

Christian Ethics

A Brief History of Fundamentalism in America

Matthew 16:3 And in the morning, It will be foul weather to day: for the sky is red and lowring. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?

Prior to World War I, there were 4
dominant branches of
Fundamentalist thought

- One branch pretty much condemned American culture
- These were Dispensational, Premillennial Fundamentalists, who found in “the signs of the times” the decay of American culture
- Social reform looked much like the lawlessness predicted by Paul, II Thessalonians 2.1-12
- The concern was that religious “liberalism would turn religion into morality”
- Daniel’s prediction of the advance of knowledge (Daniel 12.4) was coming true
- Proponents of this branch were Arno Gabelein, and Isaac Haldeman

- Another respected the tension American culture created, but didn't want to totally isolate from it
- It was dispensational and premillennial, but didn't attack American culture
- It was apolitical, emphasizing evangelism as the primary means of contact with American culture
- Advocates of this view were W.B. Riley, Moody Bible Institute

- A third branch sought to preserve “Christian civilization”
- It believed that “the ideals of Christian piety went together with the ideals of the progressing and democratic American nation”
- In other words, America’ ideals were Biblical ideals
- They were willing to work with those who differed in some areas, in order to preserve the Christian American culture
- William Jennings Bryan was a leading advocate of this view

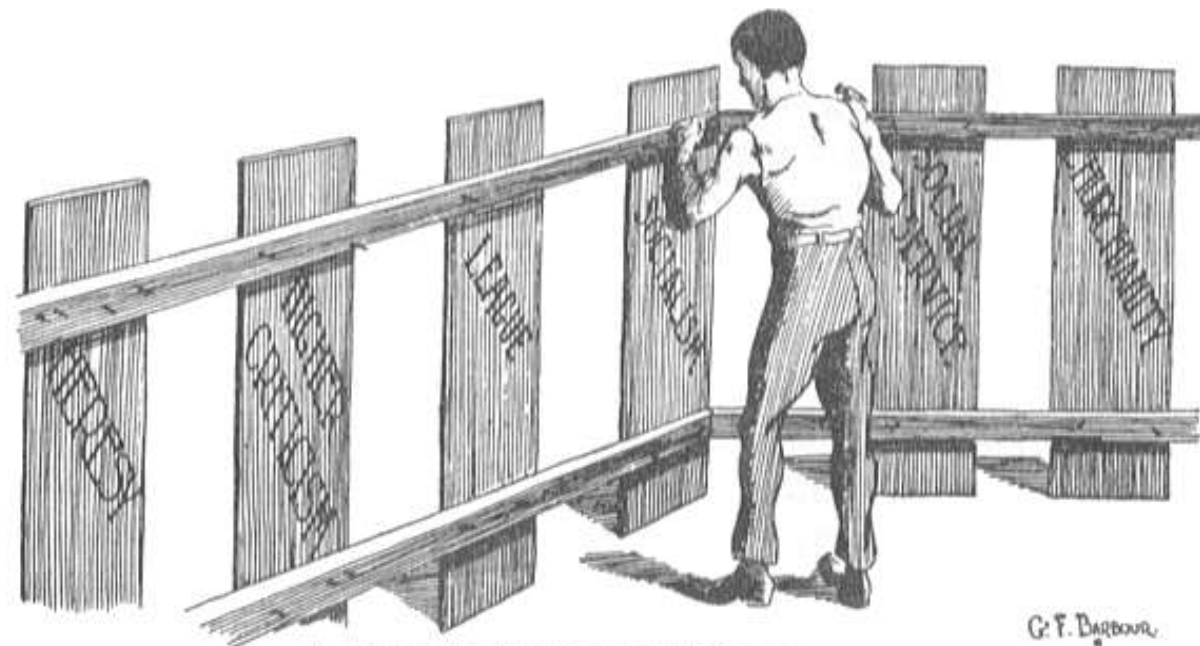
- The fourth branch viewed transformation of culture as part of the mission of the Church
- Although not all Presbyterians held this view, most who held it were Presbyterians.
- They saw the sword coming out of the mouth of Jesus (Revelation 19.21) as the Word transforming society
- Proponents were B.B. Warfield and J. Gresham Machen

World War I changed the way people viewed many things, and it contributed to further divisions among Fundamentalists

- Prior to WW I, the conservatives and liberals belonged to the same groups and denominations
- The war created deep divisions in America: Christians became much more politically active
- Williams Jennings Bryan resigned as Secretary of State so as to avoid bringing America into the war
- Billy Sunday became a great patriot, telling listeners that “made in Germany” was stamped on the bottom of Hell

- The “basic goodness” of man, which was the hallmark of liberalism and social reform, was threatened by the war: “Christian culture” had to be rescued from it
- Patriotism became a two-edged sword: American culture must be preserved, but sacrifice in the war didn’t equate to Christianity

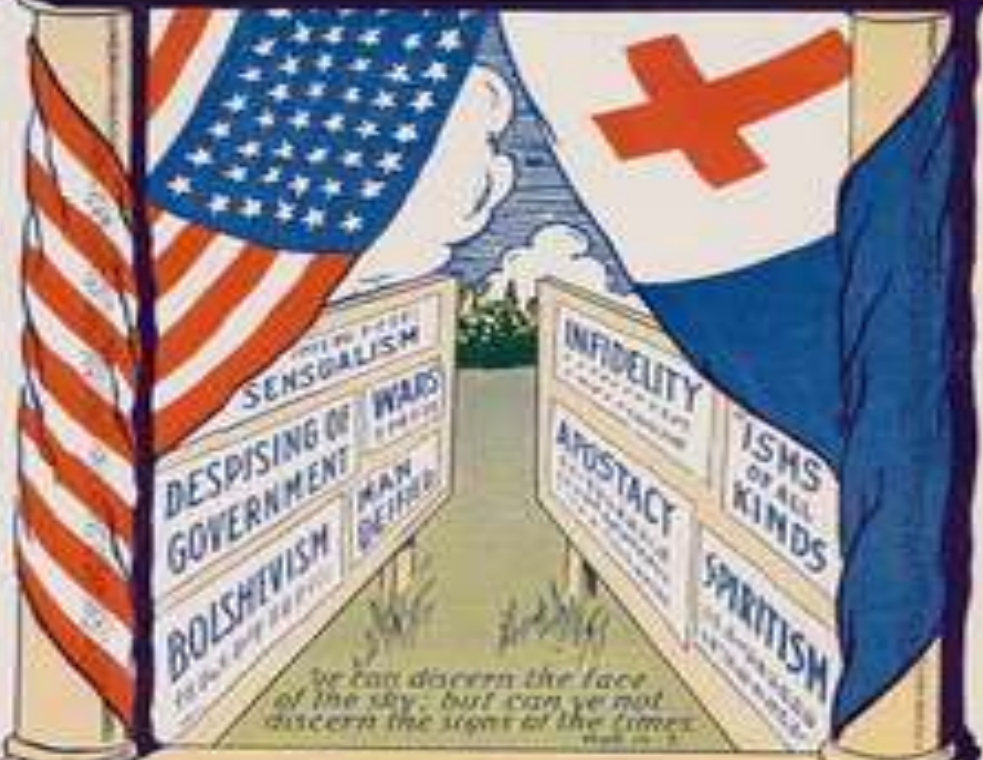
The immediate post-war years (the
Roaring Twenties) added a new enemy to
American culture: communism



G. F. BARBON

WILL THIS FENCE HOLD THEM BACK?

THE KING'S BUSINESS.
JULY 1918



SIGNS OF THE TIMES

It was during this time that
Fundamentalist began to shift its
emphasis

- Fundamentalism had primarily been concerned with evangelism, prayer, and prophecy
- In 1919, W.B. Riley organized the World's Christian Fundamentals Association
- It's first conference addressed "the Great Apostasy spreading like a plague throughout Christendom"

- It's goal was simple: to address the crises of the denominations by teaching true and pure doctrine.
- But the overwhelming sense of social crisis will bring about a new type of fundamentalism