J. Edgar Hoover: How the FBI Aided and Abetted the Rise of White Christian Nationalism.* By Lerone A. Martin. (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2023. 352 pp.)

A household name by the early Cold War, longtime Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Director J. Edgar Hoover became a top public authority in the nation's fights against communism and crime. Many came to revile him, especially after learning that Hoover had approved thousands of illegal FBI activities. Yet throughout the fame and controversy, Hoover remained a staunch Presbyterian, faithfully renting a pew at the National Presbyterian Church, where he served on numerous committees and even taught Sunday School. Yet until now, his faith has been understudied. Lerone Martin shows us why this has been a mistake.

For Hoover, key national security concerns had a common cause: godlessness. Faith was Hoover's ultimate solution. Yet not just any faith. He dismissed far-right Christian fundamentalists as disreputable "trash" and left-leaning Christians as influenced by, or susceptible to, communism. Rather, Hoover, who grew up in a racially segregated neighborhood and church that was only minutes from the Capitol, championed a white Christian nationalism, an "impulse to make whiteness and conservative Christianity the foundation and guidepost of American governance and culture." Martin's book demonstrates how Hoover used his office to instill white Christian nationalism not only among FBI personnel, but also among many U.S. Christians.

Martin reveals how "Hoover recreated the FBI in his image, establishing an internal religious culture

that fashioned the FBI into a battalion of dedicated soldiers and ministers for white Christian America." For instance, for decades, many white special agents went to a Jesuit retreat center for spiritual formation, which even helped inform "split-second decisions" they might make in the field. The FBI also held annual worship services, with Hoover approving prominent white Protestant and Catholic officiants who praised and blessed FBI personnel and their work. Hoover's carefully cultivated religious culture within the Bureau encouraged white FBI personnel to believe that they "had divine sanction to enforce and defend existing societal arrangements—the racial, gendered, classed, and sexual status quo—in the name of Jesus."

For Hoover's FBI, "ends justified any and all means," even illegal ones, with "moral ends ... determined by the Bureau's Christian nationalism, not the U.S. Constitution." Martin succeeds in demonstrating how many of Hoover's white FBI agents embodied, endorsed, and enforced white Christian nationalism

The book also "explains why white evangelicals—from the pulpit to the pew, from the local church to the international parachurch—honored ... Hoover as an anointed leader." Although not an evangelical, Hoover shared with white evangelicals racial, patriarchal, heteronormative, and anti-communist convictions and a belief that the United States was a Christian nation. White evangelicalism allowed Hoover to shape, strengthen, and spread the white, nationalistic gospel already present among white evangelicals, who used Hoover's respectability and public authority to help secure white evangelicalism's acceptance in the public square.

Since he determined, with the FBI's imprimatur, what was and was not communist, Hoover helped police white evangelical orthodoxy, for instance, responding to scores of letters from white evangelical pastors and laity seeking help in ascertaining what was communist and, therein, not Christian. Hoover's beliefs that the Social Gospel, National Council of Churches, Revised Standard Version of the Bible, Civil Rights Movement, and even Martin Luther King, among others, were under communist influence sometimes had far-reaching effects. Laity tried to use Hoover "to convert their pastors from Protestant liberalism," and numerous pastors used Hoover's writings and speeches in sermons. With taxpayer dollars, the FBI reproduced and disseminated Hoover's essays published in *Christianity Today*, white evangelicalism's flagship periodical, and the Bureau recruited white evangelicals into its ranks. Cold War connections between Hoover, the FBI, and white

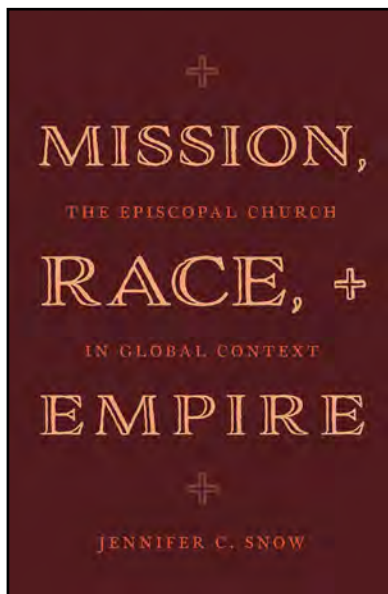


evangelicals abound. Martin adduces many more, firmly establishing how such collaborations shaped and advanced white Christian nationalism.

Even today, whether among FBI personnel or white evangelicals, “Hoover’s white Christian nationalism lingers like a ghost.” Anyone seeking to learn more about white Christian nationalism should consider Martin’s well-researched book. It breaks new ground in uncovering U.S. government complicity in its proliferation, and it offers new purchase for understanding why white evangelicals have long been willing to endorse dishonest political figures to increase their power. It also expands FBI scholarship, which has rarely studied the FBI’s religious culture or sway among U.S. Christians.

This book, of course, is not exhaustive. For example, Martin might have explored Hoover’s relationship with Billy Graham, who met with Hoover, in more depth. Yet after suing the FBI for records, Martin learned that possibly relevant files “had been legally destroyed by the FBI.” With government agencies sometimes concealing or destroying records of interactions between the U.S. government and Christians, some religious histories are not meant to be public knowledge. Yet Martin shows why recovering them matters.

Thomas W. Seat  
Seton Hall University  
South Orange, New Jersey



*Mission, Race, and Empire: The Episcopal Church in Global Context.* By Jennifer C. Snow. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023. 360 pp.)

In *Mission, Race, and Empire*, Jennifer Snow tells the history of the Episcopal Church in America over four centuries through the lens of mission, defined as “the church incorporating others beyond its current boundaries.” Such a broad umbrella is a helpful thinking tool: does mission only mean the spreading of the gospel to those outside a body of faith? Or does it mean the building of new churches in new areas as members of the church themselves move? Defining mission as the expansion of the denomination allows Snow to place foreign work alongside domestic, and outreach to non-Christians alongside church planting. She identifies two central debates as the

defining questions of the Episcopalian experience in this framework. The first is an ongoing tension between high church and evangelical styles, which had a significant impact on institutional forms, priorities, and personnel. The second debate was over race, with a particular attention to the denomination’s frequent embrace of racial paternalism in the face of both scientific racism and the antiracist demands of African American members (and some white allies).

The book’s opening three chapters focus on the colonial and revolutionary eras. Here, Snow points to the major challenge that English Anglicans faced when going about the work of the church at such a distance from the Church of England and its system of Bishops. Throughout the colonial period, Anglican colonists understood their religion to be closely entangled with civilization and order. It was out of this organizational context that English colonists confronted the religious questions posed by colonization, most importantly for Snow’s interest, relations with Indigenous nations and with African slavery. Chapters in this section focus on Jamestown, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, the Mohawk experience in the revolutionary era, the denominational tensions with Methodism, the creation of the Episcopal Church, and the challenges of incorporating free Black worshipers as full members. At the end of this experience, she explains, “the Episcopal Church’s sense of mission ... was focused on proper polity and worship.”

The book’s second section covers the nineteenth century, and readers who are familiar with Presbyterian mission history in this era will be interested to see the different experiences of the Episcopal Church. Internal conflict between the high church and evangelical factions defined this

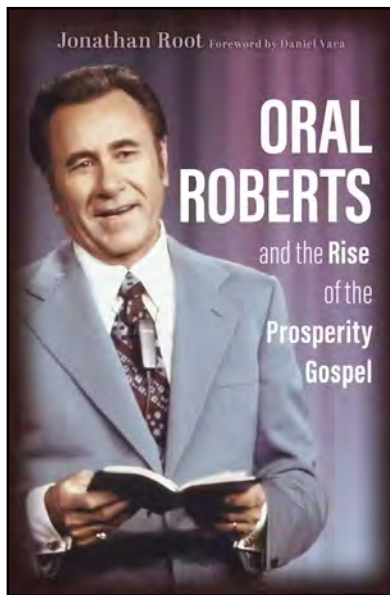
era's approach to questions of how to serve (and expand) membership during an era of slavery, civil war, reconstruction, settler colonial expansion, and American imperialism. Unlike most other Protestant denominations, the Episcopalians did not split over the issue of slavery. Instead, the antebellum southern church identified the enslaved as a target for missions, accommodated state laws that banned literacy training, and adjusted their catechism for the enslaved with a message that reinforced the slave system. In the North, free Black Episcopalians faced racist barriers to their leadership in the church. The second half of the century saw the church reaching out more to African Americans, Native Americans, and Asian Americans using what Snow identifies as "strategies of assimilation, paternalism, and segregation."

Part II concludes with a chapter on missions to Hawaii and the Philippines in the years after the United States acquired them as colonial territories. These "foreign" and imperial contexts were the places where, she argues, missionaries and bishops challenged the assimilationist ideas about race that continued to dominate "home" missions to African Americans and Native Americans alike. This new ideology was further developed in the early twentieth century, particularly in the decades between key missionary reports in 1910 and 1932. From this period forward, Episcopalian missions joined with other denominations in

emphasizing justice and humanitarianism in a *missio dei* theology. Snow's chapters on the twentieth century focus on Japanese American Episcopalian experiences of internment, civil rights activism, changes to the Book of Common Prayer, women's ordination, and the debates about marriage and sexuality within the global Anglican Communion.

A real strength throughout the book is Snow's focus on individuals. It is hard to tell a story that covers such a long period of time and such complicated issues, and these character studies give readers an understanding of how mission work hinges, to some extent, on the leadership and vision of a few individual bishops and priests who emerge at key moments. Yet Snow points out, too, that any individual action was also subsumed in the overarching structure and bureaucracy of the denomination and its General Convention. Such dynamics should be familiar to readers of Presbyterian history, as well, and will generate much food for thought about missed opportunities and roads not taken in church history. Readers interested in the ways that institutionalized racism shapes denominational structures, practices, and theology will learn a great deal from Snow's work.

Emily Conroy-Krutz  
Michigan State University  
East Lansing, MI



*Oral Roberts and the Rise of the Prosperity Gospel.* By Jonathan Root. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2023. 271 pp.)

“Hands of faith!” That was the humorous shout I used to get in the late 1980s from fellow graduate school pick-up basketball players on the rare occasions when I was lucky enough to sink a shot; they were mocking (good-naturedly) my heritage as an Oklahoman and an evangelical, with a reference to the giant 60-foot tall and 30-ton bronze-cast sculpture of praying hands that today greets those driving into the campus of Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Originally called “Healing Hands” and placed in front of the “City of Faith” medical center, whose construction and eventual bankruptcy are told in great detail in this outstanding biography, the sculpture represented a faith that was not enough to save Oral Roberts from the megalomania that led to the rise and then inevitable fall of his medical complex. The main portion of the three-building complex, now called CityPlex Towers, stands, at 60 stories, as the third tallest building in Oklahoma. During the 1990s, in ironic contrast to its origins from Roberts’s “Seed of Faith” version of the prosperity gospel, it served as the headquarters of a large debt collection company, which itself went bankrupt in 1998. Oral Roberts University itself, however, has prospered in recent years, currently counting an enrollment of over 5,000 students. Oral Roberts died in 2009, but no doubt he would have been especially pleased with the appearance of ORU in the Sweet Sixteen of the 2021 NCAA men’s basketball tournament.

Jonathan Root’s biography is the first full-length serious study since David Edwin Harrell’s *Oral Roberts: An American Life*, published in 1985. Much happened since then in Oral’s personal and professional lives, in the history of American Christianity, and in the long-term fortunes of television ministries and the Prosperity Gospel. Thus, we are fortunate to have Root’s excellent work, not to supplant but to provide a much-needed updating and further consideration of the life of one of the most important, intriguing, and ultimately puzzling American Protestant leaders of the twentieth century.

Root recounts Oral Roberts’s life in rigorous and, at times, unsparring detail—his impoverished upbringing and near-death experiences from tuberculosis when young, his invention of new styles of tent ministries and his “Seed of Faith” philosophy that served him spectacularly well for many years (until it didn’t), and his move into television and out of his Pentecostal Holiness background into “respectability” as a United Methodist (though, in truth, neither of those two sides ever fully trusted him). We learn as well of the varied careers of his children: one, a brilliant professional linguist tormented by his homosexuality, dying by suicide; a daughter perishing in a plane crash; and yet another, Richard, succeeding his father as president of ORU but forced to resign in 2007 because of a variety of financial and personal scandals of the kind his father had always avoided. Later, we follow his falling reputation, becoming the butt of national jokes in the 1980s, ignominiously culminating in his televised threat that God would “take him home” if he didn’t raise the funds to save the City of Faith complex. The funds eventually arrived, but the disastrously flawed business model of the “City of Faith” forced bankruptcy and a sale.

Roberts combined a remarkable skill at innovation in preaching and fundraising, a ceaseless drive for success, a thick-skinned ability to survive setbacks and start again at even larger ventures, a true passion for combining medical and spiritual healing that doubtless derived from his boyhood health crises, and a deep insecurity that fed his narcissism and difficulty in forging genuine personal connections. Roberts’s place is hard to stake out precisely. Certainly he was part of the astonishing rise of charismatic Pentecostalism, but he also deliberately left it behind in search of more respectable quarters. He was part of the birth of the prosperity gospel, but his version differed significantly from its current expression. He was certainly an evangelical conservative, but he was never part of the religious right. He admired Billy Graham and

wanted to be like him, but his background as a faith healer and propensity toward the grandiose and even ludicrous made that impossible. He assiduously sought connections with the wealthy and powerful, but the shadow of Elmer Gantry never fully escaped him.

Root attributes the complexities of Roberts to his sense of divine calling combined with deep insecurities that pressed him to create religious and physical structures that screamed “I’ve made it!” Root lays out

Roberts’s life in rich detail, and just as importantly, provides a cautionary tale about how capitalism and materialism can co-opt and swallow our own desires and dreams.

Paul Harvey  
University of Colorado Colorado Springs  
Colorado Springs, Colorado



*We Will Be Free: The Life and Faith of Sojourner Truth.* By Nancy Koester. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2023. 266 pp.)

In *We Will be Free*, Nancy Koester brings her insightful analysis and crisp storytelling to the remarkable life of Sojourner Truth. Truth, née Isabella Baumfree, is known mostly as a fierce abolitionist wielding great oratorical fire and a strong will for freedom. And while Koester certainly captures this element of the woman—she is “strong and vigorous,” “flint-like,” often “shouting” and “hollering”—she also draws out Truth’s more tender aspects, her fallibility, losses, and hopes. The result is a fulsome portrait of a complex woman, one who serves as a perceptive guide through a period of great tumult in American history and life. Taking “a ride” with Truth from the shadow of the Revolutionary War through Reconstruction’s end, the biography examines the ongoing struggle for racial equality, the intersectional nature of that struggle for Black women, and the deep and inventive faith that has sustained so many throughout it.

Born in 1797 in a rapidly changing Hudson River Valley, Truth grew up in a vibrant Afro-Dutch culture but also enslaved, auctioned away from her parents “for \$100, along with a flock of sheep.” She would be sold several more times before finally deciding to free herself. It was in this pursuit that she heard “there is but one master, and he who is your master is my master,” words that would work a “mighty change” in Truth’s life. Even after her emancipation, though, Truth found herself in poverty, balancing work and childcare and her own aspirations to “preach the love of Jesus.” After heading to New York City in 1829, Truth found not only new connections, including a “joyful reunion” with her unmet older siblings, but a calling to preach both to Methodists and prostitutes alike. In the following years, Truth’s physical and spiritual journeys included wide detours: through perfectionism, retrenchment, and transmigration, through a wild yet oppressive sojourn in the Kingdom of Matthias, and a flirtation with the Millerites. But onward she traveled, taking on her now-iconic moniker. Loosed from an outlook that had restricted her to following “narrow, dead end paths,” she was now liberated, “free to go wherever God’s Spirit called her.”

Koester emphasizes the transformation. In reference to Truth’s confounding early years spent essentially in the employ of a fanatical, abusive cult leader, for instance, she writes, “Isabella was not yet Sojourner Truth,” but a “housekeeper” in search of community and godliness. But Truth displayed even then her trademark steely determination, unafraid to defend her name and file lawsuits even against whites, which she usually won. In seeking to regain her son Peter from servitude in Alabama, which she did in 1828, Truth recalled feeling “so *tall within*,” a sense she may have inherited from her father, whose name, “free tree,” indicated he too stood tall and proud and dignified.

The two major turning points in Truth’s life were her conversion and her turn to abolitionism. Her long-suffering mother had told her, “there is a God who hears you and sees you ... [W]hen you are beaten or

cruelly treated, or fall into any trouble, you must ask and God will always help you.” When in distress years later, she remembered her mother’s words and cried aloud to that God who hears. “It [was] Jesus” who answered. As was common, this dramatic encounter led to her conversion and lent credibility to her ministry, just as her experiences in slavery would to her abolitionism. Cultivating a “distinctly Christian and deeply African American” faith, Truth emphasized the Holy Spirit, insisted on her own holiness, and unusually, never settled within a particular church or denomination. She also preached—like Jarena Lee, Zilpha Elaw, and Julia Foote. Koester doesn’t much mention them, or many other Black women, in the book, perhaps because, as Truth complained, “I am about the only colored woman that goes about to speak for the rights of colored women.” She wasn’t the only one, but she was indeed forging her own path, propelled by her faith.

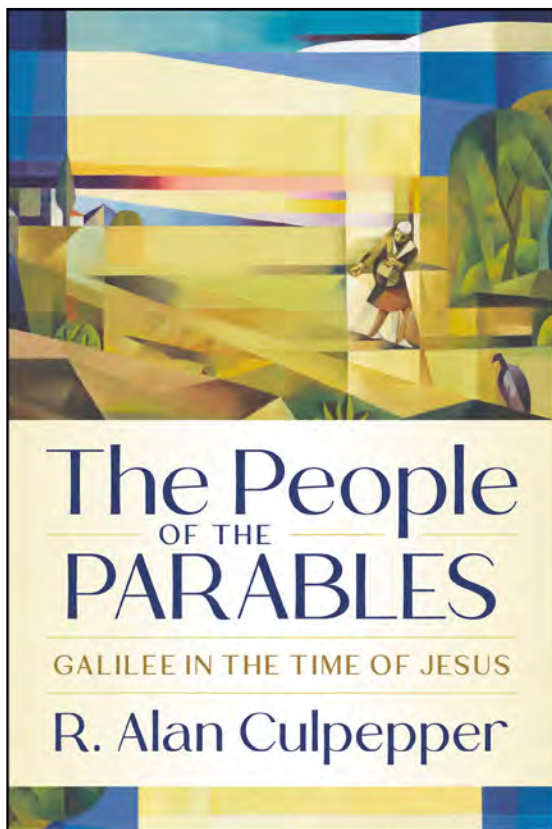
Koester describes Truth as, above all, a “comer-outer,” coming out of not only slavery and servitude, but dancing and drinking, abusive authority and patriarchy, and as she did, bidding others to come out as well. Alicia Jackson, in her exceptional introduction, places Truth alongside Ida B. Wells, Mamie Till-Mobley, Fannie Lou Hamer, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors and Opel Tometi as women who not only testified to racial and gendered traumas, but “call[ed] out the brutality” using their own stories of pain and loss in pleading for action. In the 1840s, Sojourner Truth crisscrossed from New England to Ohio to Michigan addressing audiences about the evils of slavery. She stayed with the poor, with Adventists, and in the Northampton Association of Education and Industry anti-slavery commune where she first met William Lloyd Garrison, David Ruggles, and Frederick Douglass.

She also spoke out forcefully for women’s equality, herself a “double woman,” “embod[y] Black and women’s rights movements.” She “could no more separate these than she could divide herself in two.” As she put it, “I am a woman’s rights.” But Koester balances Truth’s undeniable strength and passion with her human vulnerability. She is harangued and bullied, forced to bare her breast as proof of her femaleness. She chooses to wear a white turban and can’t quite give up tobacco; she never fully escapes poverty, loses a son to the sea and a grandson to illness.

Both because of the breadth of her life, and her intrepidity in it, riding along with Sojourner Truth means bearing witness to many pivotal events of the nineteenth century: slavery, the Second Great Awakening and reform movements, the Civil War and Reconstruction. It also means readers spot the Marquis de Lafayette from a distance, yell out at Frederick Douglass, and befriend Harriet Tubman and Harriet Beecher Stowe. They will spend a few hallowed minutes with Abraham Lincoln, considering all that changed and all that didn’t. Engrossing in its detail and well-paced, the biography unfolds smoothly, with historical arguments overlaid lightly but compellingly. The result is a readable, teachable book suitable for a wide array of audiences who should come to know the fierce, faithful Sojourner Truth. *We Will Be Free* is a book for all who, in the face of ongoing injustice, defiantly echo Truth’s infamous question: “Is God gone?” As Koester herself puts it: “Until everyone has their rights, there should never be a last biography of Sojourner Truth.”

Ansley L. Quiros  
University of North Alabama  
Florence, Alabama

# READING THE BIBLE THROUGH A HISTORICAL LENS



## THE PEOPLE OF THE PARABLES *Galilee in the Time of Jesus*

R. ALAN CULPEPPER

9780664268848 \* Paperback \* Available March 26, 2024

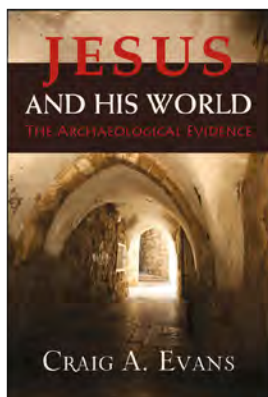
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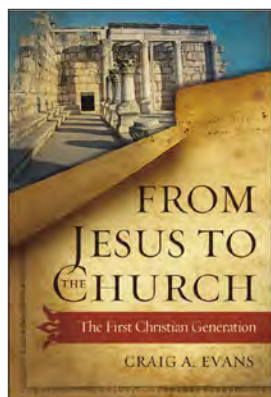
Drawing from Greco-Roman history, Second-Temple Jewish studies, archaeology, the social world of the New Testament, parable studies, and the burgeoning literature on Galilee, *The People of the Parables* describes life in first-century Galilee as it was experienced by the characters in Jesus' parables.

R. Alan Culpepper assesses both primary literature and recent research on Galilee—including important archaeological discoveries—and fashions a new and insightful social history of Galilee, the people of the parables, and the historical context of Jesus' ministry. The more we know about Galilee, the more vivid the parables and Jesus' world become. Culpepper brings new meanings to these stories for today's readers by shedding light on everyday life in Galilee in the time of Jesus.

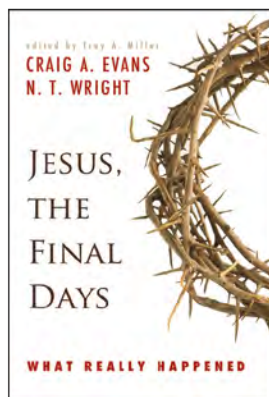
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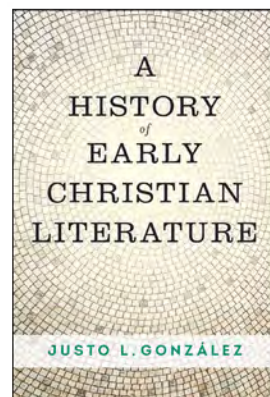
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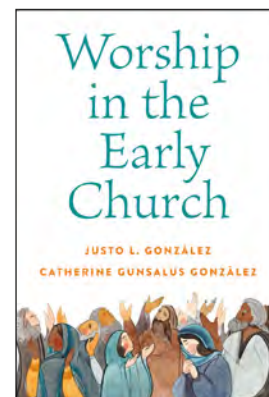
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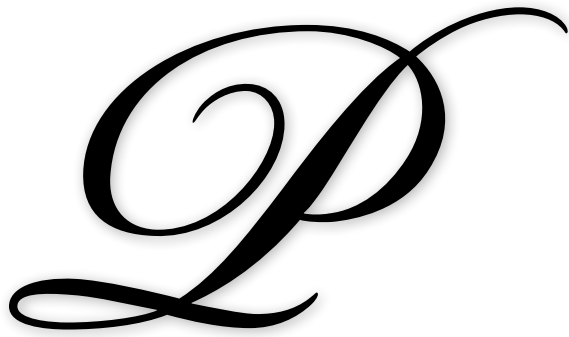


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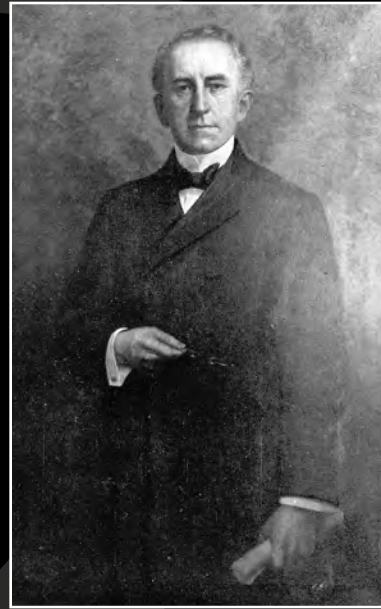
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## Christian Theism vs. Modernism

NO MIDDLE GROUND-ONLY A CHASM

*"The faith which was once delivered unto the saints"*

① The Bible **IS** the Word of God  
The BOOK judges man.

② Jesus Christ is **THE** Son of God in a sense in which **no** other is.

③ The birth of Jesus Christ was **SUPERNATURAL**.

④ The death of Jesus was **EXPIATORY**.

⑤ Man is the product of special **CREATION**.

⑥ Man is a **SINNER**, fallen from original righteousness, and apart from God's redeeming grace is hopelessly lost.

⑦ Man is justified by **FAITH** in the atoning blood of Christ; result - supernatural regeneration from **ABOVE**.

*Modernist theology*

① The Bible **CONTAINS** the word of God  
Man judges the Book.

② Jesus Christ is **A** son of God in the sense in which **all** men are.

③ The birth of Jesus Christ was **NATURAL**.

④ The death of Jesus was **EXEMPLARY**.

⑤ Man is the product of **EVOLUTION**.

⑥ Man is the unfortunate **VICTIM** of environment, but through self-culture can "make good."

⑦ Man is justified by **WORKS** in following Christ's example; result - natural development from **WITHIN**.

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B.

*On Which Side of the Chasm Are You?*