Sunday, October 13, 2013—Grace Life School of Theology—*Grace History Project*—Lesson 111
Reforming Fundamentalism

Introduction

- In the previous lesson we learned about the founding and history of Grace Bible College (originally Milwaukee Bible Institute). We suspended our study of the school's history in the year 1968. As we will see in future studies in this project, 1968 would prove to be a fateful year in the history of the Grace Movement. This was the year that Pastor Stam broke away from the GGF over disputes with the faculty and administration of GBC.

- In order to properly understand the Stam/GBC/GGF controversy we need to understand something about the theological mood of the nation after World War II. In other words, Stam's dispute with the GBC/GGF was part of larger cultural and theological trends affecting the American church.

- In the years following WWII, after the national crisis was over, some Fundamentalists thought it was time to reform Fundamentalism and purge it of old ideas and unwanted leaven. At the forefront of this reevaluation of Fundamentalism was Carl F.H. Henry's 1947 book *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*. In the preface, Henry called for a rebirth of Fundamentalism predicting that the movement would be dead within two generations if it was not reformed.

    - ". . . unless we experience a rebirth of apostolic passion. Fundamentalism in two generations will be reduced either to a tolerated cult status, or in the event of Roman Catholic domination in the United States, become once again a despised and oppressed sect. The only live alternative, it appears to me, is a rediscovery of the revelational classics and the redemptive power of God, which shall lift our jaded culture to a level that gives significance again to human life. It was the rediscovery of classic ancient philosophy that gave incentive to Renaissance humanism with its disastrous implication for Western culture. The hour is ripe now, if we seize it rightly, for a rediscovery of the Scriptures and of the means of the Incarnation for the human race." (Henry, 9)

- Henry goes on to express his deep concerns as follows:

    - ". . . it is not this doctrinal assault on the central affirmations of our faith that here distresses me. . . What concerns me more, that we have needlessly invited criticism and even ridicule, by a tendency in some quarters to parade secondary and sometimes even obscure aspects of our position as necessary frontal phases of our view. . . With the collapse of Renaissance ideals, it is needful that we come to a clear distinction, as evangelicals, between those basic doctrines on which we unite in a supernaturalistic world and life view and the areas of difference on which we are not in agreement while yet standing true to the essence of Biblical Christianity. . . It is an application of, not a revolt against, fundamentals of the faith, for which I plead." (Henry, 10-11)

- Dr. Harold John Ockenga gives the following endorsement of Henry's work in the book's introduction:

    - "If the Bible-believing Christian is on the wrong side of social problems such as war, class, labor, liquor, imperialism, etc., it is time to get over the fence to the right side. The church needs a progressive Fundamentalism with a social message.

      If Acts 15:13-18 outlines God's program and premillenarianism is correct, the church will not preach on Paris Conferences or liquor, yet it will be indifferent to these pulse-beats of the world's life. If we vacillate between Fundamentalist isolationism and cooperation with the World Wide Council of Churches, it is because we cannot be fatalistic on ethical problems. Yet Fundamentalism is precisely that. . . It is impossible to shut the Jesus of piety, healing, service, and human interest from a Biblical theology. The higher morality of redemption does not invalidate more consistency. . .

      A Christian world-and life-view embracing world questions, societal needs, personal education ought to arise out of Matt. 28:18-21 as much as evangelism does. Culture depends on such a view, and Fundamentalism is prodigally dissipating the Christian culture accretion of centuries, a serious sin. A sorry answer lies in the abandonment of social fields to the secularist.

      Here then is a healthy antidote to Fundamentalist aloofness in a distraught world. Dr. Henry may well call for an evangelical (Fundamentalist) ecumenicalism and for unity to face social needs." (Henry, 16-17)

- Thus was the alarm sounded to reform Fundamentalism after WWII. A new generation of Evangelical intellectuals such as Henry and Ockenga sought to chart a new course for Fundamentalism moving forward. Eventually the ripples caused by this tidal wave of change would impact the Grace Movement.

<u>From Evangelicals to Fundamentalists to Neo-Evangelicals</u>

- "The term "evangelical" dates from the sixteenth century, and was then used to refer to Catholic writers wishing to revert to more biblical beliefs and practices than those associated with the late medieval church. It was used especially in the 1520s, when the terms *evangelique* (French) and *evangelisch* (German) came to feature prominently in polemical writings of the early Reformation." (McGrath, 121)

- "Evangelical" (from the Greek for "gospel") eventually became the common British and American name for the revival movements that swept back and forth across the English-speaking world and elsewhere during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Central to the evangelical gospels was the proclamation of Christ's saving work through his death on the cross and the necessity of personally trusting him for eternal salvation." (Marsden, *UFE*, 2)

- "Since Protestantism was by far the dominant religion in the United States until the mid-nineteenth century, evangelicalism shaped the most characteristic style of American religion. Being a style as well as a set of Protestant beliefs about the Bible and Christ's saving work, evangelicalism touched virtually all American denominations. These denominations, such as Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Disciples of Christ, and others, had much to do with shaping American culture in the nineteenth century. Most major reform movements, such as antislavery or temperance, had a strong evangelical component. Evangelicals had a major voice in American schools and colleges, public as well as private, and had much to do with setting dominant American moral standards." (Marsden, *UFE*, 2)

- Cultural changes during the time period from the 1870s to the 1920s created a major crisis within the evangelical coalition. Essentially it split in two. "On the one hand were theological liberals who, in order to maintain better credibility in the modern age, were willing to modify some central evangelical doctrines, such as the reliability of the Bible or the necessity of salvation only through the atoning sacrifice of Christ." (Marsden, *UFC*, 3)

- "On the other hand were conservatives who continued to believe the traditionally evangelical doctrines and took the name fundamentalist. Fundamentalists were ready to fight liberal theology in the churches and changes in the dominant values and beliefs in the culture. . . Since fundamentalism was originally just the name for the militantly conservative wing of the evangelical coalition, fundamentalism was at first as broad and complicated a coalition as evangelicalism itself. It included militant conservatives among Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Disciples, Episcopalians, holiness groups, Pentecostals, and many other denominations." (Marsden, *UFC*, 3)

- "Fundamentalism was the response of traditionalist evangelicals who declared war on these modernizing trends. . . On one front the fundamentalists emphasized the fundamental doctrines of the faith: dogmas that liberal Protestants, or "modernists," typically denied. . . Modernists, influenced by higher criticism, emphasized the Bible's human origins; fundamentalists countered by affirming its inerrancy in history and science as well as in faith and doctrine." (Marsden, *RF*, 4)

- "The most influential antimodernist doctrine, eventually spreading through most of the interdenominational fundamentalism, was dispensationalism. . . This doctrine also provided a general theory of history, proclaimed that the present "church age," the sixth dispensation in the world's history, was marked by apostasy in the church and the moral collapse of so-called Christian civilization. Thus dispensationalism predicted the rise of modernism and emphasized the necessity of fighting to preserve the true faith and personal purity. These emphases also led dispensationalists to an antimodernist way of interpreting the Bible. They insisted on the inerrancy of Scripture and argued that each word was the perfect word of God." (Marsden, *RF*, 5)

- "Yet another front in fundamentalism's campaign was the battle for America—the battle to save the nation as an evangelical civilization. While in theory this agenda conflicted with

dispensationalism's pessimism about Christian civilization, in practice the two managed to coexist. Fundamentalism was thus a coalition . . . fighting against their common enemies, modernism and secularism." (Marsden, *RF*, 5)

- "During the early decades of the twentieth century, denominational colleges and seminaries cut themselves loose from their evangelical moorings, Bible institutes sprang up as alternatives, usually emphasizing evangelism, missions, and dispensationalist Bible study." (Marsden, *RF*, 5)

- "In the 1930s "evangelicalism" was not a term much used in American religious life. The white Protestant world was still dominated by the mainline denominations, and these were divided by wars between "fundamentalists and their sympathizers and "modernists" and their sympathizers. Both sides had earlier claimed the appellation "evangelical," so it was no longer as much use to either. Strictly speaking, most American Protestants . . . were neither fundamentalists nor modernists, but were located somewhere in between." (Marsden, *UFE*, 66)

- "By the 1930s the northern white churches were undergoing realignment, and fundamentalists relocated and built their own networks of separate institutions. Uncounted numbers of fundamentalists left the major denominations to join or to found independent local Bible churches, or they forsook a more liberal denomination for a smaller, more conservative one. Most fundamentalists, nonetheless, remained quietly within the major denominations, hoping to work within existing structures, especially through conservative local churches. At the same time, they increasingly gave their support to a growing network of trans-denominational fundamentalist evangelistic agencies." (Marsden, *UFE*, 66)

- "By the early 1940s, Charles E. Fuller of "the Old-Fashioned Revival Hour" had gained the largest radio audience in the country. In the 1920s Fuller had been a typical fundamentalist militant and had split a local Presbyterian congregation to form his own group; but by the time he became a national figure, he had adopted the positive fundamentalist stand of refusing to engage in controversy or to make separatism a test of orthodoxy." (Marsden, *UFE*, 68)

- In 1942 the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) was formed as a positive fundamentalist coalition. "As part of the effort for an American and world revival after World War II, a group of positive fundamentalist intellectuals began organizing a move away from dispensationalist emphases. With America's emergence into world leadership after the war, they saw a unique opportunity for reconstituting Christian civilization, if America's evangelical tradition could be revived. To attain this ambitious goal, they recognized that it would be necessary to build on fundamentalist claim to stand in the broad tradition of Augustinian orthodoxy, rather than to promote the more narrow dispensationalist teaching of recent invention. They also deplored fundamentalism's emphasis on personal ethical prohibitions at the expense of a positive social program, a theme enunciated in Carl Henry's *Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* in 1947. They were embarrassed, furthermore, by the anti-intellectualism that had come to be associated with dispensational fundamentalism, which had been promoted primarily through Bible institutes and pragmatic popularizers." (Marsden, *UFE*, 72)

- "The "neo-evangelical" reformers of fundamentalism were among the first to anticipate the possibility of an evangelical resurgence. Already in the 1940s they were talking grandiloquently not only about such a comeback, but even about "the restating of the fundamental thesis and principles of a Western culture" and as Carl Henry put, "remaking the modern mind." They were convinced that if the voice of fundamentalists could be tempered slightly, evangelical Christianity could "win America."" (Marsden, *UFE*, 64)

- "Most simply understood, the "new evangelical" reformers repudiated both the doctrinal and cultural implications of a thorough-going dispensationalism while they remained loyal to the fundamentals of fundamentalism. . . Theologically they stood for a moderate form of classic Calvinist Protestantism as opposed to some of the innovations of dispensationalist Bible teachers. . . they were much more like the broadly Calvinist interdenominational evangelicalism that had wide influence in nineteenth century American culture." (Marsden, *RF*, 6)

- "In the history of Fuller Theological Seminary, founded in 1947 by such new evangelical reformers, we can trace the renewal of America's nineteenth-century evangelical heritage as it developed from a reform within fundamentalism into a separate movement." (Marsden, *RF*, 8)

- "The most notable effort to counter such trends was the founding of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, Californian, in 1947. Charles E. Fuller provided the early funding but left most of the management of the institution to the intellectuals, headed by Harold Ockenga as president and including among its early faculty an impressive lineup: Carl Henry, Edward J. Carnell, Wilbur M. Smith, Everett Harrison, Gleason Archer, Harold Lindsell, George E. Ladd, Daniel Fuller, and Paul K. Jewett." (Marsden, *UFE*, 72)

- "Though the Fuller faculty deemphasized dispensationalism, they did not immediately repudiate their fundamentalist heritage. They were sincerely dedicated to Charles Fuller's ideal of positive evangelism and were close associates of Billy Graham. The school paid its sincere respects to fundamentalist doctrinal militancy, as well, by requiring creedal assent to the inerrancy of Scripture." (Marsden, *UFE*, 72)

- "During the 1950s, Billy Graham's success was rapidly changing the status of this predominantly positive evangelicalism that had been growing out of fundamentalism. Graham's vast popular appeal gave him virtual independence. The election of Eisenhower and Nixon in 1952 gave him entry into the White House. . . Most importantly, Graham's move toward the respectable center of American life precipitated a definitive split with the hardline fundamentalists in 1957. For his New York City crusade, Graham accepted the sponsorship of the local Protestant Council of Churches. Strict fundamentalists were deeply offended by this cooperation with liberals and they anathematized Graham. In the aftermath of the resulting schism with the coalition, "fundamentalism" came to be a term used almost solely by those who demanded ecclesiastical separatism. They called their former allies "neo-evangelicals," picking up on the term "new evangelicalism" coined earlier by Ockenga." (Marsden, *UFE*, 72)

A Brief History of Terminology

- George M. Marsden, author of many books on the history of Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism explains the history of these words in the United States in his book *Fundamentalism and American Culture*.

    - *Evangelicalism* (19th Century)—includes most major Protestant denominations and also newer revivalist groups linking holiness and premillennialists. By the end of the century, American evangelicalism is beginning to polarize between theological liberals and conservatives.

    - *Fundamentalism* (1920s)—a general name for a broad coalition of conservatives from major denominations and revivalists (prominently including premillennial dispensationalists) who are militantly opposed to modernism in the churches and to certain modern cultural mores. Related revivalists groups, such as from Pentecostal and holiness churches, are also often called fundamentalists although some remain separate from major cultural and theological battles.

    - *New Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism* (1950s-mid 1970s)—"New Evangelicals" (eventually just "evangelicals"), most of whom have a fundamentalist heritage, form the core of a broad coalition that draws in related theological conservatives, ranging from Pentecostals to Mennonites, who emphasize positive evangelicals, best exemplified by Billy Graham.

    - *Fundamentalistic Evangelicalism* (Late 1970s to early 21st Century)—the Religious Right (which includes Catholics and Mormons) includes "fundamentalistic" militants who come from not only separatist fundamentalist groups, but also from almost the whole spectrum of evangelicals, even though by no means all evangelicals, including self-styled fundamentalists, and are politicized. (Marsden, *FAC*, 234-235)

- ". . . fundamentalism was originally a broad coalition of antimodernists. From the 1920s to the 1940s, to be fundamentalist meant only to be theologically traditional, a believer in the fundamentals of evangelical Christianity, and willing to take a militant stand against modernism. Conservative was sometimes a synonym. So to call oneself a fundamentalist did not necessarily imply . . . that one was either a dispensationalist or a separatist. Neither did it necessarily imply, despite efforts to the contrary by its detractors . . . that one was . . . anti-intellectual, or a political extremist." (Marsden, *RF*, 10)

- "On the other hand, original fundamentalism did include certain elements, including *tendencies* toward all the traits mentioned above, that separated it from the mainstream of traditional evangelical Protestantism. As we have seen, much of the plot that shaped the Fuller heritage centered around efforts to get rid of those more recent aspects of fundamentalism and yet retain its essential commitment to evangelical orthodoxy and antimodernism." (Marsden, *RF*, 10)

- "The term 'evangelical' became a significant option when the NAE was organized (1942) . . . In the context of the debate with modernism, fundamentalist was an appropriate alternative; in other contexts (of the debate within the fundamentalist movement), the term evangelical was preferable." (Marsden, *RF*, 10)

- "Once the debates within fundamentalism led to a split, the "new evangelicals" or "evangelicals" came together as a part of formed fundamentalists. Although they successfully reappropriated "evangelical" as the primary designation for Biblicist American Protestantism, by no means all "evangelicals" had shared their struggles with fundamentalism." (Marsden, *RF*, 10)

Works Cited

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