

Conservative Evangelicals and Fundamentalists: Recognizing the Differences

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I. Prolegomena

A. Defining Some Terms

1. Evangelical
2. Conservative

B. Historical Context: New Evangelicalism

1. Issues (from Dr. McCune's *Promise Unfulfilled*, pp. 29-55)
 - a. The Unity/Separation Issue: The National Association of Evangelicals (1942)
 - b. The Social Issue: *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (1947)
 - c. The Scholarship/Intellectualism Issue: Fuller Theological Seminary (1947)
 - d. The Evangelism Issue: Billy Graham (1949-1957)
2. Agenda
 - a. From "Is Evangelical Theology Changing" in *Christian Life* (March 1956)
 - i. Friendly attitude toward science.
 - ii. Willingness to re-examine beliefs concerning the Holy Spirit's work.
 - iii. Shift from "so-called extreme" dispensationalism.
 - iv. Increased emphasis on scholarship.
 - v. More definite recognition of social responsibility.
 - vi. Re-opening the subject of biblical inspiration.
 - vii. More toleration regarding eschatological views.
 - viii. Willingness to converse with liberal theologians.
 - b. From Harold Ockenga
 - i. In the forward to *The Battle for the Bible*:

"Neo-evangelicalism was born in 1948 in connection with a convocation address which I gave in the Civic Auditorium in Pasadena. While reaffirming the theological view of fundamentalism,

this address repudiated its ecclesiology and its social theory. The ringing call for a repudiation of separatism and the summons to social involvement received a hearty response from many Evangelicals. ... It differed from fundamentalism in its repudiation of separatism and its determination to engage itself in the theological dialogue of the day. It had a new emphasis upon the application of the gospel to the sociological, political, and economic areas of life."

- i. From "The New Evangelicalism" in *The Park Street Spire*, February, 1958, pp. 5-6 (cited by Robert Lightner, *Neo-Evangelicalism* [Findlay, OH: Dunham, nd], pp. 40):
 - a). Fundamentalism had the wrong attitude—suspicion.
 - b). Fundamentalism had the wrong strategy—separation.
 - c). Fundamentalism had the wrong results—lost the battles.

3. Results

a. Theological Accommodation

b. Cultural Assimilation

C. Surveying the Evangelical Landscape

1. Non-fundamentalist evangelicals, i.e., those professing evangelicals which do not have roots in the fundamentalist-modernist controversy.
2. Post-conservative evangelicals, i.e., those professing evangelicals which have given up the fundamentalist concept of biblical authority and the idea of an irreducible core of doctrine which defines the Christian faith and who may claim to be a Christian.
3. Conservative evangelicals, i.e., those professing evangelicals who remain committed to the fundamentalist concept of biblical authority and to an irreducible core of doctrine which defines the Christian faith and who may claim to be a Christian.

II. The Question: Are conservative evangelicals really fundamentalists? If not, what are the differences between conservative evangelicals and fundamentalists?

What basis is offered for concluding that they are (historic) fundamentalists? (1) They hold to and promote the fundamentals of the faith, and (2) they believe in and practice separation. What should we make of this claim?

- A. It is true that these men embrace the fundamentals of the faith, but that really is irrelevant in terms of telling the difference between a fundamentalist and a neo-evangelical.

- B. There is indeed a growing interest in the subject and practice of separation, but it is very unclear whether there is anywhere close to a consensus on this subject.

- C. The differences between new evangelicalism and fundamentalism cannot be reduced to the issue of separation.

Concluding Thoughts and Questions: