

***The Fragmenting of Fundamentalism:
Its Roots, Results, and (Potential) Remedies***

David M. Doran
Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary

I. The Roots of Fundamentalist Fragmentation

A. The Fundamentalist/Modernist Controversy

B. The Fundamentalist/New Evangelical Controversy

1. The Backdrop

Rolland D. McCune (*Promise Unfulfilled*, pp. 29-55) cites four crucial issues/events that served as the backdrop for New Evangelicalism:

- 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. The Battleground

- a. Some Critical Clarifications about the New Evangelicalism when it was “New.”

- b. The Critical Concern of the Fundamentalist: Separation from Unbelief and Unbelievers

C. The Fundamentalist/“Pseudo[or Neo]-Fundamentalist” Controversy

1. The Backdrop

- a. John R. Rice and *The Sword of the Lord*

- b. Jerry Falwell, The Moral Majority, and *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon*

- c. Jack Van Impe, *Heart Disease in Christ's Body*.

2. The Battleground

- a. Some Critical Clarifications about the “Pseudo-Fundamentalists”

- b. The Critical Concern of the Fundamentalist: Separation from Disobedient Believers

Summary:

1. Three major controversies shaped fundamentalism as we know it, but the central questions seem to boil down to two: (a) how should believers respond to the presence of unbelief and apostasy? and (b) how should believers respond to other believers who refuse to respond biblically to unbelief and apostasy? The answers to these questions resulted in a fundamentalist commitment to separation from apostasy and from those who will compromise and cooperate with it.
2. But answering the second question became more difficult as the years passed by and the complexity of relationships became greater. In other words, there was a certain level of clarity and agreement among the separatists during the first two controversies, but the process of fragmentation began to set in as groups differed regarding the application of the two core separatist principles. Or, to look at it another way, the unity was fragmented because of a lack of agreement about the application of separation from disobedient brothers (both in their identification and the rigor with which it should be applied).

II. The Results of Fundamentalist Fragmentation

Three areas of confusion have developed:

- A. Confusion over the Definition of Fundamentalism
 1. Fundamentalism vis-à-vis Modernism, i.e., what constitutes a fundamentalist?
 2. Fundamentalism vis-à-vis New Evangelicalism, i.e., what constitutes a new evangelical?
- B. Confusion over the Doctrine of Separation, i.e., does the Bible teach separation from both believers and unbelievers?
- C. Confusion over the Practice of Separation, i.e., at what level does separation operate? Does believing in "secondary separation" really lead to third and fourth degrees?

III. The (Potential) Remedies for Fundamentalist Fragmentation

- A. Teach our history more clearly and carefully, with diligent attention to the biblical and theological issues at stake (and less attention and influence given to sociology and psychology).
- B. Accept the fact that times have changed and the significant ramifications of this on our reason for existence.
- C. Determine whether we will be a theologically driven movement or a pragmatically oriented movement, then get busy building on that decision.
- D. Demand integrity in our leaders and organizations.