PROTESTANT FUNDAMENTALISM IN THE BLACK COMMUNITY, 1915-1940

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation illuminates and elucidates the ways that Protestant fundamentalism was manifested and applied in the African American community during the modernist-fundamentalist controversy, from 1915-1940. In contrast to the prevailing literature, which tends to view the fundamentalist movement as essentially white and entirely distinct from the context of black Protestantism, I argue that during this period many members of the African American community consciously and intentionally articulated a fundamentalist theological perspective. Yet even as certain black Protestants conveyed a theological commitment to fundamentalism that aligned closely with that expressed by their white counterparts, their particular racial context motivated them to live out these religious convictions in ways that often distinguished them from white fundamentalists. This analysis emerges from a historical-theological approach that first examines doctrinal specifics being espoused – taking theological claims and theological actors seriously on their own terms – and second situates these theological claims within their relevant historical context.

This work offers several contributions to the scholarship of both fundamentalism and African American religious history. First, it identifies fundamentalist voices within black churches, thus challenging the prevailing perception that Protestant fundamentalism was an exclusively white religious project. Second, it demonstrates that the conservative theology of fundamentalism was not necessarily tied exclusively to a conservative social and political agenda, as scholars often assume; in fact, some black

preachers overtly fought against the oppressive hand of Jim Crow by offering progressive social and political applications of their conservative fundamentalist theology. Third, by identifying black fundamentalists who used their religious platforms to combat racial injustice in a variety of ways, this work challenges the commonly assumed association between theologically conservative religion and social accommodationism/passivity within the black church.

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When my journey through graduate school began nine years ago as a master's student at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, I had not imagined the possibility that I might end up where I am today. I entered Southwestern's M.Div. program intending to pursue a career in pastoral ministry; yet by the time I graduated, I realized that my newfound passion for academic scholarship – especially on the topic of religious history – was pointing me in a different direction. Ultimately that led to my doctoral work at Texas A&M, and perhaps no single person was more influential in my turn toward the historical profession than my church history professor, Miles Mullin. I am certain that I have never taken more course hours with a single professor than the 21 I took with Miles during my master's program, and his mentorship and friendship – which have extended well beyond my time at Southwestern – were foundational in my decision to pursue the life of a historian. In fact, I can trace the seeds of this dissertation back to his American Christianity seminar, which not only introduced me to the essential historical scholarship on fundamentalism, but also to the idea of race as a major factor in the development of American religion.

If my experiences in seminary provided the seeds of my dissertation, my time at Texas A&M studying under the members of my doctoral committee allowed those seeds to take root and flourish. My advisor, Felipe Hinojosa, has been steadfastly encouraging throughout the entire dissertation process, and his guidance in navigating comprehensive exams, proposals, funding applications, and the research and writing of the dissertation

itself has been invaluable. Many hours of conversation have yielded dimensions of depth and clarity in my work that would otherwise not have appeared. Likewise, my other committee members – Albert Broussard, April Hatfield, Walter Kamphoefner, and Robert Mackin – have each in turn profoundly influenced my growth as a scholar. Not only did their classes provide me with excellent scholarly grounding in their fields of expertise, but their willingness to give generously of their own time to assist me in a multitude of situations – be it preparing for exams, planning research trips, reading and providing feedback on my work, writing recommendation letters, or simply offering an outlet to talk about life outside of work – puts me in their debt. Every time I interact with my committee members, both individually and as a unit, I reflect on how fortunate I am to have chosen Texas A&M for my doctoral studies. I also owe much to my fellow graduate students at Texas A&M, whose friendships have made my time here well worthwhile even beyond the scholarly and academic arena, and to the history department staff – especially Rita Walker and Kelly Cook – whose expertise in navigating the ins-and-outs of the administrative side of the graduate program has been tremendously helpful.

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instrumental in my decision to pursue an academic career, but she has also carried much of the burden imposed by this dissertation, up to and including the multi-week research trips that have taken me away from our family. Her love, support, encouragement, companionship, and trust drive me to be a better person each day. It is to her that I dedicate this work.

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Contributors

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All work for the dissertation was completed independently by the student.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

On Tuesday, June 13, 2017, a wave of chaos and indignation broke over the Southern Baptist Convention's annual meeting. In the wake of the acrimonious 2016 presidential election between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton, an election which generated a spike in the visibility and influence of the white nationalist "alt-right" movement, a black Southern Baptist pastor from Texas introduced what he expected to be an uncontroversial resolution for the Convention to firmly denounce the racism and white nationalism of the alt-right. The pastor, Dwight McKissic of Cornerstone Baptist Church in Arlington, Texas, was flabbergasted when the resolutions committee declined to forward his proposed resolution to the convention floor. The committee explained this initial decision by noting that they were "very aware that on this issue, feelings rightly run high regarding alt-right ideology," but still "we just weren't certain we could craft a resolution that would enable us to measure our strong convictions with the grace of love, which we're also commended by Jesus to incorporate." This released a tidal wave of backlash, both on social media and from messengers at the convention. For his part, McKissic called it "a mystery how you can so easily affirm standard beliefs about other things, but we get to white supremacy . . . and all of a sudden, we've got a problem."[1]

[1]Emma Green, "Resolution Condemning White Supremacy Causes Chaos at the Southern Baptist Convention," *The Atlantic*, 14 June 2017. Accessed 19 January 2018. https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/06/the-southern-baptist-convention-alt-right-white-supremacy/530244/.

In the face of this backlash, the committee scrambled to correct its misstep, and so on June 14, the last day of the annual meeting, the Convention adopted a resolution that denounced "every form of racism, including alt-right white supremacy, as antithetical to the Gospel of Jesus Christ."[2] Yet from a public relations perspective, the SBC was still left with the lingering optics of having ignored an anti-racism resolution offered by one of its black members. Many people, including McKissic, maintained reservations in the face of the hastily passed resolution, noting that the entire snafu "showed a fault line. It showed that maybe, just maybe, you aren't where you're supposed to be on this."[3] Other Southern Baptists bristled at the resolution itself, holding that it was unnecessary and smacked of political virtue signaling: "[Southern Baptists] don't have a problem with white supremacy. If there are those in the SBC who have embraced it . . . issuing a resolution isn't going to produce repentance. Scripture already condemns it. If Scripture won't convince them, what chance does a resolution have?"[4] But ultimately both the original hesitance to broach the resolution and the divided reaction to its eventual adoption left some black Americans wondering, with McKissic, how the black and white members of one of the most visible conservative evangelical denominations in America could find agreement on many other issues, including doctrinal confessions, and yet still butt heads about how to address the topic of racism.

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[2]For the full text of the resolution, see "On the Anti-Gospel of Alt-Right White Supremacy." Accessed 19 January 2018. http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/2283/on-the-antigospel-of-altright-white-supremacy.

[3]Green, "Resolution Condemning White Supremacy Causes Chaos."

[4]"Does the Southern Baptist Convention Still Have a Stain On It?" *Pulpit and Pen* (blog), 23 June 2017. Accessed 19 January 2018. http://pulpitandpen.org/ 2017/06/23/does-the-southern-baptist-convention-still-have-a-stain-on-it/.

This question of racial differentiation in the midst of doctrinal agreement is by no means a new development, and its recent manifestation in such obvious fashion in the midst of the very theologically conservative ranks of the Southern Baptist Convention serves simply to point out the persistence of the issue in American religious life – particularly in conservative Protestant circles.[5] Indeed, a full century prior to the SBC's alt-right resolution this trend was present in the emergence of American Protestant fundamentalism in the early decades of the twentieth century. In the years between the world wars, when the fundamentalist-modernist controversy burned the brightest and fundamentalism was making a name for itself as (in George Marsden's words) "militantly anti-modernist Protestant evangelicalism," the theologically conservative convictions underlying fundamentalism straddled the color line to the extent that some African Americans began to publicly self-identify as fundamentalists and to discuss the importance "the fundamentals" to the black community.[6] Yet despite this reality, black actors are noticeably absent from the historical accountings of fundamentalism, and in turn fundamentalism rarely engenders much discussion in the realm of African American religious history. In the words of one scholar, blacks *could not* be fundamentalists because "although they share many beliefs with other evangelicals, those beliefs function quite differently in their very different social world" in which black religion

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[5]For sociological analysis of this phenomenon in the context of modern American evangelicalism, see Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided By Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Jason E. Shelton and Michael O. Emerson, *Blacks and Whites in Christian America: How Racial Discrimination Shapes Religious Convictions* (New York: NYU Press, 2012). For multidisciplinary reflections on this topic, in the wake of Emerson and Smith's landmark study, see J. Russell Hawkins and Phillip Luke Sinitiere, eds., *Christians and the Color Line: Race and Religion After* Divided by Faith (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[6]George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture,* 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 4.

offers "a racially based separation in which church and community are bound tightly together."[7] Here again arises the persistent question of racial differentiation in the midst of doctrinal alignment.

Yet, what of those black conservative Protestants who *did* explicitly name themselves fundamentalists, or who undertook an overt defense of "the fundamentals"? This dissertation aims to begin to address this particular historiographical silence. In the chapters that follow I will argue that there were indeed fundamentalists among African American Protestants, who not only claimed the title for themselves but who also aligned with the theological heartbeat of fundamentalism as expressed and summarized in *The Fundamentals* (hence, this study begins in 1915, the year in which the final articles of *The Fundamentals* were published). But not only this, black fundamentalists in this period also demonstrated a type of social engagement markedly different from that typically associated with fundamentalism. Rather than spending the majority of their time and energy on issues like fighting against evolutionary theory in the public schools, the social action and religious application emerging from among black fundamentalists emphasized things like racial equality, justice for all people regardless of skin color, and the social advancement of the African American community from marginalized minority to full participants in American citizenship. As much as this reality challenges the traditional conceptualization of American Protestant fundamentalism with respect to its social expressions, it also shows that theologically conservative religion offered an avenue for African Americans to challenge racism in ways that are often associated with

[7]Nancy T. Ammerman, "North American Protestant Fundamentalism," in *Fundamentalisms Observed*, eds. Martin Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 3.

more theologically liberal (or even secular) traditions in the black community.[8] Black fundamentalists managed to combine a traditional brand of theological fundamentalism and a race-conscious, progressive type of social activism that are usually understood to be profoundly disparate, if not mutually exclusive.[9] These black fundamentalists between 1915 and 1940 would undoubtedly have resonated with Dwight McKissic's frustration in 2017 at the mystery of "how you can so easily affirm standard beliefs

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[8]For example, Mary R. Sawyer associates conservative black religion in the context of Jim Crow with passivity on the issues of segregation and racial advancement. See Mary R. Sawyer, "Black Protestantism as Expressed in Ecumenical Activity," in *Re-Forming the Center: American Protestantism, 1900 to the Present*, eds. Douglas Jacobsen and William Vance Trollinger (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 284-85. In fact, as Paul Harvey points out, ever since W. E. B. Du Bois scholars of black religious institutions have "veered between visions of liberatory potential and sociological explorations of why these poetically powerful institutions so often apparently failed to act as engines of social progress." See Paul Harvey, *Bounds of Their Habitation: Race and Religion in American History* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 142. On this count, my dissertation accords with Ingrid Overacker's analysis that, while historical scholarship often "regretfully dismisses or bitterly excoriates the church for failing to address the pressing social and political issues crucial to the lives and fortunes of African Americans form the turn of the century to the advent of World War II," in fact black Christians "relied upon faith to motivate them to continue to challenge racism during the first four decades of the twentieth century." Ingrid Overacker, *The African American Church Community in Rochester, New York, 1900-1940* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1998), 4.

Similarly, Allison Calhoun-Brown and Sandra L. Barnes have pointedly challenged the strict association between religious conservatism and accommodationist social/political stances. Calhoun-Brown demonstrates that the "otherworldly" religious orientation of conservative traditions does not necessarily depress expressions of racial empowerment, while Barnes argues that religious conservatives display both a willingness to engage in political/social activism as well as a desire to rhetorically align themselves with the resistance/protest tradition of African American religion. Others, such as Eric McDaniel and Christopher Ellison, argue that a conservative commitment to biblical literalism within the African American "interpretive community" actually produces support for progressive social and economic policies. Allison Calhoun-Brown, "While Marching to Zion: Otherworldliness and Racial Empowerment in the Black Community," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 37, no. 3 (September 1998): 427-439; Sandra L. Barnes, "Priestly and Prophetic Influences on Black Church Social Services," *Social Problems* 51, no. 2 (May 2004): 202-221; Sandra L. Barnes and Oluchi Nwosu, "Black Church Electoral and Protest Politics from 2002 to 2012: a Social Media Analysis of the Resistance Versus Accommodation Dialectic," *Journal of African American Studies* 18, no. 2 (June 2014): 209-235; Eric L. McDaniel and Christopher G. Ellison, "God's Party? Race, Religion, and Partisanship over Time," *Political Research Quarterly* 61, no. 2 (June 2008): 180-191.

[9]A note on terminology: The terms "conservative" and "progressive" are not intended to connote the array of political and social commitments or programs that typically fall under those headings today. The words are used according to their more general definitions, so that "conservative" entails a desire to preserve or restore traditional conditions and to limit change, while "progressive" conveys an attitude favoring changes or reforms that break from the traditional status quo.

about other things, but we get to white supremacy . . . and all of a sudden, we've got a problem."

Despite the fact that numerous African Americans affirmed fundamentalism or identified as fundamentalists during the interwar period, the historiographies of fundamentalism and African American religion have, for the most part, utterly failed to intersect. One recent book, Mary Beth Swetnam Mathews' *Doctrine and Race*, marks a noteworthy exception to this trend, offering a much-needed consideration of the relationship between fundamentalism and the black community.[10] She rightly notes that "historians of [fundamentalism] have not engaged fully with how fundamentalists understood race and race relations in general . . . [and] the extent to which African Americans interacted with white fundamentalists . . . and with fundamentalist theories in general has also received scant attention."[11] Mathews argues that both whites and blacks racialized fundamentalism and modernism to exclude the black community from direct involvement in the controversy – white fundamentalists painting fundamentalism as an exclusively white movement and black Protestants casting modernism as an essentially white phenomenon. Despite the fact that she defines fundamentalism in essentially theological terms, as I similarly will in this dissertation, Mathews nevertheless still pointedly excludes blacks from among the ranks of the fundamentalists, reasoning that

[10]Mary Beth Swetnam Mathews, *Doctrine and Race: African American Evangelicals and Fundamentalism Between the Wars* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2017). Some other recent forays into somewhat more circumscribed aspects of fundamentalism and race include Jeffrey P. Moran, "Reading Race into the Scopes Trial: African American Elites, Science, and Fundamentalism," *Journal of American History* 90, no. 3 (December 2003): 891-911; Jeffrey P. Moran, "The Scopes Trial and Southern Fundamentalism in Black and White: Race, Region, and Religion," *Journal of Southern History* 70, no. 1 (February 2004): 95-120; Albert G. Miller, "The Construction of a Black Fundamentalist Worldview: The Role of Bible Schools," in *African Americans and the Bible*, ed. Vincent L. Wimbush (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2000), 712-727.

[11]Mathews, *Doctrine and Race*, 3.

their willingness to entertain and employ certain racially progressive social ideologies and strategies, including a general emphasis on racial justice, precluded any such association or identification. Unfortunately, this fails to account for not only the black Protestants who were overtly embracing the fundamentalist label in the 1920s and 1930s, but also the common assertion among both proponents and opponents that fundamentalism was, for good or for ill, a widespread phenomenon in the black Protestant community (a topic that will be addressed in chapter two). I find, in accordance with Mathews, that black Protestants did indeed embrace racially progressive applications and strategies that distinguished them from white fundamentalists, but in many cases they actually grounded these social positions in their fundamentalist theology and identity. Hence, the discrepancy in social worldview should not prompt us to dismiss black fundamentalists as inauthentic or even nonexistent, but it should rather cause us to recognize that fundamentalist American Protestantism, considered from a historical-theological perspective, had a much wider range of social commitments and cultural applications than has usually been assumed, if we take into consideration the disparate racial, social, and cultural contexts in which fundamentalism might have manifested.

While Mathews' monograph represents an important and notable step forward in considering the confluence of fundamentalism and racial identity, its novelty also reveals and reinforces the historiography's generally exclusionary trend when it comes to African Americans and fundamentalism. While she does not go so far as to affirm that there were, in fact, black fundamentalists, Mathews does convincingly demonstrate that

blacks were self-consciously engaged with ideas surrounding the fundamentalist controversy. Yet for the vast majority of religious historians, black Americans have typically been excluded from consideration with respect to American Protestant fundamentalism, based either on explicit denials that African Americans could even *be* fundamentalists, or on implicit neglect in historical analysis.[12] Moreover, when African Americans do expressly appear in the scope of the typical historical narrative relating to fundamentalism, they often represent either a small sympathetic group to be quickly mentioned and passed over or a bogeyman which white fundamentalists could leverage in consolidating their coalitions. Unfortunately, these sorts of exclusionary perspectives fail to account for those African Americans who consciously self-identified as fundamentalists in the very midst of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy. One of the goals of this dissertation is to incorporate these marginalized black fundamentalist voices into the historiography.

This marginalization of blacks reflects at least two notable historiographical trends. First, fundamentalism is often understandably construed as primarily an *institutionalized* political or social movement rather than as an essentially theological undertaking, a position which naturally marginalizes those who might have been theologically and ideologically aligned with the movement but whose social circumstances precluded overt participation in the movement's institutional structures. Second, most treatments consider as definitional the fundamentalists' militant posture toward certain social and cultural changes, such as society's increasing acceptance of

[12]As noted above, Nancy Ammerman explicitly denies any possible overlap between African Americans and fundamentalists. See Ammerman, "North American Protestant Fundamentalism," 3.

evolutionism, that were often associated with the modernist worldview. Yet unfortunately, this emphasis also naturally excludes African Americans who expressly identified themselves as fundamentalists, but whose militant activism often, through force of cultural circumstance, was directed toward racial rather than religious or religio-cultural ends. In short, if fundamentalism is conceptualized as a movement closely related to certain religiously-motivated political and social objectives important to conservative white Protestants, and it is likewise tied in significant ways to formal institutional structures, then it follows that African Americans might be safely ignored because they were typically far from the cultural centers of power and the social center of the institutionalized movement, even if they were often doctrinally united with the fundamentalist perspective.

An example of the former trend – treating fundamentalism as an institutional movement over against the theological specifics of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy – comes in Ernest Sandeen's *The Roots of Fundamentalism*, one of the earliest modern scholarly treatments of the subject. Sandeen carefully distinguishes between the "fundamentalist movement" and the more limited "fundamentalist controversy" of the 1920s, noting that "the movement existed independently of the controversy." Sandeen describes the movement as "a self-conscious, structured, long-lived, dynamic entity with recognized leadership, periodicals, and meetings," possessed of a "self-conscious identity and structure similar to the Republican party, the Knights of

Columbus, or (probably the closest parallel) the Puritans."[13] Sandeen's emphasis on self-conscious identity and institutionalized structure – on a level with a major political party, no less – clearly sets the focus on those citizens with relatively unfettered access to the social and cultural mainstream. Consequently, it is not entirely surprising that African Americans, a group which was constantly pushed to the margins of society in the Jim Crow era, are wholly absent from Sandeen's narrative. The comparison of the fundamentalist movement with a political party is a striking one when considered from this angle; African Americans were routinely marginalized in the political sphere at this time through disfranchisement efforts, and so perhaps it should not be a surprise to see them excluded from Sandeen's evaluation of a movement which he considers to be "similar to the Republican party" in its institutional makeup. For similar reasons, other studies containing a strong institutional focus – like Joel Carpenter's *Revive Us Again*, which admittedly "devotes most of its attention to the internal affairs of the fundamentalist movement" – seem to find African Americans to be almost entirely absent because of their marginality relative to the institutional forms, though not to the doctrinal commitments, of the movement itself.[14]

Much as Sandeen distinguishes between the fundamentalist controversy and the fundamentalist movement, William Glass, in his 2001 offering *Strangers in Zion*,

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[13]Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), xiii.

[14]Joel Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), xii. Carpenter, like Sandeen, fails to include so much as a single index reference to African Americans. Carpenter's other work on fundamentalism also reflects the strong institutional perspective which appears in *Revive Us Again*. See, for example, Joel Carpenter, "Fundamentalist Institutions and the Rise of Evangelical Protestantism, 1929-1942," *Church History* 49, no. 1 (March 1980): 62-75.

explains that "a helpful distinction can be drawn between fundamentalism as a set of beliefs and as a movement with a specific agenda."[15] For Glass, whose study centers on the development of fundamentalism in the American South, southern fundamentalism was essentially concerned with preserving the doctrinal fidelity of churches and denominations because the movement leaders saw their churches as moral guardians of the culture and organizing institutions of their communities; thus, the movement was in large part concerned not only with doctrinal issues but with preserving the South's social order. A significant part of that social order, of course, centered on race relations, and the prominence of Jim Crow loomed large as the fundamentalist movement was establishing its roots in the South. Consequently, aside from a passing reference or two to a minimal black presence at a few southern Bible conferences, Glass's study includes African Americans only insofar as they appeared in white fundamentalist rhetoric. For instance, the fundamentalist opponents of the reunion of southern and northern denominations played on racial fears and prejudices to consolidate support for their cause, demanding that no consideration of reunion would be feasible unless the northerners provided "an explicit statement that the reunited denomination would maintain a policy of racial separation."[16] Thus it seems that Glass's understanding of southern fundamentalism as "a movement with a specific agenda" rather than just "a set of beliefs" limits the degree to which (and the roles in which) African Americans appear in the history of fundamentalism. Given that the movement is presented as one which

[15]William R. Glass, *Strangers in Zion: Fundamentalists in the South, 1900-1950* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001), x.

[16]Ibid., 71.

seeks in many respects to preserve the prevailing social order, African Americans, as those who occupied the bottom rung of the social order, are naturally excluded; there is no room for any conception of black fundamentalists within this particular "movement."

Michael Lienesch, who explores only the antievolutionist portion of the fundamentalist phenomenon, argues that antievolutionists made similar use of racial prejudice by intimating that "acceptance of evolution would encourage racial equality and the eventual mixing of the races."[17] Lienesch goes farther than Glass, however, in at least acknowledging some noticeable degree of black support for fundamentalist positions. He notes that black churches of the 1920s "tended to be theologically orthodox, and many of their ministers were biblical literalists who held strong dispensationalist sympathies," and further points out that at the Scopes Trial "large numbers of black believers rallied behind William Jennings Bryan."[18] Lienesch draws chiefly on the work of Jeffrey Moran to argue that shared antievolution sentiments caused some black church leaders to ally with white fundamentalists, concluding that "while African Americans remained on the outside of fundamentalism's strictly segregated organizations, many (Moran suggests a majority) may have considered themselves to be fundamentalists."[19] In this brief statement, Lienesch appears to concur that a strictly institutional focus might obscure connections between fundamentalism and African American religion. Yet although it is commendable that he at least offers some

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[17]Michael Lienesch, *In the Beginning: Fundamentalism, the Scopes Trial, and the Making of the Antievolution Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 90.

[18]Ibid., 39.

[19]Ibid. Lienesch draws upon two of Jeffrey P. Moran's articles: "Reading Race into the Scopes Trial: African American Elites, Science, and Fundamentalism," *Journal of American History* 90, no. 3 (December 2003): 891-911; and "The Scopes Trial and Southern Fundamentalism in Black and White: Race, Region, and Religion," *Journal of Southern History* 70, no. 1 (February 2004): 95-120.

degree of explicit consideration of black support for fundamentalist causes, it is also notable that Lienesch devotes less than one full page to the subject.

In addition to the conceptualization of fundamentalism as an institutionalized movement rather than as a set of particular doctrinal positions, the definitions used to identify the most central aspects of the fundamentalist perspective can likewise tend toward racial exclusion. Most notably, an emphasis on religio-cultural militancy permeates the historiography of the last three decades, thanks in large part to George Marsden's foundational work *Fundamentalism and American Culture*. Marsden defines fundamentalism as "militantly anti-modernist Protestant evangelicalism" and posits that militant opposition to modernism, in both its theological and cultural expressions, was the single mark which "most clearly set off fundamentalism from a number of closely related traditions."[20] Marsden recognizes fundamentalism as a movement which, though essentially driven by theological convictions, was most clearly defined by its fiercely oppositional attitudes toward not only modernist theology but *also* the social and cultural changes which fundamentalists associated with a modernist worldview. Fundamentalists, then, were not merely engaged in ecclesiastical battles for control over their denominations, or spiritual battles for the salvation of souls; they necessarily and definitionally took part also in social and cultural confrontations which grew out of their religious convictions – perhaps most famously seen in the antievolution movement and the Scopes trial.[21] Indeed, thanks largely to Marsden, the centrality of religio-cultural

[20]Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 4.

[21]See also, George M. Marsden, "Fundamentalism as an American Phenomenon, A Comparison with English Evangelicalism," *Church History* 46, no. 2 (June 1977): 215-232. In this article Marsden identifies fundamentalism as "militantly opposed" to both "modernist theology and the cultural change

militancy is so common in the literature as to be nearly axiomatic. When considering the movement as an institutionalized political or social entity there is little doubt that cultural militancy was in fact a key element of fundamentalist identity. Moreover, for the most visible movement leaders militant anti-modernism was clearly a nonnegotiable priority, as when Curtis Lee Laws famously proposed "to do battle royal" for the fundamentals of the faith.[22]

Apt as this emphasis may be in the context of fundamentalism's institutional history or the study of major (white) movement leaders, a single-minded focus on religio-cultural militancy can unfortunately also serve to obscure the presence of those African Americans who self-identified as fundamentalists and held to the theological distinctives, but whose political and social activism was often occupied with racial rather than religious issues. Consequently, such people receive little consideration in the prevailing historiography. For instance, Marsden himself contends that "'fundamentalist' has seldom been a self-designation" for African Americans due to the movement's segregationist heritage.[23] Though it is unquestionably true, as William Glass demonstrates in *Strangers in Zion*, that fundamentalism (particularly in the South) has at times been intimately intertwined with segregation and racial prejudice, there nevertheless remain unexplored in the historical record any number of black figures, many of whom will appear in the pages of this dissertation, who *did* in fact name

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associated with it," a movement which "stressed the supernatural" and whose most distinctive doctrines were biblical inerrancy, divine creation, and dispensational premillennialism. Perhaps not surprisingly, the cultural issues which inspired the most fervent fundamentalist engagement – among others, the nature of the Bible, the role of the Bible in social and educational contexts, and the debate over evolution – reflect one or more of these distinctive doctrinal convictions.

[22]Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 159.

[23]Ibid., 324.

themselves fundamentalists. The ubiquitous emphasis in the historiography on religio-cultural militancy serves to obscure the presence of such self-identified black fundamentalists and to marginalize claims such as that of one *Norfolk New Journal and Guide* editorialist who declared, within mere weeks of the impending Scopes Trial, that "Afro-Americans are fundamentalists, for the most part."[24]

In contrast to the institutional or political approaches to the topic, this dissertation aims to seriously incorporate the fundamentalist elements within the black church by taking a historical-theological approach that treats the specifics of doctrinal commitments and doctrinal attitudes as central in identifying and defining fundamentalism. This approach assumes theology *qua* theology to be a meaningful analytical category, and understands the content of religious belief to be important in-and-of itself, rather than being exclusively a reflection or manifestation of other underlying driving forces. Of course this does not entail that the theological content of religious belief is the only meaningful analytical category, or that religious beliefs are entirely unrelated to other commitments; indeed, social circumstances and religious beliefs often inform and influence one another, especially in the essential sermonic (and also more generally religious) task of practically applying theological commitments to everyday life. In the chapters that follow, I will argue that in fact the differing social and cultural circumstances facing the black and white communities led to substantially different actions and applications, even among those who would commonly agree on the most important fundamentalist doctrines.

[24]"Our Group are Fundamentalists in Religion," *Norfolk New Journal and Guide*, 13 June 1925, p. 12.

All that considered, the theological convictions underlying "fundamentalist" thought (on either side of the racial divide) ought not be boiled down to *merely* expressions of underlying social, cultural, political, or economic ideological positions, but they should rather be treated as significant and meaningful in themselves. This dissertation's historical-theological approach seeks to heed Albert Raboteau's warning of the dangers that exist when historians fail to take seriously the content of religious belief. Reducing religion to "an epiphenomenon of economic or political ideology," he cautions, demonstrates both "an inadequate grasp of religion and a simplistic understanding of history."[25] Moreover, the fact remains that many of the historical figures who appear in the following pages understood theology in general, and their theological positions in particular, to be intrinsically meaningful in defining one's identity, and so the historical-theological approach seeks to take religious devotees seriously on their own terms.

One result of this commitment is that much space will be devoted to nuanced aspects of doctrinal analysis and comparison between religionists from across the racial spectrum. While social circumstances and social application unquestionably play a large role in the analysis, similarities and differences in doctrinal positions are also treated as important building blocks for constructing a religious identity. Consequently, while other treatments might focus largely on institutional statements and actions in defining and evaluating fundamentalism, this work will frequently reference the ninety articles of *The Fundamentals*, published sequentially in the early- and mid-1910s, as a means of

[25] Albert J. Raboteau, *A Fire in the Bones: Reflections on African-American Religious History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 9.

evaluating the doctrinal content that might properly characterize fundamentalist religious convictions in the historical-theological context surrounding the emergence of "fundamentalism" as an identifiable part of American religious nomenclature from the mid-1910s forward.

This historical-theological approach also allows for a sense of the variety, diversity, and dynamism among African American congregations and individual religionists. Recognizing that real, substantive theological divisions and conflicts existed within African American communities helps to avoid the temptation to treat "the black church" as a singular, monolithic, undifferentiated whole. Even as many African Americans on opposing sides of the modernist-fundamentalist conflict aimed for the same social goals of racial advancement – and even as some of them were willing to work side-by-side in seeking to achieve those goals – they still expressly drew lines of distinction and differentiation on essentially theological grounds; their alignment in the one arena did not necessarily dictate a congruence in the other, revealing a level of complexity and diversity within "the black church." This situation also reinforces the value of theological conviction as a meaningful identity-shaping factor in and of itself, rather than simply, as Raboteau noted, "an epiphenomenon of economic or political ideology." After all, if the usefulness and importance of theology was exclusively tied to a utilitarian expression of underlying social, economic, or political motivations, then there would seem to be little reason for black religionists who were aligned on issues of social and racial activism to draw theological dividing lines over such doctrinal particularities as biblical inspiration or the divinity of Jesus. The reality of such dividing

lines, as will be documented in the chapters to follow, demonstrates the importance of these theological distinctions to the practitioners themselves, while at the same time the fact that these very practitioners often showed a spirit of ecumenical cooperation for common racial goals (an ecumenical approach that white fundamentalists would have rejected out of hand) speaks to the power and ubiquity of race as a unifying factor for African Americans – even fundamentalists and modernists – in the context of Jim Crow America.

With the historical-theological approach in mind, then, the contentious task of actually defining "fundamentalism" remains. Approaching this endeavor from the vantage of theology and identity, I propose four factors – the first three theological, which will be addressed consecutively in the next three chapters, and the fourth identificational. These four factors are: the embrace of an overarching supernaturalist and Biblicist worldview, a personal commitment to the central doctrinal essentials of the movement as laid out in *The Fundamentals*, a readiness to overtly and explicitly criticize and condemn modernist theology, and the willingness to expressly identify as a fundamentalist. The first three theological elements build upon one another to form the doctrinal and attitudinal content of fundamentalism as a theological perspective, such that the removal or denial of any one of them would clearly set someone outside of the fundamentalist realm, while the fourth is a more subjective self-identificational (and therefore, somewhat more elusory) element.[26] The three theological tenets together are

[26]A tendency toward ecclesiastical and organizational separatism has also been often treated as an essential aspect of fundamentalist thought and behavior. However, the recent work of Nathan Finn on Baptist fundamentalism in the South has challenged the ubiquity and necessity of this characteristic. Finn helpfully differentiates between "separatist fundamentalists," who saw strict separation to be imperative,

the essence of what I would define as "doctrinal fundamentalism" – that is, regardless of whether or not a historical actor overtly claims the fundamentalist title, these elements reflect an essentially fundamentalist posture from a historical-theological perspective, though of course not from an institutional one.[27] Examining these three theological elements in sequence will form the basis of this dissertation's first three chapters.

The fourth element, self-identification as a fundamentalist, is rather more difficult because of the inherent subjectivity involved, but it remains important in demonstrating that some major black ecclesiastical leaders sought to overtly position themselves *within* the extant cultural maelstrom that was the fundamentalist-modernist controversy. When such self-identification appears in conjunction with the three aspects of "doctrinal fundamentalism," as laid out above, it becomes difficult to deny that a major historical-theological congruence between white and black Protestants has seemingly slipped through the cracks of the historiographies of fundamentalism and of African American religious history. Of course, self-identification as a definitional criterion has its own inherent limitations – most notably, that divorced from explicit theological affirmations the term "fundamentalist" might well carry different connotations to each person who uses it. Two caveats, then, are in order. First, many of the figures in the following pages who sought to elucidate and defend "the fundamentals" or to identify as "fundamentalists" (figures like Eli George Biddle, J. G.

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and "denominational fundamentalists," who desired to be voices of conservative influence within their denominations. See: Nathan A. Finn, "The Development of Baptist Fundamentalism in the South, 1940-1980" (Ph.D. diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007).

[27]This is one advantage of taking the historical-theological approach, which allows for the examination of fundamentalist theology and fundamentalist theological influences within the black community even apart from official institutional affiliations.

Robinson, or Lacey Kirk Williams) did so in light of their clear doctrinal affirmations, thus adding their self-identification to the already established contours of their "doctrinal fundamentalism" (as defined above). Second, those whose fundamentalist designation appears without a robust, detailed theological or doctrinal context (figures like the Henry Brothers or William David Miller) may present more tenuous connections to the historical-theological fundamentalist movement, and thus the conclusions we can draw from their examples are much more limited. Yet, the historical context of the raging religious controversy between fundamentalists and modernists during the interwar period dictates that their very usage of this terminology implied a willingness to be identified in some respects with the common public perception of fundamentalism. So, while self-designation is obviously a limited criterion, it is nevertheless an important element of dealing with historical figures on their own terms, and it will recur throughout the following chapters as both an important marker in the process of identity construction and, in many cases, as a parallel affirmation of the other three theological elements of "doctrinal fundamentalism" as laid out above.

While consideration of this self-referential aspect of defining fundamentalism will recur throughout the dissertation, the first three theological elements will receive focused, sequential consideration in chapters two through four, since they progressively build upon one another. Chapter two explores the claims by black commentators (on both sides of the theological divide) that fundamentalism was a widespread force within the black community, using these accounts to examine the contours of the basic fundamentalist worldview that was understood to exist among African Americans. In

terms of broad theological characteristics, this worldview was characterized by a supernaturalist presupposition connected to the traditional beliefs of "the old-time religion," a commitment to Biblicism that was often termed "biblical literalism," and a doctrine of creation that denied the rising tide of evolutionary thought. To deny a supernaturalist and Biblicist worldview would, automatically and obviously, preclude a fundamentalist identity, considering that the conflict with modernism centered on issues of supernaturalism and biblical reliability themselves. Yet while many African Americans recognized a major fundamentalist contingent among their race's numbers, the broad theological worldview commonalities between black and white fundamentalists did not necessarily manifest in a similar overlap on issues of social activism and social worldview. For many black fundamentalists, their involuntary and ubiquitous cultural position as part of an oppressed racial group meant that their activist energy would be spent on issues of a racial, rather than a particularly religious, nature. In this case, a historical-theological perspective illuminates fundamentalist characteristics among many African American Protestants, while a social or institutional perspective might obscure such a connection.

While a supernaturalist and Biblicist worldview obviously constitutes the very most basic *sine qua non* of fundamentalist thought, it just as obviously needed to be joined with specific Protestant doctrinal propositions that formed the "fundamentals" of the faith that fundamentalists undertook to defend. To deny any of the basic doctrinal essentials that comprised the majority of the argumentation in *The Fundamentals* – such as, for example, the full divinity of Christ – would virtually axiomatically set someone

apart from the "fundamentalism" of the early twentieth century.[28] Chapter three, therefore, focuses on the five most common points of fundamentalists' doctrinal contention (the so-called "five fundamentals") – biblical inspiration, Christ's divinity, the virgin birth, substitutionary atonement, and the literal resurrection and second coming – and examines these doctrines as they were commonly taught among conservative black clergy and religious leaders. In terms of the positive affirmations attending the basic "fundamental" theological propositions, conservative African Americans very much resembled white fundamentalists. The doctrinal formulations, the accompanying argumentation, and the common appeal to solidarity with both biblical and church-historical sources demonstrated substantial similarity between members of different races who sought to champion the fundamentals.

But even possessing a supernaturalist/Biblicist worldview and also embracing the core "fundamental" doctrines fails to fully encapsulate the fundamentalist perspective; these commitments might be sufficient to make one a theological conservative, but perhaps not a fundamentalist. Characterized not only by what it affirmed but also what it opposed, fundamentalism entailed an overt resistance and explicit opposition to the rising modernist theology in early twentieth-century churches and denominations. The most famed modernist preacher of the era, Harry Emerson Fosdick himself, drew this distinction: "We should not identify the Fundamentalists with the conservatives. All fundamentalists are conservatives, but not all conservatives are Fundamentalists. The

[28]Hence, for example, Jehovah's Witnesses and other Unitarian groups would not be considered fundamentalists, despite the fact that they assert both supernaturalism and Biblicism, because they deny (among other things) that Jesus Christ is the eternal divine second person of the Trinity.

best conservatives can often give lessons to the liberals in true liberality of spirit, but the Fundamentalist program is essentially illiberal and intolerant."[29] The fundamentalist posture of overt polemical opposition to modernism, which Fosdick noted as "essentially illiberal and intolerant," constitutes the focus of chapter four. Even more pointedly, the chapter deals with African American clergymen's polemical repudiations of modernism from the pulpit – a location which (along with its associated ecclesiastical office) holds a place of special authority and influence in both the Protestant tradition in general and the African American Protestant tradition in particular. While chapter three noted the many similarities between blacks and whites in formulating and arguing for the fundamental doctrines, chapter four goes even farther, noting not only the congruence in anti-modernist polemics across racial lines but also the significantly different applications that African American preachers drew from these same pro-fundamentalist and anti-modernist positions. In many cases black preachers launched immediately from their fundamentalist doctrines or polemics into social applications – the need to subvert Jim Crow, fundamentalist religion as the promise of black racial advancement, the promotion of interracial marriage – that would likely have been inconceivable to their white counterparts. Thus chapter four continues the argument from previous chapters that certain African Americans could rightly be considered fundamentalists on the basis of both their positive doctrinal affirmations and negative polemical repudiations, but it also shows that the expression and application of that fundamentalist faith could differ enormously from one side of the color line to the other.

[29]Harry Emerson Fosdick, "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" in *American Religions: A Documentary History*, ed. R. Marie Griffith (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 418.

While racial context unquestionably impacted the way fundamentalists understood their faith's relationship to the culture, there were nevertheless instances of confluence and cooperation across racial lines that are worth noting. Chapter five examines in detail one such interracial endeavor, the establishment of the American Baptist Theological Seminary in Nashville, Tennessee. As a school affiliated with the nation's leading black Baptist denomination (the National Baptist Convention, Inc.), ABTS represented National Baptists' desire to bolster the availability of conservative Baptist theological training for black ministers across the nation (and in some cases, from outside American borders). Partnering with the National Baptists in this project was the white Southern Baptist Convention, which helped fund the school and shared in the control of the institution's governing bodies. ABTS is a particularly noteworthy case due to the fact that it was much more than the paternalistic exercise that one might expect in the context of the early-twentieth century South; indeed, although white Baptists obviously exercised much influence, the seminary project was designed for African Americans to maintain primary control over the seminary by holding majorities among the governing bodies, the faculty, and the administration. The first few decades of ABTS's existence testify to both the unifying power of a common religious confession as well as the tragic dividing walls erected by a culture of Jim Crow, which even a shared commitment to "the faith once delivered" could not breach.

Chapter six, in turn, examines another aspect of fundamentalist identity as it came to be expressed and experienced in the African-American context – the contested relationship between fundamentalism and Americanism. The chapter serves to highlight

some of the divisions *within* the black community over this brand of religion, as pro- and anti-fundamentalist forces maneuvered on the rhetorical battlefield of American identity to cast fundamentalism as either supportive or injurious toward various American ideals (and hence toward blacks' full participation in the American experiment). Both sides admittedly sought for African Americans to lay claim to the full extent of American citizenship and the rights and privileges thereof, but they vociferously disagreed as to whether fundamentalist religion and identity constituted a help or a hindrance to the race in such a quest. But even as opponents attempted to portray them as an albatross around the neck of the race, fundamentalists within the black community sought to weave together these various elements of their identity – as black, as fundamentalists, and sometimes as Americans – in ways that were unique and particular to their cultural experiences in their time and place, as African Americans living under the threateningly watchful eye of Jim Crow.

Thus the combined progression of the chapters points to the dual reality facing black fundamentalists in the interwar years. On the one hand, they embraced and propounded fundamentalist doctrines, arguments, and polemics that placed them well within the boundaries circumscribed by *The Fundamentals* and other early sources, even to the point that many African Americans explicitly donned the controversial mantle of fundamentalism for themselves. Yet on the other hand, their place in American culture as a whole was subject to the overarching white supremacy of Jim Crow, and as a result the actions, attitudes, and activism that stemmed from their religious convictions took on a very different cast from that of their white counterparts. The task of applying their

theological convictions to the most pressing issues facing their community entailed that issues of racial justice and equality took a level of precedence unfamiliar to white fundamentalists, and the institutionalized racial prejudice of the Jim Crow era led many black fundamentalists to sometimes partner even with modernists in their communities in the pursuit of common racial goals. And even when the lines of strict racial distinction were momentarily blurred by a common religious confession, as in the ABTS project, the strictures of American society drastically circumscribed the boundaries of interracial cooperation, because the single most defining characteristic of any black person in the eyes of the dominant white society remained their race. Due to the tensions that arose from these two intersecting realities – the theological reality of their fundamentalist religion and the social reality of their pressing desire for racial solidarity in the face of the second-class citizenship imposed by Jim Crow – black fundamentalists remained largely ignored by their white counterparts and, until recently, also by historians. The pages that follow will seek to both examine this tension and seriously evaluate these people on their own terms, offering another level of complexity and variety to the experiences of "the black church" in the twentieth century and suggesting an American Protestant fundamentalism united in essential doctrinal attitudes but variegated in its hues of social action, cultural application, and activist fervor.

CHAPTER II

THE RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL WORLDVIEW OF BLACK FUNDAMENTALISM

On Saturday, June 13, 1925 the editorial page of the *Norfolk New Journal and Guide*, a historically black newspaper based in Norfolk, Virginia, published a column entitled "Our Group are Fundamentalists in Religion." The editorialist confidently proclaimed that "Afro-Americans are fundamentalists, for the most part," and concluded with the remarkable assertion that "Yes, the Afro-American people are Fundamentalists, and they can give a reason for the faith that is in them by pointing to what they have become in this free Nation from what they began in the days of the Colonies."[1] More than simply a declaration regarding the perceived religious conservatism within the African American culture of the day, this editorial drew an explicit connection between the purported fundamentalist proclivities of the black populace and the issue of racial advancement in the legal, social, and political realms. Fundamentalism and racial identity, it implied, were intimately intertwined within the African American community in 1925. Yet this editorialist's claim that African Americans were "for the most part" fundamentalists contrasts sharply with the general historiographical silence on the subject.[2]

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[1]"Our Group are Fundamentalists in Religion," *Norfolk New Journal and Guide*, 13 June 1925, p. 12. This and subsequent newspaper articles are available via such online databases as the Black Studies Center (http://bsc.chadwyck.com/) and Readex (http://www.readex.com/content/americas-historical-newspapers).

[2]In recent years, a few scholars have begun to focus on some specific aspects of black fundamentalism, but the movement as a whole still appears to lack any notable integration into the wider literature on early-twentieth century Protestant fundamentalism. For explorations of the relationship between race, fundamentalism, and evolutionism centered expressly on the Scopes Trial, see: Jeffrey P.

Theologically speaking, American Protestant fundamentalism was marked from its very beginning by its opposition to the emerging theological modernism of the early twentieth century. Modernist theology sought to bring Christianity into line with the most current patterns of rationalist thought, embracing higher-critical methods of biblical scholarship and often eschewing supernaturalist biblical interpretations which rested on the reliability or historicity of the events narrated in the text. For example, in his famous lectures from 1899 and 1900 on the nature of Christianity, Adolf Harnack argued that Christianity's true "Easter faith" was not dependent on the uncertain historical claims of the apostles' original "Easter message" of physical resurrection: "Either we must decide to rest our belief on a foundation unstable and always exposed to fresh doubts, or else we must abandon this foundation altogether, and with it the miraculous appeal to our senses."[3] Such modernist attitudes engendered fiery reactions from religious conservatives – both white and black – who undertook to defend the doctrines that they considered to be the fundamentals of the faith.

But more than just theology, historical scholarship has often associated fundamentalism with certain conservative cultural and social forms that tend toward

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Moran, "Reading Race into the Scopes Trial: African American Elites, Science, and Fundamentalism," *Journal of American History* 90, no. 3 (December 2003): 891-911; Jeffrey P. Moran, "The Scopes Trial and Southern Fundamentalism in Black and White: Race, Region, and Religion," *Journal of Southern History* 70, no. 1 (February 2004): 95-120. For insight into the role of Bible Schools in black fundamentalism see: Albert G. Miller, "The Construction of a Black Fundamentalist Worldview: The Role of Bible Schools," in *African Americans and the Bible*, ed. Vincent L. Wimbush (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2000), 712-27.

Recently Mary Beth Swetnam Mathews published a book examining the interactions between black Protestants and fundamentalism during the interwar period, but she does not consider fundamentalism to be a phenomenon that was expressed or experienced within black churches. Mary Beth Swetnam Mathews, *Doctrine and Race: African American Evangelicals and Fundamentalism between the Wars* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2017).

[3]Adolf Harnack, *What Is Christianity?*, trans. Thomas Bailey Saunders, Harper Torchbook edition (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), 161-62.

excluding African Americans. George Marsden, the foremost scholarly authority on the American fundamentalist movement, explained fundamentalism as a militant opposition not only to theological modernism, but also to "the cultural change associated with it."[4] Protracted cultural battles of a conservative and reactionary nature – most notably on issues such as evolutionary theory and public school curricula – have come to be indelibly identified with the fundamentalism of the 1910s, 20s, and 30s. This correlation certainly holds for the most visible fundamentalist spokesmen and institutional networks, but it must be noted that these most prominent leaders and institutions were white and segregated. The social and cultural markers often associated with fundamentalism, then, stem from a basically white social context empowered by the segregationsim of Jim Crow America, and as a result fundamentalism also often carries with it an association with the white conservative racial politics of segregation.[5]

And yet, the Norfolk editorialist's claim during the weeks leading up to the infamous Scopes Trial that black Americans were "for the most part" fundamentalists – even if we account for the likely hyperbole baked into that statement – offers a stark historical counterpoint. Indeed, as this chapter unfolds it will demonstrate that this claim was not limited merely to one journalist in Virginia, but that many black voices on both

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[4]George M. Marsden, "Fundamentalism as an American Phenomenon, A Comparison with English Evangelicalism," *Church History* 46, no. 2 (June 1977), 215.

[5]George Marsden makes this connection in his seminal work, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, arguing that African Americans have eschewed fundamentalism due to its heritage of racial segregation. George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 324.

Jeffrey Moran likewise identifies this focus on fundamentalists' conservative cultural militancy as a major reason for African Americans' exclusion from discussions of fundamentalism: "Some conservative white evangelicals shifted to support fundamentalist Protestantism, leaving their black brethren upholding once-shared beliefs but rejecting the white fundamentalists' emphasis on aggressive cultural battles." (Moran, "The Scopes Trial and Southern Fundamentalism in Black and White," 95-96.)

sides of the debate considered fundamentalism to be (for good or for ill) a major influence in the African American community. And as we examine those voices, from both sides of the aisle, some of the broad elements associated with these black fundamentalists' worldview will likewise become clear – theological commitments to such conservative theological bellwethers as supernaturalism, divine creation, and Biblicism, along with social elements more progressively geared toward addressing challenges facing the black race as a whole. In short, the typical historiographical emphasis on certain types of conservative social and cultural militancy in connection with fundamentalism has actually obscured the presence of black fundamentalists whose theological worldviews (including concerns about the *theological* dangers of modernism) aligned with the prominent white institutions and leaders, but whose social worldviews tended by force of historical circumstance to focus largely on progressive issues of racial advancement and equality rather than conservative worries about the cultural changes accompanying modernism. The theological conservatism of black fundamentalists in fact coexisted alongside – and in some cases even fueled – progressive social attitudes in the arena of race and culture. A shared religious worldview, which allowed some theologically conservative Protestants on both sides of the color line to claim the fundamentalist label, did not necessarily elicit a shared social worldview when it came to determining the issues for which social and cultural battle royal was justified.

"Filled to Overflowing" with Fundamentalists

Any investigation of the essentials of black fundamentalism or an exploration of the black fundamentalist worldview must first consider the task of finding and identifying black fundamentalists in the historical record. Was the editorialist for the *Norfolk New Journal and Guide* correct in asserting that "Afro-Americans are fundamentalists, for the most part"?

The *Journal and Guide* editorial was by no means alone in presenting fundamentalism as either widespread within or characteristic of the black community, though the scope of its claim to encompass nearly the whole of "the Afro-American people" was undeniably ambitious, and might best be understood as employing some measure of hyperbole. Still, there were others who claimed widespread devotion to Christian fundamentalism within particular denominational bodies. For instance, a 1924 column in Wichita's *Negro Star* applauded the fact that "all loyal members of evangelical churches and especially the Missionary Baptist Church watch close the insinuating forward movement of modernism in its attacks on many of the fundamentals of Christianity and combat such movement whenever detected by a more close adherence to The Church." Missionary Baptist Churches were here singled out as denominationally inclined to the "fundamentals of Christianity," later explicated as including "the Old Time methods of repentance, regeneration, and absolute compliance to the every command of The Christ."[6] It is worth noting that the fundamentalism expressed here consisted of theological propositions and personal conduct, and the

[6]Untitled opinion column, *Negro Star* (Wichita), 11 January 1924, p. 4.

method given to combat modernism was a closer adherence to *the church* and its traditional orthodox teachings, presumably including such doctrines as divine creation, the divinity of Christ, and biblical inspiration, which were often challenged by modernists. Militant cultural campaigns to combat the broader social changes accompanying the modernist viewpoint, however, were notably absent for these particular black fundamentalists; they seem to have advocated a turning inward rather than outward to combat the dangers of modernism.

In similar fashion, though years later in the mid-1930s, Bishop Noah W. Williams of the A.M.E. Church, in lobbying for the creation of a new denominational divinity school, based his argument for rigorous biblical ministerial training on the fact that "The African Methodist Episcopal church, [be]cause of its principles, traditions, organization and fundamentalism, stands in a position to do as much for the cause of the Master as any Christian organization in America, whether that organization be composed of white or colored people."[7] For Williams, the fundamentalism which he perceived to characterize the A.M.E. Church was foundational in the denomination's positioning as a highly influential exponent of the cause of Christianity. While the A.M.E. never explicitly identified itself as fundamentalist, and certainly there were a wide variety of ministerial perspectives within the denomination, we can see in the doctrinal statements of various A.M.E. publications like the *A.M.E. Shield* and *The Doctrines and Disciplines* why Williams might make such an identification on a strictly theological level; these publications explicitly affirmed basic elements of a fundamentalist worldview (e.g.,

[7]"Bishop Noah Williams Proposes 'Real' Divinity School," *Atlanta Daily World*, 23 March 1935, p. 1.

supernaturalism, creationism, and Biblicism) as well as numerous specific doctrines like the deity of Christ, substitutionary atonement, and propitiation.[8] Interestingly, in Williams' statement the conservative cultural militancy so often identified with fundamentalism once again appears to be absent, as the denominational "fundamentalism" in view was directed toward internal educational improvements and a "more uniform" ministerial teaching.

Claims about widespread fundamentalist proclivities within the black community rang forth not only from sympathetic voices, but also from vehement opponents of the movement. In a scathing 1925 article that cast Christian fundamentalism as "an obstacle to civilization to climb over and batter down," popular labor organizer and cultural commentator Ernest Rice McKinney lamented that "The Negro race is filled to overflowing with these 'Fundamentalist' gentlemen. They are everywhere and in everything. They keep us poor, ignorant, and weak."[9] Aside from the startling depiction of black fundamentalists as enemies of "the Negro race," a topic to which we will return later, McKinney's characterization of the race as "filled to overflowing" with fundamentalists is a striking image in its own right, echoing (albeit from a polar opposite viewpoint) the Norfolk editorialist's grandiose claim that "Our Group are Fundamentalists in Religion."

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[8]A. B. B. Gibson, *The African Methodist shield (improved): for the benefit of the members, Sunday schools, Allen Christian Endeavor League and missionary societies of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Macon, GA: published by the author, 1919), 30 ff.; Rev. D. M. Baxter, *The Doctrine & Discipline of the A.M.E. Church, Twenty-Eighth Revised Edition* (Philadelphia: A.M.E. Book Concern, 1924), 38-49.

[9]Ernest Rice McKinney, "This Week," *New York Amsterdam News*, 15 April 1925, p. 9.

Such a sense of extensive theological fundamentalism within the black community, though perhaps slightly exaggerated at times for dramatic effect, was nevertheless borne out by the presence of individual black churches and individual black leaders, both clerical and otherwise, who self-identified using the term "fundamentalist." Walker's Tabernacle Baptist Church in Atlanta publicly embraced such an identity, as the public announcement of their cornerstone-laying celebration in late 1932 unabashedly publicized that the principal address at this defining ceremony "will emphasize the importance of Fundamentalism in the church."[10] Significantly, the ceremony which celebrated the laying of this church building's literal foundation included exposition highlighting the foundational role of fundamentalist doctrine in the church at large, indicating the gravity and import of the topic for the clergy and laymen of Walker's Tabernacle Baptist. It is difficult not to see here a symbolic association of fundamentalism with the very bedrock of the church's foundation; just as the church building could not stand apart from the brick-and-mortar foundation, so the church as a spiritual entity could not stand apart from the affirmation of the central doctrinal truths of fundamentalism.

Major leaders in the wider African American community likewise identified themselves in this manner. In one of the more intriguing self-identifications, A.M.E. pastor William David Miller termed himself a "progressive Fundamentalist," though unfortunately he offered no further explication of that tantalizing phrase aside from his

[10] "Walker's Tabernacle Baptist Church," *Atlanta Daily World*, 11 November 1932, p. 3a.

conviction of the centrality of evangelism for the church.[11] But regardless of what Miller might have intended the qualifying adjective "progressive" to signify, his forthright use of "fundamentalist" bespoke an apparent willingness to identify with that *theologically* conservative tradition connoted by the term. Miller's career through the 1930s, pieced together through various publications, suggests that this particular fundamentalist, at least, possessed a high degree of charisma and influence. Arriving in 1908 at Wesley Chapel A.M.E. Church in Houston, Miller helped the church take on "new strength and growth," swelling membership to more than 800 during his six-year tenure.[12] In each of four assignments after Wesley Chapel, Miller was able to either oversee the completion of church buildings or substantially pay down the church's debt while also increasing congregational giving, probably through increased attendance. His arrival at Oklahoma City's Avery Chapel A.M.E. Church in 1929 presaged rapid growth: in his eleven years at the church, Miller was able to rebuild and expand the church building, establish an old folks' home, and increase membership from 364 to 1,545 – all in the midst of the Great Depression. He also held the distinction of being the only black clergyman in the state whose sermons were broadcast over the radio.[13] Clearly Miller must have exhibited significant personal charisma and magnetism in order to achieve such success in so many venues, but his avowed position as a "progressive Fundamentalist" also indicates that a great many people in the black communities in Houston, Waco, Los Angeles, and

[11]"Being Boomed," *Plaindealer* (Topeka), 7 April 1939, p. 4.

[12]*The Red Book of Houston: A Compendium of Social, Professional, Religious, Educational, and Industrial Interests of Houston's Colored Population* (Houston, TX: Sotex Publishing Company, 1915), 76.

[13]Richard R. Wright, Jr., *The Encyclopaedia of African Methodism* (Philadelphia: A.M.E. Book Concern, 1947), 202.

Oklahoma City were ready and willing to lend their ears (and their money) to a man claiming to preach a brand of fundamentalist Christianity.

Some members of the black press understood the presence of fundamentalism to extend even beyond the exclusively ecclesiastical realm of the clergy. A reporter for the *Pittsburgh Courier* reported that Dr. Mordecai Johnson, president of Howard University, proudly "proclaimed his beliefs in fundamentalism" to Howard's graduating class in June of 1928, warning them that "religion . . . is the only thing that can give morale" and, in the reporter's words, commending "'the old-time religion' as a cure for broken morale and a panacea for present day evils."[14] The interpretive spin injected by the reporter is in this instance perhaps more revealing than the speech itself. It is unclear whether Dr. Johnson himself used the term "fundamentalism" to describe his beliefs or whether this constituted an editorial addition from the reporter; given Johnson's educational pedigree, his connection to Walter Rauschenbusch, and Adam Clayton Powell's characterization of Johnson as a "modern, progressive" minister, the more likely explanation is that this is an editorial insertion.[15] What is clear, however, is that even if Johnson in all likelihood failed to use the term himself, the *Courier*'s reporter found fundamentalism sufficiently pressing on his mind that he automatically associated any religious and doctrinal appeals toward a traditionalist "old time" religion with the

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[14]Louis R. Lautier, "Howard 'Prexy' Warns Against Sophistication," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 9 June 1928, p. 10.

[15]Gary Dorrien reports that in 1931 Adam Clayton Powell responded passionately to H. L. Mencken's "bigoted screed claiming that black Americans had no accomplished thinkers and its ministers were ignorant fundamentalists." Powell agreed that fundamentalism was "a negation of every intellectual decency," but he sought to counter Mencken's attack on black America by providing a list of many black ministers who "were modern, progressive, learned, and emphatically not fundamentalist" – a list that included Dr. Mordecai Johnson. Gary Dorrien, *The New Abolition: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Black Social Gospel* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 441.

seemingly ubiquitous fundamentalism that Ernest Rice McKinney had previously decried as "everywhere and in everything." The influence of this worldview, it seems, was felt beyond merely the pews and the pulpit.

Perhaps no self-proclaimed black fundamentalists were more widely recognized and regularly heard than the Henry Brothers, a nationally-renowned traveling revivalist troupe. The ensemble was prominent in the early-to-mid 1930s, headed by the family patriarch J. I. Henry, who was accompanied by his sons, J. L. Henry, O. D. Henry, N. G. Henry, and W. W. Henry. Best known in the print media for employing a showman's flare for the dramatic to "put over their fundamentalism," the Henrys engendered both enormous crowds and nearly constant controversy wherever they spoke.[16] Capacity crowds of around 1,600 people turned out for their revival services in Norfolk in September of 1933, and even when numbers were not precisely reported, phrases like "packing them in" and "filled to capacity" often peppered the newspaper accounts of the Henry Brothers' revival stops. Even in death the Henrys drew massive crowds, as thousands reportedly came to pay their respects at the unexpected passing of O. D. Henry in July 1935. Such was the Brothers' fame that in 1933 a Baptist pastor resolved to draw a crowd to his church by falsely advertising that one of the Henrys would be speaking.[17] Despite their popularity, however, the Henry Brothers were also painted by their detractors as "religious exploiters" and "racketeers" due to their revival style,

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[16]P. B. Y., Jr., "The Henry Brothers, Evangelists, Put Over Their Fundamentalism with Modern Embellishments," *Norfolk New Journal and Guide*, 16 September 1933, p. 24.

[17]Ibid.; Elliott Freeman, Jr., "The Whirling Hub," *Afro-American*, 28 October 1933, p. 19; "Manager of the Henry Brothers Dies Suddenly," *Norfolk New Journal and Guide*, 27 July 1935, p. 9; "Rev O. D. Henry Buried in $650 Casket; Evangelist Stricken Sun. in Roanoke," *Afro-American*, 3 August 1935, p. 18; Elliott Freeman, Jr., "The Whirling Hub," *Afro-American*, 4 November 1933, p. 7.

which was characterized by a great deal of ecstasy and emotionalism, the use of music to periodically build and ebb emotional fervor throughout the services, the collection of a "sacrificial dime" offering, regular congregational shouting, and even occasional fainting spells.[18]

Beyond the particulars of their revival ministry, the family achieved a sort of celebrity status because controversial elements of their personal lives – occasionally ignominious and sometimes downright *strange* – regularly invaded the headlines of major black newspapers, earning them the moniker "the Headline Henrys."[19] The evangelists received a cold reception from the ministers in Boston, for instance, and were "treated as racketeers" because modern revivalists such as the Henrys were perceived to be engaged in "too much commercialism, unclean living, drinking, and immoral conduct" – a perception undoubtedly reinforced by the fact that the Brothers traveled about in their own "custom built Peerless limousine."[20] This controversy remains firmly ensconced on the mundane end of the spectrum for the Henrys, however. The revivalists figured centrally in a long list of headline-grabbing events which far outstripped the Boston ministers' charges of excessive commercialism. On one occasion, the brothers were assaulted by a group of armed men in Washington, D.C., nearly

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[18]Louis R. Lautier, "Capital Spotlight," *Afro-American*, 29 July 1933, pp. 1-2; Elliott Freeman, Jr., "Henry Bros. Get Cold Shoulder in Boston," *Afro-American*, 28 October 1933, p. 19; "Theme Song, Hand Clapping Feature Revival of Henry Brothers in D.C.," *Afro-American*, 22 July 1933, p. 2.

[19]P.B.Y., Jr., "The Henry Brothers, Evangelists, Put Over Their Fundamentalism with Modern Embellishments"; regarding the Henrys' "celebrity" stature, an article from the *Afro-American* in 1933, which publicizes that three of the brothers began preaching at the age of ten or younger, reads very much like a celebrity-profile entertainment piece: "Dad of Henry Brothers is a Native of MD," *Afro-American*, 23 September 1933, p.8.

[20]Freeman, "Henry Bros. Get Cold Shoulder in Boston"; "Evangelists Travel in Limousine," *Norfolk New Journal and Guide*, 23 September 1933, p. A3.

resulting in a riot outside of their revival meeting.[21] On another occasion, N. G. Henry fell mysteriously and violently ill, leading him to accuse a female schoolteacher of giving him a poisoned sandwich.[22] W. W. Henry added his own series of personal indiscretions to the headlines: shortly after leaving the troupe in 1934 to accept the pastorate of Holy Trinity Baptist Church, he was arrested (and eventually found guilty) for drunkenness and destruction of property; mere months later he was accused (and ultimately convicted) of impregnating a 15-year-old girl; the following year he was found to have fathered a child with an 18-year-old white girl, and he was subsequently removed from his pastoral position at Holy Trinity.[23] Little more than a month after W.W. Henry was ejected from his pastorate, his brother O. D. suddenly and unexpectedly passed away of "acute indigestion" following a series of revival services in Richmond.[24] For a group of traveling fundamentalist preachers, this family evidently rose to the level of celebrity and garnered an enormous amount of attention, both approbatory and opprobrious.

Interestingly enough, the content of the Henrys' "fundamentalist" preaching was never laid out in the newspaper articles covering their revival meetings. The theological particulars of their message were routinely ignored in favor of discussion about their style and methods of working a crowd. Yet it was widely understood that the Henry

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[21] "Henry Brothers Say They Were Threatened," *Afro-American*, 23 June 1934, p. 20.

[22] "Poisoning of One of Henry Bros. Mystery," *Afro-American*, 22 July 1933, p. 1.

[23] Elliott Freeman, Jr., "Boston Jugs Evangelist Henry," *Afro-American*, 14 July 1934, p. 1; E. W. Clark, "Evangelist and Officer Stage Fight," *Atlanta Daily World*, 28 July 1934, p. 6; "Women Faint, Men Weep as Accused Pastor Preaches," *Afro-American*, 22 September 1934, p. 3; "Henry Evangelists Are Under Fire in Richmond," *Afro-American*, 20 July 1935, p. 6; "Boston Congregation Ejects Wilbert Henry," *Afro-American*, 18 May 1935, p. 3.

[24] "Manager of the Henry Brothers Dies Suddenly."

Brothers self-identified as fundamentalists.[25] And as professed fundamentalists they received raucous welcomes and capacity crowds nearly everywhere they appeared. That type of reception for a group of itinerant revivalists demonstrates that, at the very least, large segments of the black population were *open* to hearing a purported fundamentalist message. Combined with the presence of clerical leaders who professed fundamentalism and the black weeklies' testimony to the steadfast conservative strength within black churches and denominational structures, Ernest Rice McKinney may not have been too far off after all when he opined that the black community was "overflowing" with fundamentalists.

Characteristics of a Black Fundamentalist Worldview

As Protestant fundamentalism found expression within the black community, black fundamentalists also operated out of a *religious* worldview largely comparable to that of the movement's better-known white leaders. Staples of this worldview included an emphasis on supernaturalism, biblical literalism, and a belief in divine creation (typically contrasted against evolutionary views), aligning with two of George Marsden's three "most distinctive" doctrines of fundamentalism – Biblicism and divine creation.[26] Despite this significant congruence, white and black fundamentalists

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[25]"Henry Brothers, Evangelists, Are Baptist Fundamentalists," *Afro-American*, 5 August 1933, p. 11.

[26]Interestingly enough, Marsden's third doctrinal distinctive, dispensational premillennialism, appears to have been a topic of somewhat less regular discussion among many self-identified black fundamentalists. Yet eschatology was not wholly absent from the conversation. In 1935 Noah W. Williams, who was referenced earlier in this chapter, reported to the Associated Negro Press about his journey through the Holy Land. In the process, he joined his express avowal of premillennialism with his conviction that the only reason to read the Bible is "if you believe it is the Inspired Word of God," and his

nevertheless diverged markedly on some of the social aspects of their worldview; African American fundamentalists tended to connect their religious convictions with social applications and activities centered on issues of racial advancement, and hence were sometimes involved with much more progressive types of social reform than their white conservative counterparts. This commitment serves to demarcate sharply between white and black fundamentalists, leading to the marked contrast between the seemingly ubiquitous conservative cultural militancy of the white "fighting fundamentalists" and the relative hesitancy among African Americans to make such culturally conservative battles (even on issues about which they may have agreed in principle with their white counterparts, such as evolution) their *raison d'être*. Yet, at least in terms of their overall *religious* worldview, black fundamentalists shared quite a bit in common with their white brethren.

In discussions of fundamentalism, especially in black newspaper reports, the rather ambiguous terminology of "old-time religion" was apt to appear with relative frequency, usually without explicit definition. However, the contexts in which this terminology appeared indicate that the authors, or the speakers being quoted, used it to refer to at least two general religious worldview characteristics: a firm continuity with the religious traditions of the past and an emphasis on the supernatural aspects of religion. Both of these characteristics set the fundamentalist worldview in opposition to that of modernism, which embraced religious innovation and a generally naturalistic

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exhortation that anyone who doesn't believe in biblical inerrancy to "quit pretending." Williams' endorsement of premillennialism, however, did not specifically entail the dispensational brand in particular. Bishop Noah W. Williams, "Touring the Holy Land," *Atlanta Daily World*, 30 March 1935, p. 1.

approach to the world. Notably, the terminology of "old-time religion" was employed in this way by proponents and opponents of fundamentalism alike in order to portray a movement tied to past tradition and essentially supernaturalist in character – though, of course, the value judgments surrounding such identifications varied widely based on the author's perspective.

The manifestation of supernatural elements in the natural world was an oft-implied connotation of "old-time religion," especially in the context of revivalism and the Christian's struggle against the sin and evil evident in the modern world. The Henry Brothers' gatherings, for example, were twice referred to as "old-time revival" services in a 1933 issue of the *Afro-American*, and this characterization of the Henrys' fundamentalism as "old-time" religion was associated with their stated desire to "wipe out sin and conquer the devil."[27] Hence, the supernaturalism of this sort of "old-time religion" entailed not only the purposeful working of God in his creation, but also the nefarious and malevolent presence of an evil spiritual power – the devil – intent on leading men into sinful behavior. The Henrys' equation of "wiping out sin" with "conquering the devil" indicates the degree to which the immoral and sinful *actions* of men in the natural world – actions necessitating endless revivals and calls for moral reform – were tied to the idea of a supernatural tempter who was at the root of the natural sinful actions of humanity.

The supernaturalism of "old-time religion," however, did not necessarily entail explicit recognition of evil spiritual powers in the world; often it was connected simply

[27] Freeman, "Henry Bros. Get Cold Shoulder in Boston"; Freeman, "The Whirling Hub," 28 October 1933.

with the possibility of God intervening in society or in the lives of individuals. In an instance of a somewhat more theologically specific belief in supernatural intervention, a Wichita writer insisted in 1924 that the Missionary Baptist Church's ability to combat modernism rested on "a hurried beating back to . . . the Old Time methods of repentance, regeneration, and absolute compliance to the every command of The Christ." This author's explicit recognition of "regeneration" – an expressly miraculous work of the Holy Spirit to turn the heart of an individual away from his or her sin and toward Christ – as an essential piece of the "Old Time" religion, as well as his identification of the need for "a fully consecrated ministry prepared in heart by the Holy Spirit," clearly testifies to the supernaturalism which was in view when the term "old-time religion" was applied to black fundamentalism. Not only might the devil be on the prowl, as the Henrys preached, but God the Holy Spirit was obviously considered to be actively at work in the world. Indeed, the specific and personal work of the third person of the Trinity himself, evidenced by such a "beating back" to the old-time religious doctrines, was here presented as the only means to "combat" the "insinuating forward movement of modernism in its attacks upon many of the fundamentals of Christianity."[28]

Similar sentiments were expressed in other denominational contexts as well. James M. Nabrit, a National Baptist and the fourth president of the American Baptist Theological Seminary, overtly warned against "liberalism in religion" as one of the greatest "foes" facing black ministers due to liberals' rejection of "the old-fashioned regeneration and spiritual power" in favor of naturalistic ideas of "morality, human

[28]Untitled opinion column, *Negro Star*, 11 January 1924, p. 4.

goodness and mere culture."[29] The old-time religion once again was linked with both an explicit rejection of modernist theology and an express embrace of such supernaturalistic concepts as the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. Combatting the modernist threat, it seemed, entailed a direct reliance on the supernatural power of the triune God – an idea encapsulated in the appellation of "old-time" or "old-fashioned" religion.

Even the disparaging comments of modernists and religious skeptics pertaining to fundamentalism's "age-old fetishes" and its stark opposition to modern science indicate that the "old-time religion" was characterized by a belief in the penetration of the supernatural realm into the natural world. In 1930 the *New York Amsterdam News* saw fit to inform its black readers of a mass meeting featuring an assortment of white speakers, but held by the black Hubert Harrison Memorial Church, intended to advance the position that the tenets of "fundamentalism," "orthodox Christianity," and "the old-time religion" (all three terms seemingly used interchangeably) were outdated and antithetical to the modern world: "The spiritual, 'Old-Time Religion' is a delightful song," one Unitarian minister said, "but the idea is intellectually fallacious. Why should a religion that was good enough for Moses be good enough for us?" The teachings of the fundamentalists, he argued, brooked "no reconciliation [with] the known facts of science," and all the speakers agreed that Christianity must rid itself of its "age-old fetishes" in favor of the "freedom and recognition of science."[30]

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[29]J. M. Nabrit, Sr., "The Need of a Trained Leadership for Negroes," *Home and Foreign Fields*, July 1937, The Southern Baptist Commission on the American Baptist Seminary Records, AR 630, Box 2, Folder 66, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee (hereafter cited as Commission on ABTS Records).

[30]"Clergymen Uphold Religious Revolt," *New York Amsterdam News*, 31 December 1930, p. 11.

In addition to connoting a supernaturalist worldview, the “old-time religion” label was applied to black fundamentalism as a means of conveying a perceived continuity with religious traditions of the past. For one A.M.E. minister, Bishop Heard, it entailed doctrinal faithfulness to the historical beliefs of the A.M.E. church, and by association also to the racial heritage represented by Richard Allen and his denomination. The *Atlanta Daily World* reported that the Bishop “made a plea for the church to make a return to fundamentalism as laid down by the founder, Richard Allen, in other words return to the ‘old time religion.’” Just as this report seems to indicate that Heard himself associated his fundamentalism with a harkening back to historical tradition, so the *Daily World*’s reporter associated Heard in much more opprobrious terms with “obsolete ideas” and a dangerously backward-looking intolerance for new doctrines that were being “laid down by young men.”[31] Though the relative value ascribed to such a backward-gazing position differed radically from Bishop Heard to his *Daily World* critic, it is notable that both men recognized continuity with historical tradition to be essential to Heard’s promotion of “old time” fundamentalist religion. Similarly, a short 1925 column the *Cleveland Gazette* lamented the lack of “middle-ground” in the fundamentalist-modernist controversy; in doing so, the *Gazette* painted fundamentalism as, among other things, “old-timeism” which was seen as “conservative” and “reactionary,” clearly presenting fundamentalists, whether white or black, as people tied to – and usually actively looking to – the past.[32]

[31]I. P. Reynolds, “What Sam of Auburn Avenue Says,” *Atlanta Daily World*, 21 February 1932, p. 8.

[32]“The World Is Lining Up,” *Cleveland Gazette*, 6 June 1925, p. 2.

The broad supernaturalism and traditionalism associated with the appellation of "old-time religion" carried along other particular theological associations as well. Among such common traits ascribed to African American fundamentalists, noted and attested by partisans from both sides of the modernist-fundamentalist conflict, was the conviction that the Bible, as the inspired word of God, ought to be interpreted "literally."[33] Closely associated with biblical literalism was unsurprisingly a propensity for anti-evolutionism stemming from the literal interpretation of the universe's divine creation as described in the opening chapters of Genesis.[34] So literalism, belief in divine creation, and anti-evolution attitudes all hung together as a major component of the black fundamentalist worldview.

Perhaps the most striking evidence of the widespread (in fact, nearly universal) association of fundamentalism with biblical inerrancy and biblical literalism in the black community comes not in the form of a hard-hitting news report, a golden-tongued soliloquy, or a high-minded public disputation. Instead it comes as a tiny question-and-answer tucked away in the children's section of the October 8, 1927 *Chicago Defender*.

[33] Discussions of the "literal interpretation" of the Bible have the potential to lead to some confusion. The idea of biblical literalism typically pointed to the specific doctrine of biblical inspiration (and the concomitant issues of inerrancy and infallibility). Interpreting the Bible "literally" was meant to imply that it was to be considered the literal words of God himself – that is, its origin was divine, its very words (not just its ideas) were inspired by God, and hence its content was wholly trustworthy and reflective of God's own perfection. "Literal" interpretation did not entail an elimination of genre-specific interpretation, however; the poetic and metaphorical language of the Psalms, for instance, was by necessity recognized even by "literalists." So, Psalm 1's description of the righteous man as "a tree planted by streams of water" did not require biblical literalists to conclude that righteous men were literally trees or that they ought to literally plant themselves next to rivers. However, in other genres (such as historical narrative and prophetic literature), straightforward claims and statements were taken as literally as possible such that, for example, the claim in Joshua 10:13 that "the sun stood still" for a whole day was understood to mean exactly that – that God had supernaturally and miraculously provided for the sun to remain in the sky longer than ever before in order to allow the Israelites to destroy the Amorites.

[34] This is of course entirely consonant with the convictions of white fundamentalists as seen so clearly, for example, in the essays touching on science, creation, and the Genesis narrative in *The Fundamentals*.

The weekly *Defender Junior* featured a regular segment of simple trivia questions for kids to answer; this particular edition offered such questions as "What is the 'initial sack' in baseball?" and "What is the official abbreviation for Colorado?" It also auspiciously included the question "In religion, what is the essence of fundamentalism?" The answer, provided at the bottom of the page, was "the literal interpretation of the Bible."[35] This question-and-answer and the unusual context in which it appears warrant further comment. The identification of biblical literalism with the "essence" of Christian fundamentalism, without any racial qualifiers attached, speaks to the pride of place that this conviction held as an identifying mark for fundamentalists, black or white. Even more important, the utilization of this information by the *Defender* (itself no bastion of religious conservatism, by any means) as a *children's* trivia question signifies the universal, indeed almost elementary, nature of this information in the minds of the newspaper's editors. Whether or not the *Defender*'s young African American readers around the country knew anything else of the particulars or the nuances of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy, they were presumably expected to know that biblical literalism constituted the "essence" of religious fundamentalism just as they should know that first base was the name of the "initial sack" in baseball.

Just a week after the *Defender* printed the trivia question in their children's section, the paper published a column by George A. Singleton entitled "Religion Worth Having," lamenting that the black man's fundamentalist religion, as a mere "hand-me-down . . . from the American white man," was not fitting for the race: "The form of

[35]"Ask Me Another," *Chicago Defender*, 8 October 1927, p. A8.

Christianity as worshiped instead of practiced by the gloriously orthodox and the manifestly fundamentalists is not the type which has abidingness. The Negro group needs religious leaders who will extricate them from the meshes of a crass superstition, literalism and formalism."[36] Singleton not only chastised black fundamentalists for the "crass superstition" of their supernaturalism, but also chastened them for their devotion to biblical literalism, identifying these two the major components of fundamentalism as snares entangling the race. Also worth noting is Singleton's overarching theme that black religion ought to be deliberately geared toward advancing racial interests – a quality which he considered to be lacking in black fundamentalism and black Christianity more generally; yet as we will see later on, this idea of religion as a tool for racial advancement was by no means absent among pro-fundamentalist African American voices.[37]

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[36]George A. Singleton, "Religion Worth Having," *Chicago Defender*, 15 October 1927, p. A2.

[37]Singleton was not alone in his dismissal of theologically conservative Christianity, with its commitment to supernatural and otherworldly doctrines (in his words, "superstition, literalism and formalism"), as mere accommodation to the oppressive white culture, and therefore unfit to advance African American interests. Such ideas are also reflected in the writings of Ernest Rice McKinney quoted in this chapter, and chapter six of this dissertation deals in more detail with this type of argument. This sentiment is in some ways anticipatory of E. Franklin Frazier's argument in *The Negro Church in America* that Christianity represented a foreign tradition that black slaves eventually adopted due to their "subordination and isolation in American society" and the complete destruction of their social heritage. See E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Church in America* (New York: Schocken Books, 1963), 82. Yet in contrast to Singleton's assertion, Albert J. Raboteau has contended that slaves' Christianity, even as it was in many notable ways an "otherworldly" religion, provided the basis for the slaves to resist the prevailing culture by declaring the fundamental incompatibility between orthodox Christianity and the practice of slavery. Hence, the otherworldly Christianity toward which Singleton was so hostile was not merely an accommodationist adoption of the prevailing "white man's" religion, but actually represented an opportunity for blacks to assert their own agency and resist the oppressive status quo. Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South*, updated ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 290, 333.

Other scholars have likewise affirmed the agency of black slaves in adopting and adapting the Christian religion to fit their circumstances. Eugene Genovese, far from seeing slave Christianity as a purely accommodationist capitulation to the prevailing white culture, identified elements of resistance and counterculture in slave religion: "The slaves reshaped the Christianity they had embraced; they conquered the religion of those who had conquered them." See Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World*

Lest we are tempted to conclude that biblical literalism was merely a charge leveled at fundamentalists by their less-than-sympathetic contemporaries at the *Chicago Defender*, it is needful to note that African American proponents of fundamentalism were quick to claim biblical inerrancy and biblical literalism as badges of distinction. Take for example Lacey Kirk Williams, the president of the National Baptist Convention, Inc., who in an address to the 1928 Baptist Ministers' Conference in Washington, D.C. undertook "an affirmation of fundamentalism." In so doing, Williams raised two points of doctrine in particular: the deity of Christ and "belief in a literal interpretation of the new testament," including Jesus' virgin birth and works of miraculous power.[38] Nor was Williams new to this particular battle. Three years prior, in fact, he had taken to the floor of the National Baptist Convention's September 1925 annual meeting to deliver his presidential address, mere weeks after the furor surrounding fundamentalism and evolution had captivated the nation during John Scopes' trial. Williams felt obliged, given the summer's events in Dayton, to adjudicate the hot-button topic of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy. "The differentiation," he proclaimed to the convention, "between the Modernists and the Fundamentalists has been very clearly and fairly drawn, and . . . I believe that we should take our stand with

the Slaves Made (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), 212. William E. Montgomery similarly contends that the egalitarianism inherent in the revivalist doctrines of the Great Awakenings, centering as they did on the conversion experience and the equal standing of all individuals before God, provided an opening for black slaves to connect the Christian gospel with their own emancipation: "The power of the conversion experience pierced all conventional social barriers, rendering privilege irrelevant and elevating all of God's creatures to the same condition. . . . The social and political ramifications of evangelical doctrine reverberated through the South during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The inference that blacks drew from the gospel was their liberation from slavery." See William E. Montgomery, *Under Their Own Vine and Fig Tree: The African-American Church in the South, 1865-1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), 20.

[38]"We Run Everything Says L. K. Williams," *Afro-American*, 18 February 1928, p. 1.

those who believe in the full, sufficient authority of the Scriptures in matters of religion."[39] The fact that Williams made such arguments while in a position of great authority in one of the more prominent African American denominations of the day reflects the gravity and the centrality of biblical inerrancy and biblical literalism among black fundamentalists; this issue was evidently no less central to them than it was to their white counterparts.[40]

Also like their white brethren, black fundamentalists' emphasis on biblical literalism and divine creation, particularly as such literal interpretation impacted their exegesis of the creation narrative in Genesis 1-3, brought them ineluctably into conflict with the rising tide of evolutionary thought.[41] Floyd J. Calvin, writing in the *Pittsburgh Courier* upon the occasion of William Jennings Bryan's death, lauded the text of Bryan's final (undelivered) speech as "a clear exposition of the case against evolution and the cardinal principles of the Fundamentalists' creed." Calvin proceeded: "Thousands refuse to believe that man is descended from an ape, and we are one of them. As for the whole fight between science and the Bible, we stand with the Commoner and the Bible."[42] Calvin's anti-evolutionism was thus erected on the

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[39]"The Third Annual Address of Dr. L. K. Williams, President," *National Baptist Voice* 10, no. 40, 17 October 1925, 15.

[40]L. K. Williams, in fact, was also instrumental in founding the American Baptist Theological Seminary – a cooperative effort between the white Southern Baptist Convention and the black National Baptist Convention to create a school for educating black clergy in fundamentalist doctrine. The story of ABTS, including L. K. Williams' participation, is examined in substantial detail in chapter five of this dissertation.

[41]For an in-depth exploration of the fundamentalist origins of the anti-evolution movement, see: Michael Lienesch, *In the Beginning: Fundamentalism, the Scopes Trial, and the Making of the Antievolution Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

[42]Floyd J. Calvin, "The Digest," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 8 August 1925, p. 16.

foundation of the Bible and, presumably, the necessity of a literal interpretation of its inerrant words in Genesis 1.

Interestingly, the very same edition of the *Pittsburgh Courier* also included an article reproving fundamentalists for choosing to "stand by the Adam and Eve story," positing to the contrary that "God chose to write the story of creation on the face of the whole earth instead of on the printed page."[43] Such argumentation, taking aim at the biblical literalism which underpinned black fundamentalists' opposition to evolutionary theory, was reminiscent of an article before Bryan's death which riffed on the idea of biblical inspiration by arguing that "every stratum of the earth crust is a vast lead in the 'inspired book' of Evolution."[44] Clearly biblical literalism and inspiration, manifested most concretely in what one critic acidly panned as "the ridiculousness of the literal interpretation of the early chapters of Genesis," was recognized by both friends and foes to be at the heart of the anti-evolution attitude common among the fundamentalists, white and black alike.[45]

Yet interestingly these commonalities across the color line do not appear to have widely prompted among African Americans the same sorts of culturally conservative political militancy that they did among those white fundamentalists who have garnered the vast majority of scholarly attention. Whites elicited the stereotypical image of the "fighting fundamentalist" by their willingness to engage in protracted cultural battles revolving around issues such as whether evolution should be taught in public schools,

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[43]Alma Booker, "Is Evolution Based Upon a Guess?" *Pittsburgh Courier*, 8 August 1925, p. 5.

[44]William Pickens, "Don Quixote Bryan, Fundamentalism," *Norfolk New Journal and Guide*, 12 January 1924, p. 5.

[45]"The Bookshelf," *Chicago Defender*, 27 February 1926, p. A1.

while blacks hesitated to do so. A common commitment to doctrinal fundamentalism did not entail identical types of political and social involvement, but rather their disparate racial and cultural contexts manifested in significantly divergent social worldviews between blacks and whites who might otherwise have been unified on essential theological grounds.

In the context of the Jim Crow era, amidst radical abuse and substantial racial oppression – and in a white supremacist society that automatically defined black individuals first and foremost by their race – it should come as no surprise that black fundamentalists' political and social energy was largely dedicated to progressive ideas of racial advancement. After all, as C. Eric Lincoln has noted, the black church has historically functioned as a custodian of African American identity, constituting "in a real sense a universal church, claiming and representing all Blacks out of a tradition that looks back to the time when there was *only* the Black Church to bear witness to 'who' or 'what' a black man was."[46] So while black fundamentalists in the interwar period certainly encountered theological conflicts with other segments the black Christian community, nevertheless they applied their fundamentalism and directed their cultural activism toward addressing the common issues of racial oppression and inequality that faced the black community as a whole.

At times, fundamentalist voices construed racial progress as actually being a primary motivator *driving* religious decisions and religious activity. Contrary to the idea advanced by the likes of Ernest Rice McKinney and George Singleton that

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[46]C. Eric Lincoln, *Race, Religion, and the Continuing American Dilemma* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1984), 96.

fundamentalism was antithetical to racial progress, its adherents sometimes presented their theological conservatism as a clear means of advancing specifically racial interests. Consider once again the *Norfolk New Journal and Guide*'s 1925 editorial "Our Group are Fundamentalists in Religion." This column grounded the sustained fundamentalism of the African American race on the continuation of racial progress and the utility of the "simple faith" in achieving that end: "It has brought us thus far, and the belief is general that it is sufficient to carry us further. . . . We have seen so many radical changes to our advantage in the gradual evolution of the past half century, and we are seeing so much of the like sort from day to day that we see no good and sufficient reason to waver in the Faith." One cannot help but wonder whether the editorialist would have condoned "wavering" in the faith if the "radical changes to our advantage" which he evidently observed in day-to-day life had begun to slow or cease altogether. In this arrangement racial progress was given a pride of place such that racial considerations were intimately tied to religious identity. Continuing in this vein, the editorial concluded by saying that black fundamentalists "can give a reason for the hope that is in them by pointing to what they have become in this free Nation from what they began in the days of the Colonies." Racial progress was here again linked explicitly to religious identification. Notably, the editorialist also obliquely lent credence to the idea that black fundamentalists' time and energy was by necessity devoted more to issues of race than to anything else, stating that the race's tendency to avoid speculation on issues of religious modernism "may be due in large measure to the fact that we have so many other problems to contend with that

absorb our time and dominate our thoughts."[47] So we see here not only evidence of racial advancement being rhetorically connected to religious fidelity, but also an indication that black fundamentalists consciously acknowledged the need to devote their political and cultural energy to addressing racial concerns rather than more stereotypically fundamentalist issues like evolution.

African American fundamentalists were also shown occasionally as leveraging their religious identities for racial ends. Such was the case with the aforementioned L. K. Williams, president of the National Baptist Convention, Inc. from 1922 until his death in 1940. In 1928 Williams embarked on a nationwide tour in order "to promote the interests of the Negro race through the Baptists denomination."[48] Williams, who had gone on record before his convention as standing with the fundamentalists and against the modernists, was willing to leverage his position as a Baptist leader and an advocate of fundamentalist theology in order to promote specifically racial interests. Similarly, Williams was closely involved with the effort to establish, in cooperation with the white Southern Baptist Convention, a black Baptist seminary in Nashville; at the dedication of the American Baptist Theological Seminary's first building, Williams sincerely thanked his Southern Baptist brethren for their assistance while simultaneously exhorting them to understand that their people's debt to the black race had not yet been paid.[49] Williams' activity offers yet another example of black fundamentalists linking together religious

[47]"Our Group are Fundamentalists in Religion."

[48]"We Run Everything Says L. K. Williams"; "Ignores School Row in Address," *New York Amsterdam News*, 22 February 1928, p. 10; "Controversy Sidestepped by Williams," *Chicago Defender*, 25 February 1928, p. 2.

[49]"Baptist Theological Seminary for Negroes Dedicated Sunday," *Nashville Banner*, 15 September 1924, Commission on ABTS Records, AR 630, Box 5, Folder 23.

identity and racial advancement in ways that their white counterparts would not have conceived. Such a perspective was a product not only of racial pride and solidarity on the part of African American fundamentalists but also of the ubiquitous racial prejudice and discrimination that they faced on a daily basis, emanating from the white supremacist social structure of early twentieth-century America.

In addition to this connection to the general ethos of racial advancement, two other common perceptions from within the black community may have also played some role in subduing potential proclivities toward white fundamentalists' brand of conservative cultural activism in favor of waging battles of primarily racial import. The first of these was an association of such conservatism with white southerners and thus with racism and white supremacy. These connotations were propounded with some regularity in the black weeklies throughout the 1920s and 1930s. This association may help to further explain black fundamentalists' tendency to apply their religion to racial issues (in contrast to the other cultural concerns driving their white fundamentalist counterparts), for if they had instead ascribed paramount value to the fight for other culturally conservative particularities they might have been perceived within the African American community as siding with the forces of racial oppression and white supremacy.

Fundamentalism was often linked in black weeklies with Southern racial violence and intolerance, and at times was explicitly tied to the Ku Klux Klan.[50] In 1926

[50]For a detailed study on the print media's role in creating the association between the South and fundamentalism, see: Mary Beth Swetnam Mathews, *Rethinking Zion: How the Print Media Placed Fundamentalism in the South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006).

the *Pittsburgh Courier* reflected on a recent outbreak of racial violence in Texas by proclaiming that Texas "has always been the perfect paradise for the fundamentalist and barbarian." Another article in the same edition held up Georgia as the quintessence of "arrogant bigotry," full of people "obsessed with Fundamentalism, Ku Kluxism, and colorphobia."[51] A year earlier Kelly Miller in the *Afro-American* had identified the Klan as "composed mainly of Fundamentalists."[52] At roughly the same time, soon after the Scopes verdict, an editorial in the NAACP's *The Crisis* equated the religious conservatives of Dayton, Tennessee with those "who permit lynching and make bastardy legal in order to render their race 'pure'."[53] In 1933 Wendell Dabney posited that the acquittal of a black Georgian who had shot a white thief signaled that "surely Fundamentalism is about to bid 'farewell, a long farewell to all its greatness.'"[54]

Even when the movement was not directly tied to the South or the Klan, it was often disparaged by opponents as being tightly intertwined with historic racism. In a rhetorical strategy which was not entirely uncommon, Ernest Rice McKinney pointed his readers back to the days of antebellum America, arguing that "it was the heterodox who destroyed slavery in America and England. The Orthodox Fundamentalists wanted slavery to continue."[55] Likewise, a Norfolk reporter in 1926, having already expressly associated fundamentalism with religious intolerance, concluded that "intolerance and

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[51]"The Springfield Sun Throws A Little Light On 'Texas Justice,'" *Pittsburgh Courier*, 27 November 1926, p. A8; "Empire State of Ignorance," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 27 November 1926, p. A8.

[52]Kelly Miller, "Kelly Miller Says," *Afro-American*, 21 November 1925, p. 11.

[53]"September Crisis Scores Prejudiced Fundamentalist," *Philadelphia Tribune*, 22 August 1925, p. 15.

[54]Wendell P. Dabney, "Reflections of Dabney," *Spokesman* (Chicago), 4 February 1933, p. 4.

[55]Ernest Rice McKinney, "This Week: Skeptics, Agnostics, Atheists, Infidels and Free Thinkers," *Broad Ax* (Chicago), 15 August 1925, p. 2.

race prejudice sleep in the same bed and are all but indistinguishable."[56] At the close of the decade such conservative religious convictions continued to be scored by religious liberals and secularists as "sectional bigotry opposed to human freedom and adult conscience."[57]

Outspoken proponents of fundamentalism within the black community were not exempt from attacks by their opponents grounded in the priority of racial progress. These old-time religionists were at times accused of holding back the entire African American race. Ernest Rice McKinney, as was mentioned earlier, railed against the ubiquity of fundamentalists within the black community, who worked to "keep us poor, ignorant and weak." For McKinney, the hope of the race rested in the idea that "some day, we will revolt [against fundamentalist clergy] and then someone will have to get another job or starve."[58] In this brief column, responsibility for the race's poverty, ignorance, and political weakness was laid squarely at the feet of a single group: black fundamentalists. Other writers even went so far as to identify particular religious teachings that were holding the race back. Edward Arbor, writing for the April 1935 issue of *The Crisis*, was quoted as saying that "Being guided by such principles that make one love one's neighbor, turn the other cheek and 'take it to the Lord in prayer,' avails little when opposition is found in masked men with shotguns, closed factory doors, and farmland without seeds to plant." Arbor further argued that racial progress was undermined by some fundamentalist preachers in the South who "consigned to hell"

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[56]"American Intolerance and Menace of a State Church," *Norfolk New Journal and Guide*, 11 September 1926, p. 12.

[57]"What the Republican Party Can't Be," *Chicago Defender*, 9 November 1929, p. A2.

[58]Ernest Rice McKinney, "This Week," 15 April 1925.

militant racial activists.[59] That such declamations awaited those who permitted (or were even perceived as permitting) their religious convictions to stand in the way of racial progress and racial solidarity might easily have served as motivation for fundamentalist black Christians to prioritize their racial struggles and racial applications of their conservative doctrine.

A second widespread perception that may have helped motivate black fundamentalists to devote their energy more to progressive racial causes rather than conservative cultural causes was the idea that *true* religion primarily required right social action, not merely right theology. This theme reverberated all through the 1920s and 1930s, especially in the trendsetting, socially-minded *Chicago Defender*. In December 1923 Roscoe Simmons sardonically exclaimed, "Maybe the Modernists and Fundamentalists arguing about creeds will stumble upon true religion. . . . They may not be much on Christianity, but they are up on theology." Simmons was convinced that upright social conduct was the essence of the "true religion" which seemed to bypass the theologically-minded disputants, as evinced by his biting critique: "Suppose they fought sin half as hard as they fight among themselves over creed. This would be a pleasant world, would it not?" Social action, here represented as "fighting sin," clearly took precedence in Simmons' mind over doctrinal disputations. He resumed the same drumbeat two weeks later, imagining that "Looking down from heaven Jesus will say: 'Look at my children, fighting over faith, when they know that faith without works is as ships without water.'" Without question, social comportment trumped theological

[59]"Claim Church Holds Southerners Back," *Plaindealer* (Topeka), 29 March 1935, p. 2; "Says Negro Church Holds Rase Back in South," *Wyandotte Echo*, 29 March 1935, p. 1.

exactitude for Simmons, as he drew upon the poetry of Roden Noel to drive home his point: “What if men take to FOLLOWING where He leads, Weary of mumbling Athanasian creeds?” Simmons continued on this track in the months that followed, drawing support for his position particularly from John 14:15, “If you love me, keep my commandments.”[60]

Simmons and the *Defender* were by no means alone in promoting this perspective. In January of 1924 the *Afro-American* reported on a Y.M.C.A. vespers address by Dr. William V. Tunnell, who advised the 200 men in attendance that “neither fundamentalists or moralist counts in the last analysis, it is living the Christian life that is the important thing.”[61] As discussed earlier, L. K. Williams, president of the National Baptist Convention, determined in 1928 to travel through the country “to promote the interests of the Negro race through the Baptist denomination.” Williams’ theological convictions were joined closely with social action designed to advance racial interests.[62] Indeed, the concept of upright social conduct was often connected, as it was for Williams, with explicitly racial concerns. For instance, Reverend Adam Clayton Powell warned that the institutional church was collapsing due to its failure to speak out against “present day Philistines” afflicting the land: “the profit system, intolerance, selfishness, racketeering, exploitation, race hatred, mob violence, unbrotherliness, and every form of injustice.” He concluded morosely that “the preachers are feeding the people on fundamentalism and religious traditions instead of telling them how to get food and

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[60]Roscoe Simmons, “The Week,” *Chicago Defender*, 15 December 1923, p. A1; Roscoe Simmons, “The Week,” *Chicago Defender*, 29 December 1923, p. 11; Roscoe Simmons, “The Week,” *Chicago Defender*, 20 September 1924, p. A3.

[61]“200 Hear Dr. Tunnell,” *Afro-American*, 25 January 1924, p. 6.

[62]“Ignores School Row In Address.”

fundamental human rights."[63] Clearly Powell believed that practical solutions to social problems – namely, food and human rights – ought to be foundational to the church's faith and practice, even superseding the exposition of the theological content of their "religious traditions." Likewise J. Raymond Henderson, a Baptist minister in Atlanta, argued that "the church cannot stay out of politics and be true to its mission."[64] True Christianity, it seemed to many in the black community, was just as dependent (if not more so) on right social conduct than on creedal specifics.

At times the premium placed on racial militancy was even more obvious, as in the piece by George A. Singleton in October 1927 which argued that African Americans needed a new type of religion: "The form of Christianity that is generally embraced by the Negro group makes them servile. The type of religion needed by the black man is militantly aggressive. . . . A religion that makes for manhood, group cohesiveness, solidarity, racial self-esteem, brotherhood, shot through with the very life of Jesus is the religion worth having."[65] The purpose of African American religion, in Singleton's mind, was to advance the interests of the race, replacing servility with racial militancy, racial solidarity, and racial self-esteem. Indeed, in the context of Jim Crow, the notion of "social action" on the part of the African American community almost necessarily pointed to the prospect of explicitly *racial* activism. The regularity of such attitudes within the black community – attitudes which promoted social action, especially action surrounding issues of racial progress, as the test of "true religion" – adds another

[63]Rev. A. Clayton Powell, Sr., "The Silent Church," *Norfolk New Journal and Guide*, 27 April 1935, p. 8.

[64]J. Raymond Henderson, "This Thing Called Religion," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 30 May 1931, p. 19.

[65]Singleton, "Religion Worth Having."

dimension to our understanding of the black fundamentalists' precarious position. Though their conservative religious commitments could potentially have, in a vacuum, prompted them to favor the same type of conservative political and cultural militancy as did many white fundamentalists, their continuous experience of racial oppression, in conjunction with the black community's emphasis on social action as a mark of true religion and the potential association of fundamentalism with anti-black racism, led them instead to apply their religious convictions to the task of promoting the race's interests rather than fighting the conservative cultural battles so characteristic of their white counterparts.

A parting image may serve to reinforce the point. On March 30, 1935 the *Afro-American* printed a photograph on its front page captioned "Churchgoers Sign Up," showing the Reverend John L. Henry, formerly of the Henry Brothers' traveling revival troupe and at this point the pastor of Tenth Street Baptist Church in the nation's capital, leading a long line of his congregants out the door of Tenth Street church and to a petition booth in front of the building. There John Henry and the rest of his congregation readily signed a petition in favor of the Costigan-Wagner anti-lynching bill.[66] While J.L. Henry had very conspicuously identified himself as a fundamentalist during his days as an itinerant revivalist, and he even for a time might have been considered a celebrity, on this day he made the front page of the paper not expressly for his preaching or for his theology but rather for his willingness to lead his congregation to jointly engage in progressive social action on behalf of the race. Henry stood ready to proclaim the

[66]"Churchgoers Sign Up," *Afro-American*, 30 March 1935, p. 1.

fundamentals of the faith in his family's revival meetings, and more than likely did the same from the pulpit of Tenth Street Baptist, yet on this day this fundamentalist clergyman led his congregants to stand up and "fight" also for racial justice.

Conclusion

There is little doubt that the African American community has received far too little attention in the historiography of American Protestant fundamentalism. Not only did a significant number of African Americans claim for themselves the "fundamentalist" label, but they also shared some notable characteristics with their white counterparts: a supernaturalist perspective, a firm continuity with religious traditions of the past, a belief in biblical inspiration and inerrancy, an emphasis on divine creation, and an attitude of hostility toward evolutionary thought. Yet a major difference lay in the fact that the conservative brand of cultural militancy so long held to be an essential defining characteristic of fundamentalism – that is, the willingness among white fundamentalists to engage in protracted and heated cultural battles against the perceived cultural changes that accompanied modernism, such as the struggle to keep evolution out of public school curricula – was often absent (at least as a first-order concern) among conservative black Christians. Indeed, for black fundamentalists the pressing racial issues facing them from all sides often meant that their social outlook centered more on the progressive politics of racial advancement than the conservative social and political agendas of white fundamentalists. As a result African Americans have typically been excluded from historical considerations of American fundamentalism despite the

numerous members of the black community who used just such a label to identify themselves. Yet as we have seen, the *religious* worldview of fundamentalism, broadly conceived based on George Marsden's "most distinctive" doctrines of Biblicism and creationism, was relatively consistent across racial lines, even if social mores and activities were not.

In terms of general religious outlook, white and black fundamentalists in fact shared a great deal. But any comparison of the two groups must ultimately venture beyond the general fundamentalist worldview and into narrower theological particularities, for the entire theological premise of the movement was that certain fundamental doctrines must be uncompromisingly protected in the face of the advancing modernistic threat (most notably the "five fundamentals" of biblical inspiration, the deity of Christ, the virgin birth, substitutionary atonement, and the literal resurrection and second coming of Christ). This more detailed doctrinal evaluation is the task to which we can now turn in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

THE FIVE FUNDAMENTALS ACROSS RACIAL LINES

Having seen in chapter two that the substantial presence of "fundamentalists" within black ecclesiastical circles was recognized by black commenters from all across the theological spectrum, the question naturally arises as to the relative consonance between this black fundamentalism and the more commonly understood conception of Protestant fundamentalism that has occupied the vast majority of the historiographical attention. Were the essential doctrinal convictions and formulations of this black version of fundamentalism closely akin to the theological positions being advanced and defended by the better-chronicled white leaders under the banner of "fundamentalism"? This chapter will offer a historical-theological analysis and comparison to demonstrate that several of the most central theological elements of the white fundamentalist platform were likewise being taught in black churches with nearly identical content, formulation, and biblical/exegetical backing. This is not to say, of course, that black fundamentalists were simply copying from or emulating a group of white exemplars; rather, fundamentalists on both sides of the color line met the challenge of modernist theological arguments contemporaneously and in parallel, drawing from a deep church-historical tradition and, even more importantly, the authoritative voice of Scripture to validate their positions as the biblically and historically authentic "faith once delivered to the saints."

From the outset of the modernist controversy, white fundamentalist leaders were concerned not only with the inward fidelity of believers, but also with the rigorous external doctrinal precision required to combat what they saw as modernist incursions into orthodox churches and denominations. Feelings, emotions, and inner experience, while truly within the realm of the proper Christian life, were arenas to which modernists regularly appealed as they argued for ecclesiastical acceptance of theological liberalism.[1] In perhaps the most famous modernist sermon of the era, Harry Emerson Fosdick took aim at fundamentalist intolerance, arguing on experiential rather than exegetical grounds that liberal and conservative theologies ought to peacefully coexist: "There are many opinions in the field of modern controversy concerning which I am not sure whether they are right or wrong, but there is one thing I am sure of: courtesy and kindliness and tolerance and humility and fairness are right. Opinions may be mistaken; love never is."[2] For Fosdick, the theological "opinions" in dispute did not touch the essence of Christianity; they paled in comparison to the need for interpersonal love and tolerance. Given the contours of modernist arguments like Fosdick's, the theological conservatives aimed to arrest the growing inroads of liberal influence by turning to the battleground of objective revelatory truth, not subjective experience – and indeed, fundamentalists perceived the objective truths of the very "faith once delivered to the saints" to be deeply at risk if the onward march of liberal theology was not halted with expedience. As a

[1]Subjective personal experience did play some role in fundamentalist thinking; see, for example, E. Y. Mullins, "The Testimony of Christian Experience," in *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, ed. R. A. Torrey and A. C. Dixon, vol. 4 (Los Angeles: The Bible Institute of Los Angeles, 1917; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 315.

[2]Harry Emerson Fosdick, "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" in *American Religions: A Documentary History*, ed. R. Marie Griffith (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 422.

result, those most vocal in their opposition to modernism naturally expected a high measure of theological exactitude in their doctrinal formulations, lest their modernist adversaries use theological imprecision as a cover for smuggling in aberrant or dangerous perspectives.

As one might expect, many white fundamentalist leaders who subsisted in the midst of, and often explicitly embraced, the culture of Jim Crow America tended not to extend this same expectation of theological sophistication to African Americans. In some cases, southern fundamentalist leaders exploited racial fears and prejudices to consolidate white support for their social and ecclesiastical aims, and in the process essentially dismissed African Americans as meaningful historical actors altogether.[3] In other cases, even when black Christians were considered as legitimate individual agents rather than a subversive oppositional monolith, assumptions of moral and intellectual inferiority led white bellwethers to assume that conservative blacks lacked the ability, willingness, or desire to properly engage the crucial doctrinal debates. Texas' famed fundamentalist churchman J. Frank Norris, for instance, standing in the Southern Baptist mainstream regarding his assumption of the natural propriety of segregation and white supremacy, considered African Americans to be simpleminded dupes vulnerable to influence from subversive anti-Christian and anti-American forces.[4] Norris was known to amuse himself by demeaning blacks on the basis of their supposed simplicity, as when he mimicked a haunting in his church in order to frighten three black workers. Laughing

[3]William R. Glass, *Strangers in Zion: Fundamentalists in the South, 1900-1950* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001), 71.

[4]Barry Hankins, *God's Rascal: J. Frank Norris and the Beginnings of Southern Fundamentalism* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 162, 167.

at their obvious distress, Norris justified his action as an opportunity to "get in conversation with them about the end of the world and when they are going to be earthquaked" – this was, you see, "really a righteous act to shake them up and have them forget their troubles."[5]

Similarly, Northern Baptist newspaperman Curtis Lee Laws, often credited with popularizing the term "fundamentalist," bemoaned the fact that blacks' simplemindedness exposed them to the menace of the Roman Catholic Church: "There is much in Roman Catholicism that has an appeal to the average uncultured Negro. . . . [Catholic practices] are all calculated to work on the credulity of one who is naturally superstitious."[6] Inherent in such white fundamentalist leaders' perceptions of African Americans was a firm conviction of intellectual inferiority and superstition, which, even when couched in less overtly negative terms like "naturally religious," predictably excluded black Christians from conversations of major doctrinal import.[7] If, after all, African Americans could not even be trusted to resist the lascivious wiles of Romanism, how could they be expected to contribute to, or even understand, the precise theological formulations that constituted the fundamentalist bulwark against modernist incursions?

But contrary to the paternalistic condescension and the minimal expectations coming from men like Norris, Laws, and other white fundamentalist leaders, in fact

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[5]J. Frank Norris to Jane Hartwell, 28 December 1928, J. Frank Norris Papers, AR 124, Box 19, Folder 853, quoted in Mary Beth Swetnam Mathews, *Doctrine and Race: African American Evangelicals and Fundamentalism between the Wars* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2017), 28.

[6] Curtis Lee Laws, "The Negro and Roman Catholicism," *Watchman Examiner* 19, no. 9, 26 February 1931, 265.

[7]The characterization of African Americans as "naturally religious" dates back to antebellum romantic racialists and is intimately connected to the idea of intellectual inferiority. See Curtis J. Evans, *The Burden of Black Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 36-37.

black clergy and laypeople approached doctrinal discussions with an eye toward theological nuance and doctrinal precision belying the Jim Crow stereotype of black intellectual inferiority that so quickly sprang to the lips and pens of their white contemporaries. To demonstrate the depth of thought and precision extant among theologically conservative black thinkers of the era, this chapter focuses on the five most common points of doctrinal contention for fundamentalists: biblical inspiration and inerrancy, the deity of Christ, the virgin birth, the substitutionary atonement, and the physical resurrection and literal second coming of Christ – often together termed the "Five Fundamentals." Along with a general attitude of skepticism and antipathy toward modernism, these five doctrinal pillars offer a helpful starting place from which to launch a historical-theological examination of conservative black Christians and their relationship to the defining characteristics of the "fundamentalist" faith.

This is not to say that every person mentioned in this chapter expressly identified as a fundamentalist, though several certainly did. Rather, the point is to demonstrate that typically "fundamentalist" doctrines were being formulated, understood, and expressed (as to their content) similarly in both white and black contexts. For example, when black newspapers like the *Star of Zion* asserted "the inspiration of the Scriptures" to be the non-negotiable centerpiece of fundamentalist bibliology (or doctrine of Scripture), did that terminology entail the same essential theological connotations, such as inerrancy and infallibility, as it did for white fundamentalists?[8] This chapter will utilize primarily non-sermonic theological sources from black churches in comparison with the similarly

[8]George Biddle, "The Fundamentals," *Star of Zion*, 08 September 1921.

non-sermonic "sourcebook" of fundamentalist teaching, *The Fundamentals*, to demonstrate that the doctrines most often associated with fundamentalism were understood and taught in much the same way by theological conservatives on both sides of the color line.[9] Black and white conservatives drew in parallel from the common streams of church history and biblical exegesis, understanding their views to be an extension of both what Scripture plainly taught and what the church historic believed. This being the case, they also laid a common emphasis on the doctrine of Scripture as ground zero for the modernist conflict and as the indispensable root from which an orthodox defense and understanding of the other "fundamental" doctrines must spring.

A Dialectic Spectrum of Theological Inquiry

In preparation for approaching a historical-theological analysis, it is important to recognize that even among such a group as the fundamentalists, there was not necessarily absolute harmony on every nuance of every doctrine. Without question, there was firm unity around the essential nature of the "fundamental" doctrines, and there were lines that could absolutely not be violated without crossing into the outer darkness of modernism. Even so, we would do well to consider the particular nuances of these historical-theological discussions as existing on a spectrum rather than as a static dichotomy.[10]

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[9]Sermons, representing in their form and authority a substantially different and unique form of communication, will constitute the focus of chapter four.

[10]The concept of a using "dialectical spectrum" in lieu of a strict dichotomy reflects the approach of C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya in *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990). Lincoln and Mamiya offer a "dialectical model of the black church," which models various sets of dialectical polarities with the understanding that any given church

We might conceptualize, for example, the doctrine of Scripture as a spectrum with the leftmost polarity representing a view of the Bible as simply a product of the minds of fallible men, and the rightmost polarity a view of the Bible as a simple stenographic dictation from the divine mind. Somewhere in the middle of the spectrum is a point dividing the fundamentalists from their opponents, from which all rightward positions would acknowledge the Bible as wholly inspired by God, and therefore without error; however, even among those right-most positions, there were contestations over exactly *how* God inspired the Bible to be written, and whether men were active or passive agents in its creation. Within fundamentalist circles, there were heated conflicts over the distinction between plenary-verbal inspiration and mechanical dictation.[11] Yet even within the four volumes of *The Fundamentals*, the very sourcebook from which the

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body could fall within a range of possible locations on the intervening spectrum. If we apply this model to issues pertinent to the fundamentalist/modernist controversy, we can understand how, even within the "fundamentalist" range of the spectrum, there could be substantial internecine arguments and disagreements, such as between plenary-verbal and mechanical dictation views of inspiration, or between penal and moral-government views of substitutionary atonement.

Since the introduction of Lincoln and Mamiya's dialectical model, some scholars such as Allison Calhoun-Brown (political science) and Sandra L. Barnes (sociology) have used Lincoln and Mamiya's suggested dialectical pairings to argue for more nuanced views of the relationship between conservative theology and political/social action among African American Christians. Calhoun-Brown has challenged the assumption that the "otherworldly/this-worldly" and "resistance/accommodation" dialectics are intrinsically linked. Barnes has argued that black churches all across the "priestly/prophetic" spectrum are involved in social and political activism. She has also pointed out that when religious conservatives and progressives find themselves in opposition to one another on social issues, both sides position themselves as in line with the resistance/protest tradition of the black church and consider their opponents to be accommodationists. Allison Calhoun-Brown, "While Marching to Zion: Otherworldliness and Racial Empowerment in the Black Community," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 37, no. 3 (September 1998): 427-439; Sandra L. Barnes, "Priestly and Prophetic Influences on Black Church Social Services," *Social Problems* 51, no. 2 (May 2004), 202-221; Sandra L. Barnes and Oluchi Nwosu, "Black Church Electoral and Protest Politics from 2002 to 2012: a Social Media Analysis of the Resistance Versus Accommodation Dialectic," *Journal of African American Studies* 18, no. 2 (June 2014), 209-235.

[11]Nathan A. Finn, "John R. Rice, Bob Jones Jr. and the 'Mechanical Dictation' Controversy: Finalizing the Fracturing of Independent Fundamentalism," *The Journal of Baptist Studies* 6 (2014): 60–75.

movement gained its name, both perspectives were represented.[12] Likewise, as we examine perspectives on the "five fundamentals" within black churches and publications, it is wise to recognize that there will certainly be a variety of expressions that fall on different points of the dialectical spectrum; the pertinent question is whether they subsist within the fundamentalist "range" of the spectrum.

The Five Fundamentals: A Historical-Theological Comparison

The foremost fundamentalist doctrine, which also typically enjoyed pride of place in any listing of "the fundamentals of the faith," was without a doubt the doctrine of biblical inspiration. In fact, nearly one-third (twenty-eight out of ninety) of the essays in *The Fundamentals* were specifically devoted to some aspect of bibliology, or the doctrine of Scripture – many specifically addressing issues of inspiration, inerrancy, and the claims of higher-critical scholarship. Commitment to the veracity of biblical inspiration, or the idea that the text of the Bible was inspired by God, also entailed the explication of the concomitant ideas of biblical inerrancy (the Bible as being without any actual error) and infallibility (the Bible as being without even the possibility of error). Because modernist thinkers might speak of the *ideas* (but not the words) of Scripture as being inspired, or even of certain *parts* of Scripture as being inspired, the fundamentalist

[12]L. W. Munhall, in discussing 2 Peter 1:21, asserts, "This passage does not justify the so-called 'mechanical theory of inspiration.' Such theory is nowhere taught in the Scriptures." Yet in the very same volume, George Bishop argues that the testimony of Exodus 4:11-12 and 2 Corinthians 13:3 "looks very much like what has been stigmatized as the 'mechanical theory.' It surely makes the writer a mere organ." L. W. Munhall, "Inspiration," in *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, ed. R. A. Torrey and A. C. Dixon, vol. 2 (Los Angeles: The Bible Institute of Los Angeles, 1917; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 56; George S. Bishop, "The Testimony of the Scriptures to Themselves," in Torrey and Dixon, *The Fundamentals*, vol. 2, 94.

defense of inspiration emphasized God as the author of the very words of the Bible in its totality. As James M. Gray affirmed in his contribution to *The Fundamentals*, God "caused [every word in the Bible] to be recorded, infallibly and inerrantly recorded, for our profit. In this sense the Bible does not merely contain the Word of God, it *is* the Word of God."[13] Recognizing that modernist denials of *other* fundamental tenants of the faith were first grounded in a denial of the absolute authority and trustworthiness of the Scriptures that taught these essential doctrines, fundamentalists unsurprisingly committed above all to a defense of their doctrine of Scripture.

Contrary to the prejudiced assumptions of many white fundamentalists, black Christians were facing the same modernist challenges to their bibliology and, in many cases, they were expressing the same doctrinal interconnections, definitions, nuances, and rejoinders as were white fundamentalists. Not content with a mere tip of the hat to the Bible as "the Good Book," numerous African-American church members aggressively confronted modernist thought in their own cultural contexts, but utilizing terms that would have been perfectly at home in J. Frank Norris' *Searchlight* or Curtis Lee Laws' *Watchman-Examiner*. Indeed, many of these defenders of traditional bibliology did so by wielding the pen in their own denominational newspapers – an indication that, while these denominations could certainly not be classed as "fundamentalist" on the whole, an attitude of hostility toward modernist innovations and a pressing drive to uphold the faith's doctrinal fundamentals characterized a substantial

[13]James M. Gray, "The Inspiration of the Bible – Definition, Extent, and Proof," in *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, ed. R. A. Torrey and A. C. Dixon, vol. 2 (Los Angeles: The Bible Institute of Los Angeles, 1917; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 12.

number of black Christians cutting well across denominational lines. The argued *from* Scripture *for* Scripture, drawing on both biblical and historical material to demonstrate that an inspired and authoritative Bible constituted the very foundation upon which Christian orthodoxy rested, concluding that as higher criticism undermined this highest view of Scripture it likewise undermined the very bedrock of the Christian faith.

Take for example the declamations of Cambridge minister Eli George Biddle in the A.M.E. Zion's *Star of Zion* in the early 1920s.[14] In August of 1921, the Sunday School Convention of the A.M.E. Zion's New England Conference experienced firsthand the advances of modernism, as a "higher critic" in their own midst "attempted to foist his pernicious doctrines" upon the convention. The incursion incensed Biddle, a Civil War veteran and an elder statesman of the denomination, prompting him to write an impassioned response in *The Star of Zion* entitled, appropriately, "The Fundamentals." In response to this modernist threat, Biddle trumpeted "the importance of our tenaciously holding on to the great 'fundamentals' of our Christian faith" – a list

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[14]Mary Beth Swetnam Mathews discusses Eli George Biddle at some length in *Doctrine and Race*, 75, 82-86, 96. Interestingly, despite the fact that Biddle expressly identified as a proponent of the fundamentals and he consigned to Hell anyone who rejected the fundamental doctrines (see below), Mathews is unwilling to categorize him as a fundamentalist. This unwillingness apparently stems from the fact that, as Mathews demonstrates, Biddle drifted away from dispensational eschatology, he argued for an essential compatibility between religion and science, and he used the word "motherhood" in conjunction with "Fatherhood" to describe God's relationship to his creation. As will become clear later in this chapter, Biddle's eschatological ambivalence regarding particular millennial theories and his view of science and religion are consonant with early fundamentalism as expressed in *The Fundamentals*. Biddle's use of "motherhood" would certainly have earned the ire of white fundamentalist leaders like J. Frank Norris, but it is a relatively minor oddity that does not appear to infringe on any central fundamentalist doctrine in Biddle's exposition of the faith. Moreover, Biddle's own use of capitalization qualitatively distinguishes between "Fatherhood" (capitalized) on the one hand, which reflects the Bible's testimony to "Father" as a personal name and an essential relational element of Trinitarian theology, and "motherhood" (uncapitalized) on the other hand, which reflects an analogical description of certain elements of God's actions and disposition toward creation (cf. Isaiah 66:13, Psalm 131:2, Matthew 23:37). This appears to be a relatively thin basis upon which to disqualify Biddle from being a fundamentalist, especially in the face of his own testimony on the issue of "the fundamentals."

of doctrines which included “The Virgin Birth,” “The Vicarious Sacrifice of Christ,” and “The Divinity of Christ,” but which was notably headed by the crucial doctrine of “The Inspiration of the Scriptures.”

The higher-critical threat to the doctrine of Scripture, in particular, sat square in Biddle’s crosshairs as he explained the dangers of modernism and the crucial importance of the fundamentals. Some few “would be leaders and teachers” in the A.M.E. Zion church, it seems, were championing the “false and pernicious teaching” of higher criticism, and so Biddle took his stand on the doctrine of inspiration. In fact, he saw capitulation on the doctrine of Scripture as the ground and the root of infidelity on other “fundamental” issues. In contrast to the denomination’s General Rules, which maintained the sufficiency and trustworthiness of Scripture, “the ‘Higher critics’ and their amateurish followers would have us discard the plain teaching of ‘The Holy Scriptures’ for their foolish and far-fetched deductions; they deny ‘The Virgin Birth,’ which the Word of God so plainly and emphatically teaches.” Compromise on bibliology likewise cultivated a denial of Christ’s deity, and those who rejected these fundamentals were no longer to be considered true Christians, having “cease[d] to exist as a Church of Christ.” Biblical inspiration was not merely *a* fundamental doctrine to defend, in a real sense it was the *chief* fundamental from which the others received their veracity, as much for Biddle as for the authors and editors of *The Fundamentals*.[15]

Mere months later, Biddle took once again to the pages of *The Star of Zion* to further clarify exactly what “biblical inspiration” entailed, and to argue for the “well

[15]Biddle, “The Fundamentals.”

established beliefs in the great fundamentals of the Christian religion as drawn from the plain teachings of the Word of God." In addition to the fundamentals which he had listed in 1921, Biddle added Christ's sinless life, bodily resurrection, literal ascension, indwelling of the believer, and bodily second coming – all, once more, grounded in "a firm, unshaken belief in the infallibility of the Word of God." For Biddle, then, biblical inspiration necessarily entailed biblical infallibility – not only that the Bible *actually* contains no errors (i.e. inerrancy), but also that it *could not* contain errors by virtue of its divine origin. Once again, the fundamental doctrines, and especially inspiration, became a litmus test for true Christianity; "all true Christians" believed the Bible to be divinely inspired (and therefore inerrant and infallible), and "only infidels and skeptics" would dare to "deny the inspiration of any book of the Bible."[16] Not only does Biddle's connection of inspiration with inerrancy and infallibility accord with James Gray's explication, as cited above, but his identification of non-inerrantists as "infidels" likewise parallels a well-worn theme throughout *The Fundamentals*.[17]

Continuing to argue in congruence with the fundamentalist sourcebook, Biddle contended that "we can accept the Holy Scriptures on their face value without any 'ifs' and 'ands'" because any "seeming contradictions" ultimately disappear as "scientific discoveries and conclusions which at first seemed to destroy the validity of the

[16]E. George Biddle, "The Bible a God-Inspired Book," *Star of Zion*, 01 June 1922.

[17]For instance, L. W. Munhall asserted that those who deny verbal inspiration are "infidel scoffers"; see L. W. Munhall, "Inspiration," 45. In discussing the history of higher criticism, Dyson Hague identified the roots of the movement as, among other things, "entirely infidel"; see Canon Dyson Hague, "The History of the Higher Criticism," in *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, ed. R. A. Torrey and A. C. Dixon, vol. 1 (Los Angeles: The Bible Institute of Los Angeles, 1917; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 20. A. W. Pitzer identified the modernist denial of, among other doctrines, "inspiration" and "the miracles of the New Testament" as "infidel attacks"; see A. W. Pitzer, "The Wisdom of This World," in Torrey and Dixon, *The Fundamentals*, vol. 4, 47-48. All four volumes are replete with similar references.

Scriptures eventually are seen to confirm their divine origin."[18] Such an argument strongly resembles James Orr's discussion of science and Christianity, which posited that "the supposed disharmony [of scientific discovery] with the truths of the Bible was an unreal one, early giving way to better understanding on both sides, and finally opening up new vistas in the contemplation of the Creator's power, wisdom, and majesty."[19] M.G Kyle, in discussing archaeology's support for biblical veracity, contended in like fashion that "recent testimony of archaeology to Scripture, like all such testimony that has gone before, is definitely and uniformly favorable to the Scriptures at their face value, and not to the Scriptures as reconstructed by criticism."[20] Not only is the argument substantially similar, but Biddle's exhortation to accept "the Scriptures on their face value" uses language identical to Kyle's, indicating, if not direct allusion, at least a high degree of congruence and agreement between the parties. As if to clinch his case, Biddle offered words of wisdom from "a great scholar" that "The pick and the spade are unfading witnesses to the truth of the Bible" – possibly echoing James Gray's contention that "the pick-axe and the spade point to the same original as the Bible," but perhaps more likely referencing an older book to which Gray himself was probably alluding, James Freeman's *Handbook of Bible Manners and Customs*, which claimed "The pick and the spade are to be the humble instruments of illustrating and

[18]Biddle, "The Bible a God-Inspired Book."

[19]James Orr, "Science and the Christian Faith," in *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, ed. R. A. Torrey and A. C. Dixon, vol. 1 (Los Angeles: The Bible Institute of Los Angeles, 1917; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 336.

[20]M. G. Kyle, "The Recent Testimony of Archaeology to the Scriptures," in *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, ed. R. A. Torrey and A. C. Dixon, vol. 1 (Los Angeles: The Bible Institute of Los Angeles, 1917; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 330.

authenticating the Word of God."[21] In either case, the parallels between Biddle's arguments and those of leading fundamentalist scholars remain clear.[22]

Likewise clear is the correspondent methods of biblical prooftexting and exegesis. Biddle repeatedly invoked John 5:46-47 as evidence that Jesus himself "endorsed and approvingly cited the Old Testament as the very Word of God."[23] Christ's words in this passage serve both as an affirmation of the inspiration of the Old Testament and a harsh rebuke to the Pharisees: "For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?"[24] It is no stretch to see here the pattern for Biddle's own rebukes of modernist higher critics. Notably, multiple contributors to *The Fundamentals* used this verse in precisely the same way, to offer Jesus' view of the Old Testament as proof of the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture, and concomitantly the falsity of higher criticism.[25] Even more centrally, Biddle's pairing of 2 Timothy 3:16 ("All Scripture is breathed out by God") with 1 Peter 1:21 ("men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit") aligns perfectly with one of the fundamentalists' most

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[21]Biddle, "The Bible a God-Inspired Book"; Gray, "The Inspiration of the Bible – Definition, Extent, and Proof,"14; James M. Freeman, *Handbook of Bible Manners and Customs* (New York: Nelson & Phillips, 1875), 6.

[22]Mary Beth Swetnam Mathews argues that "the lack of mention of *The Fundamentals* [by black ministers] again begs the question of whether the booklets really were sent to every minister in the United States and Canada, or whether they were sent to every white minister in the United States and Canada. . . . it would seem that they did not possess Lyman Stewart's books." Mathews, *Doctrine and Race*, 86. While by no means conclusive, Biddle's similarity in argumentation and language to Orr, Kyle, and Gray at least offers the possibility that he possessed and was alluding to *The Fundamentals*.

[23]Biddle, "The Bible a God-Inspired Book."

[24]John 5:46-47 (English Standard Version).

[25]See William Caven, "The Testimony of Christ to the Old Testament," in *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, ed. R. A. Torrey and A. C. Dixon, vol. 1 (Los Angeles: The Bible Institute of Los Angeles, 1917; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 203, 218; Dyson Hague, "The Doctrinal Value of the First Chapters of Genesis," in Torrey and Dixon, *The Fundamentals*, vol. 1, 287; Hague, "The History of the Higher Criticism," 22, 34.

common exegetical arguments in favor of inspiration. In fact, he even affirmed that 2 Timothy 3:16, as the locus classicus for the doctrine of inspiration, "is just as important as John 3:16," the best-known soteriological verse in all the Bible! Interestingly, the editor of *The Fundamentals* made a similar point, comparing the inspiration of Scripture as self-attested in these texts with central elements of orthodox Christology, noting that "to claim that good men wrote the Bible, and deny its inspiration, is on par with the claim that Christ was a good man, while He pretended to be what He was not."[26] These and other Scriptures that suffused Biddle's articles again indicated profound alignment and similarity, in argumentation and biblical exegesis, with leading fundamentalist scholars and sources of the day.[27] Both appealed directly to the Bible as the grounding authority in matters of faith, and both emerged with exegetical conclusions affirming the central and foundational importance of biblical inspiration, inerrancy, and infallibility.

Of course, Reverend Biddle's position was not characteristic of the entire A.M.E. Zion denomination. Not many years after Biddle's vehement defense of inspiration and inerrancy appeared in *The Star of Zion*, the paper's editor W. H. Davenport addressed the fundamentalist-modernist conflict by claiming "Methodism has not been seriously disturbed by these discussions." Davenport recognized that "an inerrant Bible" was at the center of the controversy for fundamentalists, but he eschewed the centrality of

[26]Biddle, "The Bible a God-Inspired Book"; R. A. Torrey, "Tributes to Christ and the Bible by Brainy Men Not Known as Active Christians," in *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, ed. R. A. Torrey and A. C. Dixon, vol. 3 (Los Angeles: The Bible Institute of Los Angeles, 1917; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 369. For several other examples of similar exegesis and usage of 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:21 in conjunction, see e.g.: F. Bettex, "The Bible and Modern Criticism," in Torrey and Dixon, *The Fundamentals*, vol. 1, 91; Caven, "The Testimony of Christ to the Old Testament," 212; Gray, "The Inspiration of the Bible – Definition, Extent, and Proof," 20; Munhall, "Inspiration," 56.

[27]Biddle's use of the "Road to Emmaus" pericope from Luke 24 also finds extensive reflection in *The Fundamentals*.

inerrancy or even the literal divinity of Christ as essential doctrines for Methodist life, quoting with explicit approval a Methodist Episcopal minister who argued that "the only test of doctrine which essential Methodist has is the effect on life . . . if the newer views of the Bible . . . make for better spiritual results in terms of practical life, the Methodist is likely to accept them cordially as soon as actual tendency becomes clear."[28] What a far cry this sentiment is from Biddle's jeremiad that those who reject the fundamental tenets of the faith "cease to exist as a Church of Christ"!

Even more jarring, in 1930 the *Star* reported on an interracial women's conference at Harry Emerson Fosdick's Riverside Church at which Mrs. Ida L. Wallace, the wife of an A.M.E. Zion bishop, impressed the attendees with her biting condemnations of the "old beliefs" from which sprung slavery and racial inferiority. In contrast, "today the Negro's prestige is gaining in direct ratio to the breakdown of fundamentalism."[29] Drawing a sharp distinction between the God of the Old Testament and Jesus of the New Testament, Mrs. Wallace opined that "the old-fashioned Jehovah was paternal, but Jesus was brotherly."[30] This seemingly Marcionite division between the Old and New Testament deities is entirely at odds with Biddle's conviction that "He who speaks now to us by His Son is the same Almighty God who spake by the

[28]W. H. Davenport, "Bishop L. W. Kyles Applauded While Delivering Sentiment of Bishops to Delegates," *Star of Zion*, 15 May 1924.

[29] For other examples of this sort of sentiment among black writers and speakers of the era, see chapters two and six of this dissertation.

[30]"Women of Two Races Discuss Negro Equality," *Star of Zion*, 06 November 1930. This unequivocally theologically liberal message at a women's conference located at Fosdick's Riverside Church could support the link between gender progressivism and theological progressivism posited by Betty A. DeBerg in *Ungodly Women: Gender and the First Wave of American Fundamentalism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990). While I disagree with the causal sequence proposed by DeBerg (she argues that the desire to preserve Victorian gender norms was the underlying factor driving fundamentalists' theological/doctrinal considerations), there does appear to be a correlative link between the gender and theological spectrums.

prophets," and the overt repudiation of fundamentalist doctrine would presumably place Mrs. Wallace among the "infidels and skeptics" from his point of view.[31] Yet even so, Biddle continued in the A.M.E. Zion; his fundamentalist convictions led him to vociferously defend those central fundamental doctrines and to attack those who would compromise them, but interestingly not to separate from a denomination that was, at least in theory and sometimes in practice, willing to entertain modernist theology on a utilitarian basis.[32]

The issue of bibliology was not one to fade quickly from the ranks of the black Methodist ecclesiastical bodies. In 1936 the A.M.E. Zion's *Star of Zion* published a piece by J. G. Robinson, the longtime editor of the A.M.E.'s *Church Review*, entitled

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[31]Marcionism was an early Christian heresy positing a dualistic division between the deities of the Old Testament and the New Testament, naturally leading Marcion and his followers to also reject the Old Testament Scriptures. See especially chapter 2 of Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 1, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971). Pelikan also interestingly draws a connection between second-century Marcionism and nineteenth-century biblical criticism, an observation that Mrs. Wallace's words at the 1930 women's conference seem to further validate. See Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, 1:23.

[32]While fundamentalists are most often characterized in the historiography as essentially separatist in nature, Nathan Finn draws a helpful and needful distinction between different types of fundamentalists on the basis of differing modes of "conservative dissent." "Separatist fundamentalists" saw strict organizational and denominational separation as an imperative, while "denominational fundamentalists" saw their personal opposition to theological progressivism as a reason to remain in their denominations as agents of conservative influence. Finn writes: "For denominational fundamentalists, contending for the faith did not have to result in abandoning mainline denominations that were infected with progressive theology. Rather, faithful conservatives should fight to purge their churches and denominations of any theology or practice that threatened Christian orthodoxy. Many denominational fundamentalists rejected the label 'fundamentalist' for the very reason that they chose to fight the progressives in their denominations rather than separating from those denominations. The very idea of denominational fundamentalism as a particular approach to conservative dissent has been almost totally ignored by historians." Nathan A. Finn, "The Development of Baptist Fundamentalism in the South, 1940-1980" (Ph.D. diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007), 15.

Many of the non-separatist black fundamentalists considered in the present dissertation, such as Eli George Biddle, may fit helpfully into this "denominational fundamentalist" category, with some caveats. Firstly, some such men, such as J. G. Robinson, did indeed show a willingness to expressly identify as fundamentalists even within their denominations. Moreover, their willingness to associate with theological liberals was not motivated solely by the desire for denominational reform but also by the common imperative of racial advancement.

"Preachers – Modernists and Fundamentalists."[33] Setting his sights on modernist thought as "contrary to the universal belief of the Christian church," Robinson, like Biddle before him, found the root of the Modernist error in their proclamation of "the errancy of the Holy Scriptures." Due to this capitulation, "many of the doctrines which were believed to be necessary for salvation are found to be non-essentials," including the doctrines of the Virgin Birth, the deity of Christ, regeneration, the resurrection, and Hell. Illustrating the great breadth of difference between Robinson and his markedly more social-gospel-friendly predecessor at the *Review*, Reverdy Ransom, Robinson castigated the modernist "Gospel of social service and economic security" as not only a betrayal of both the church historic and the Scriptures, but as a profoundly deleterious influence on the spiritual lives of black laymen; this modernist false gospel, he proclaimed, "has well nigh taken all the comfort and sweetness out of the lives of the people and almost emptied the churches."[34]

Over against modernist falsehoods, Robinson pointed to the upright example of "the old line preachers (of which I am one) called 'Fundamentalists.'" Robinson's unambiguous identification as a fundamentalist is particularly notable, as is his immediate description of fundamentalists as those "who unequivocally hold on to the inerrancy of God's Word as it is set down in the Holy Bible from Genesis to Revelations." Thus the totality of biblical revelation is comprehended in the conviction

[33]J. G. Robinson was elected to the editorship of the *A.M.E. Church Review* in 1924, a much more theologically conservative successor to Reverdy Ransom. Robinson continued in this position for sixteen years, moving largely away from Ransom's focus on the Social Gospel and toward a greater emphasis on articles about preaching and theology. See Stephen W. Angell and Anthony B. Pinn (eds.), *Social Protest Thought in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, 1862-1939* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2000), xxiv.

[34]J. G. Robinson, "Preachers – Modernists and Fundamentalists," *Star of Zion*, 30 January 1936.

that the Bible is inerrant, in contrast to modernist conceptions of either partial inspiration or the inspiration of thoughts rather than words. Furthermore, fundamentalists like Robinson must believe that "the Word of God is infallible" – once again, as with Eli Biddle and James Gray, inexorably linking the concepts of inspiration, inerrancy, and infallibility – and must "hold tenaciously to the apostolic interpretation of the Word of God"; the result of this bibliological fidelity was that, in contrast to the false "social service" gospel of the modernists, fundamentalists would "preach the Gospel of conviction, Conversion, Regeneration and Sanctification." Invoking the recent testimony of a young layman, Robinson again opened fire on the message of the Social Gospel, exhorting preachers to "leave off much social philosophy and sociology, and give us the pure unadulterated Gospel of Jesus Christ."[35]

For Robinson, this was no minor matter, but it was in fact an issue of eternal consequence. The fact that modernists and fundamentalists preached essentially different gospels meant that their eternal destinations were likewise different. A person who embraced the fundamentalist gospel "can see God's face in peace," but not so the modernist. In a whirlwind imprecatory paragraph, Robinson conjoined the description of false teachers in 2 Timothy 3:1-4 and the condemnation of rebellious unregenerate man in Romans 1:25 to leave no ambiguity as to the dangers of the modernist foe. Like the false teachers against whom Paul warned his protégé Timothy, modernistic preachers exhibited an "eagerness to fit the Gospel to this present wicked age," so that it might be palatable to men who are "Lovers of their own selves, covetous, boisterous, proud,

[35]Ibid.

blasphemers, disobedient, unthankful, unholy truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of the good, traitors, highminded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God." In so doing, modernists fit the description of the rebellious God-haters of Romans 1, having "changed the truth of God into a lie," indicating that they "serve the creature more than the Creator." As if to put a bow on this particular philippic, Robinson placed modernists under the curse of Revelation 22:19, which consigned to eternal damnation anyone who might "take away from the words of this Book of the Prophecy."[36]

While undoubtedly inflammatory and arresting, these associations were also not unique or original to Robinson; numerous articles in *The Fundamentals* made similar arguments, sometimes with identical passages. Combatting higher criticism, F. Bettex similarly understood modernism to be damning, noting that "the Book of Revelation is only the occasion for derisive laughter on the part of these skeptical critics; and because it is so, the curse mentioned in its last chapter is made applicable to them (vs. 18, 19)."[37] Arno Gaebelein read the apostasy passage of 2 Timothy 3:1-5 as being prophetic of "the present day apostasy," and in the same vein L.W. Munhall even invoked the example of wicked Balaam to show the degradation of modernists' false teaching.[38] And just as Robinson accused modernists of idolatrously serving "the creature rather than the Creator," James Gray drew upon similar themes of human idolatry to demonstrate that

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[36]Ibid.

[37]Bettex, "The Bible and Modern Criticism," 88.

[38]Arno C. Gaebelein, "Fulfilled Prophecy a Potent Argument for the Bible," in *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, ed. R. A. Torrey and A. C. Dixon, vol. 2 (Los Angeles: The Bible Institute of Los Angeles, 1917; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 143; Munhall, "Inspiration," 60.

modernist criticism of verbal inspiration was “just a spark from the anvil on which the race is ever trying to hammer out the deification of itself.”[39]

Fervent contention over the issue of bibliology also entered the ranks of black Baptists as well as Methodists.[40] J. H. Frank, the stridently anti-modernist editor of the *National Baptist Union-Review*, provides a compelling example. Historian Mary Beth Swetnam Mathews describes Frank as embracing “a dichotomy between the forces of biblical inerrancy, on which side he placed the majority of African Americans, as well as the leaders of the fundamentalist movement, and the forces of modernism, in which camp he included black intellectuals like Kelly Miller and William Pickens, as well as the majority of white Americans.”[41] Frank, in fact, identified himself and the majority of black Baptists as “fundamentalists,” in contrast to the “so-called ‘Intellectuals’ of our race.” On the doctrine of Scripture specifically, Frank wrote that the Bible “is not false but true [when dealing with history and science], true to fact and true to the truth founded upon the facts.” Following in the footsteps of George Biddle and many others before him, Frank invoked 2 Timothy 3:16 to support this position, but at the same time he also noted that the Bible’s purpose was not “to be authority in history, in science, in art, in philosophy – but to teach life and how to live.”[42] Mathews concludes that this “refusal to categorize the Bible as the ultimate historical document ran counter to

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[39] Gray, “The Inspiration of the Bible – Definition, Extent, and Proof,” 16.

[40] In addition to the consideration here relating to the unincorporated National Baptist Convention, see also the analysis in chapter four of L. K. Williams’ 1925 convention address to the incorporated National Baptist Convention, as well as the consideration in chapter five of the doctrinal controversies that attended the incorporated body’s educational joint venture with Southern Baptists, the American Baptist Theological Seminary.

[41] Mathews, *Doctrine and Race*, 55.

[42] J. H. Frank, “White Baptists,” *National Baptist Union-Review*, 17 April 1926; “How to Study the Bible,” *National Baptist Union-Review*, 27 March 1926; quoted in Mathews, *Doctrine and Race*, 54, 65.

fundamentalist understanding of the text," which was presumably, according to Mathews, to see the Bible as "the sole source of knowledge on ancient history."[43]

Yet the fundamentalist doctrine of Scripture in no sense necessitated that the Bible be "the sole source of knowledge" for history or science; to the contrary, Frank's remarks sound very much like those that might be found in *The Fundamentals* itself. Fundamentalists held the Bible to be the ultimate epistemological *authority* to which all other epistemological sources were subordinate, but it was not in itself the only source of knowledge. In fact Arthur Tappan Pierson, one of the consulting editors on the Scofield Reference Bible, in his contribution to *The Fundamentals* assumed that there are means of discovering scientific and historical truth outside the pages of the Bible, while still maintaining that all truth so derived will of necessity be consistent with the Scripture's teachings: "The Bible is not a scientific book. . . . Like an engine on its own track, it thunders across the track of science, but is never diverted from its own." In a claim here almost identical to that of J. H. Frank, Pierson affirms that the Bible's essential *purpose* is not to be an authoritative scientific manual. Yet while "no direct teaching or anticipation of scientific truth is here found," nevertheless "God led inspired men to use such language, as that without revealing scientific facts in advance, it accurately accommodates itself to them when discovered."[44]

Concerns over safeguarding the doctrine of Scripture emerged not only from the editorialist's typewriter but also from the pastor's study. African Methodist Episcopal

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[43]Mathews, *Doctrine and Race*, 65.

[44]Arthur T. Pierson, "The Testimony of the Organic Unity of the Bible to Its Inspiration," in *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, ed. R. A. Torrey and A. C. Dixon, vol. 2 (Los Angeles: The Bible Institute of Los Angeles, 1917; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 103.

minister John Albert Johnson, whose ministry spanned from the 1870s through the 1920s, saw dangerous pastoral implications in the historical-critical rejection of biblical inspiration. Johnson characterized historical criticism as a "vitally defective" approach that "has made the figure of Christ utterly uncertain" to its acolytes.[45] Yet the central purpose of the faithful minister, indeed the central purpose of God's activity in this world, Johnson contended, was the proclamation of "salvation to ruined man" – salvation from the guilt and condemnation of sin through the propitiatory, redemptive work of Christ on the cross. To dwell on moral duties or Christian virtues "in any other light than that which streams from the cross is not a testimony of the gospel"; indeed, "if Christ and him crucified are not the theme and the glory, there is injury inflicted upon man, and there is dishonor done to the majesty of mercy on high." For this very reason did "the finger of Inspiration write the Bible and the arm of Omnipotence defend it," for if an errant Bible made Christ and his work uncertain, how could the gospel be proclaimed?[46]

Further evincing his desire for doctrinal specificity and commitment to historically orthodox argumentation, Johnson continued to link the veracity of the doctrine of biblical inspiration (and the concomitant characteristics of inerrancy, infallibility, and authority) to the words and works of the Christ of Scripture.[47] The view

[45]John Albert Johnson, "Critique of Adolf Harnack's *Christianity and History*," John Albert Johnson papers, Box 1, Folder 4, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library (hereafter cited as Johnson papers).

[46]John Albert Johnson, "The Faithful Minister," pp. 5, 7-8, Johnson papers, Box 1, Folder 4.

[47]Examples of this sort of argumentation recur throughout church history, bolstering Johnson's claim (and the similar claims of fundamentalist scholars in general) to be representing the longstanding orthodox tradition of the church historic. For example, the second-century church father Irenaeus of Lyons argued in *Against Heresies* for the inspiration and unity of the Old and New Testaments on the basis of

of "The Messiah, the great Prophet, the infallible Teacher" on this matter should constitute "the end of our inquiries." Attending the testimony of Christ, Johnson found that Jesus "everywhere spoke of . . . the scripture as the word of God; that he regarded the whole in this light; that he treated the scripture and every part of it, as infallibly true, and as clothed with divine authority – thus distinguishing it from every mere human production." Thus the inspiration and infallibility of the text applied to the whole of the canon and to every specific constitutive part. This contradicted both the "Latitudinarian" theory adopted by the "entire school of Rationalists and so-called advanced thought"

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both the Old Testament's prophetic testimony about the work of Christ and Christ's own testimony about the nature and authority of the Old Testament: "The Old Testament Scriptures, and those written by Moses in particular, do everywhere make mention of the Son of God, and foretell his advent and passion. From this fact if follows that they were inspired by one and the same God. Wherefore also John does appropriately relate that the Lord said to the Jews: 'Ye search the Scriptures, in which ye think ye have eternal life; these are they which testify of me. And ye are not willing to come unto Me, that ye may have life.' How therefore did the Scriptures testify of Him, unless they were from one and the same Father, instructing men beforehand as to the advent of His Son, and foretelling the salvation brought in by Him?" Elsewhere in the same book Irenaeus uses Christ's testimony about the Scriptures to argue that the words of Moses in the Old Testament are in fact the words of Christ himself, at once affirming and connecting the doctrines of the divine inspiration of Scripture and the deity of Christ: "But since the writings of Moses are the words of Christ, He does Himself declare to the Jews, as John has recorded in the Gospel: 'If ye had believed Moses, ye would have believed Me: for he wrote of Me. But if ye believe not his writings, neither will ye believe My words.' He thus indicates in the clearest manner that the writings of Moses are His words." Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 464, 473.

Origen of Alexandria argued similarly in the third century, using Jesus' testimony in John 5 to intrinsically connect belief in Christ with belief in the authority and trustworthiness of the Scriptures (and concomitantly disbelief in Christ with disbelief in the Scriptures): "For as 'if they believed Moses they would have believed Jesus,' so if they had believed the prophets they would have received Him who had been the subject of prophecy. But disbelieving Him they also disbelieve them, and cut off and confine in prison the prophetic word, and hold it dead and divided, and in no way wholesome, since they do not understand it." Origen of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 9 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1887), 429.

Such argumentation emerged likewise from the Protestant Reformation – the common broad tradition from which the fundamentalists hailed. Second-generation French reformer John Calvin, for instance, drew on Jesus' testimony in John 5:46 to affirm the Bible's authority and the duty of true Christians to defend it against outside attacks. Jesus' words of rebuke to the Jews that "if you believed Moses, you would also believe me" constituted a call to the defense of the Scriptures: "those whom the Lord has appointed to be ministers of his word, ought to be ready to defend it against despisers." John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel according to John*, vol. 1, trans. William Pringle (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 224.

which posited that "there may be error in facts stated, or sentiment uttered," and the "Commingled" theory which admits that "when the essentials of Religion are introduced there is truth" but "when the matter is historical there may be great mistake," an approach "most destructive since it makes man the Judge of what is inspired and what is not." The testimony of Christ, consistent as it was with the testimony of other Scriptures like 2 Timothy 3:16, settled the matter for Johnson.[48] The divinity of Christ the incarnate Word, in fact, ensured the divine origin of the written Word, such that Scripture would only be "proved merely human when Christ Himself is proved so."[49] Drawing on a common historic tradition, which Johnson called the "orthodox view" and traced all the way back to the early church and the apostles themselves, both black and white conservatives produced parallel defenses and explications of the doctrine of inspiration in response to modernist challenges.[50]

Considering how closely bound Johnson's formulation and defense of biblical inspiration was with his convictions about the person and work of Jesus Christ, it should come as no surprise that insofar as conservative black churchmen formulated a doctrine of Scripture that ran closely parallel to that of their white fundamentalist counterparts, the same would be true of Christological doctrines. Johnson himself demonstrated as much, for example, in his pointed written critique of Adolf von Harnack's *Christianity*

[48]John Albert Johnson, "Inspiration," pp. 2-3, 6-7, Johnson papers, Box 1, Folder 4.

[49]John Albert Johnson, "The Preacher's Chief Study," Johnson papers, Box 1, Folder 5. Such sentiment and argumentation is, compellingly, also expressed by James M. Gray in *The Fundamentals* when he draws an explicit connection between the sinlessness of the incarnate Word and the inerrancy of the written Word: "Is it not with the written Word as with the incarnate Word? Is Jesus Christ to be regarded as imperfect because His character has never been perfectly reproduced before us? Can He be the incarnate Word unless He were absolutely without sin? And by the same token, can the scriptures be the written word unless they were inerrant?" Gray, "The Inspiration of the Bible – Definition, Extent, and Proof," 13.

[50]Johnson, "Inspiration," pp. 6, 8-9.

and History. While acknowledging Harnack as “the leading church historian of Germany” and “unsurpassed” in his knowledge of early church history, Johnson leveled a barrage of criticism at Harnack’s position on the basis of its “discarding the old definitions of Christ’s person.” By denying Christ’s deity and offering basically the moral-exemplar theory of the cross, Harnack’s attempt to preserve Christ as “the Lord and Saviour of mankind” collapsed Jesus into “a Savior merely by His teaching and example,” whose “words and example supply the ideal of the perfect life, and . . . stimulate the realization of the ideal.” The fact that this school of thought “ascribes such unique attributes to [Christ] and yet refuses to speak of anything unique in His person” amounted to, in Johnson’s words, a “fatal defect” and an “extraordinary inconsistency.” The “weakness and inconsistency” of Harnack’s position was that historical criticism offered an “utterly uncertain” Jesus whose gospel was utterly insufficient to save; the biblical claims about “the birth and infancy of the Lord, the Easter story, many things told of His life are discarded as mere husk.” This “vitally defective” view was self-evidently false to Johnson, almost even without need of rebuttal, because it was so far out of step with the testimony of the church historic tracing all the way back to the first century: “How far short [Harnack’s position] falls of what the Church has always believed on the subject is obvious.”[51] Identifying Christ’s deity, miraculous birth, atonement, and resurrection as central not only to his experience or even to his denominational tradition, but to historic Christian orthodoxy throughout the ages,

[51]Johnson, “Critique of Adolf Harnack’s *Christianity and History*.”

Johnson was unashamed to decry the fatal errors of modernist thought and historical criticism.

Of course, while the age-old testimony of the body of Christ was an essential element in establishing the veracity of these doctrines (and, hence, demonstrating the falsities of modernism), once again the final authority, as usual, rested with the God-breathed Scriptures. In a paper explicating in detail the doctrine of the incarnation and the hypostatic union, Johnson argued that the doctrine is "founded upon and rendered necessary by facts divinely revealed," the validity of which rests upon "the Authority of the Holy Scriptures." In a lengthy description echoing the orthodox formulation laid down at the Council of Chalcedon in the fifth century, Johnson distinguished between the divine nature, the human nature, and the personhood of Christ, arguing that the perfect unity of the natures was to be found in the person of Christ, but without any mixing or confusion of the natures undermining their perfect distinction. This formulation was "rendered necessary" to sufficiently account for the biblical facts, which included the "miraculous conception" of Christ and the prophecies attending his birth, the "ordinary and natural development" of his humanity during his boyhood, his unhesitating claim to "unity and equality with the father," his many miracles displaying power over both natural and spiritual forces, his death, and his literal resurrection and ascension into heaven.[52] With the exception of any in-depth discussion of atonement, this one paper explicitly affirmed the five fundamentals on the basis of the trustworthiness and authority of Scripture. Fidelity to the biblical testimony,

[52]John Albert Johnson, "The Doctrine of the Incarnation," Johnson papers, Box 1, Folder 4.

supplemented by a submission to the historic doctrines of the church, grounded Johnson's strident convictions about the doctrinal fundamentals and the folly of modernist, higher-critical innovations. Moreover, setting such claims in the twin contexts of biblical testimony and millennia-old global church history may also have served in a sense to decenter the theological question from a strictly American context, thus implicitly repudiating the idea that black fundamentalists were mere purveyors of a paternalistic hand-me-down religion from the American white man.

Similarly grounding the orthodox fundamental doctrines about the person of Christ in biblical necessity was Edward Franklin Williams, a Congregationalist minister from Chicago. To be sure, "fundamentalist" would be an anachronistic designation for Williams, who died in 1919, after the publication of *The Fundamentals* in 1915 but prior to the 1920 advent of the "fundamentalist" title in the *Watchman-Examiner*. Still, Williams was a theological conservative who was involved in arranging revival meetings for such conservative celebrities as Dwight L. Moody and Ira Sankey in the mid-1870s, and later for the editor of *The Fundamentals* himself, R. A. Torrey.[53] Williams' doctrinal convictions on such topics as the five fundamentals also seemingly led to anti-modernist sentiments as well, such that in their discussions about potentially bringing Torrey's evangelistic meetings to Chicago in 1906 a fellow minister sought to assure Williams that Torrey's teachings were untainted by "the modern viewpoint" which might

[53]Horace Hovey to E. F. Williams, 16 October 1876, Edward Franklin Williams papers, Box 7, Folder 2, Amistad Research Center at Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana (hereafter cited as Williams papers); Ellen B. Taft to E. F. Williams, 14 December 1876, Williams papers, Box 7, Folder 2; Toronto correspondent to E. F. Williams, 8 December 1876, Williams papers, Box 7, Folder 2; Horace Hovey to E. F. Williams, 27 January 1877, Williams papers, Box 7, Folder 3; Frank Dyer to E. F. Williams, 5 April 1906, Williams papers, Box 10, Folder 12.

"threaten the very ground-work" of the faith.[54] With these considerations in mind, we might describe Williams as a "doctrinal fundamentalist" or even, perhaps, a "proto-fundamentalist," since he died before any person or movement was so named.

Like Johnson, Williams turned to the Scripture's testimony and example in affirming the Christological fundamentals, such as the deity of Christ. In a lecture on "The Practical Nature of the Christian Religion" he turned to Colossians chapter 1 for an example of true faith and Christian life. The very first characteristic, which rooted all their manifestations of Christian virtue, was that "They had faith in Christ. They recognised [sic] his Deity, cherished hope through Him and received the truth of the Gospel." Here Williams paints the recognition of Christ's deity as unequivocally essential for true Christian faith on the basis of the teachings and examples laid down in Scripture. As was his wont, Williams went on to heavily emphasize social and ethical application, reminding his congregants that "we are not only permitted to believe for our own good, but for the sake of others," and urging them toward a life that is "wholly Christlike, where there is a strong and honest desire to do what Christ wishes us to do" in terms of personal conduct, service to others, and wholesome moral living.[55] Yet the strong and extensive exhortations about Christian living and moral action that characterized his writing and preaching were grounded in the doctrinal propositions of the gospel – in this case, specifically, the deity of Christ.[56]

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[54]Frank Dyer to E. F. Williams, 5 April 1906, Williams papers, Box 10, Folder 12.

[55]Edward Franklin Williams, "Preparatory lecture: The Practical Nature of the Christian Religion," 27 February 1889, Williams papers, Box 19, Folder 12.

[56]Williams' commitment to the spiritual doctrines of the Christian faith (as evident in this and the following chapter) in conjunction with a consistently strong emphasis on practically emulating Jesus' example challenges the strict division that scholars often assume between "otherworldly" doctrine and

The same held true for the other fundamentals as well. As noted previously, both Eli George Biddle and J. G. Robinson listed a variety of "fundamental" doctrines in the midst of their vociferous defenses of biblical inspiration and inerrancy. These included not only Christ's divinity and virgin birth, but also his literal resurrection and ascension, his second coming and final judgment, and his substitutionary atonement. On the subject of atonement specifically, Biddle used the interchangeable terms "Vicarious Sacrifice" and "Vicarious Death" to describe Christ's work on the cross on behalf of fallen man.[57] Both phrases indicate that the biblical testimony demands the death of Christ to be in some sense substitutionary, that he was atoning for human sin by *taking the place* of sinful men – the central feature of the fundamentalist doctrine of atonement.[58] This is the essential point of division on the theological spectrum between fundamentalists and non-

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"this-worldly" activity. For example, Paul Harvey associates black churches' community engagement with an embrace of the social gospel movement, in opposition to a focus on spiritual doctrinal matters such as the afterlife. Harvey argues that in the first half of the twentieth century, "Both Southern and Northern black churches engaged in much community work. In doing so, they applied the ideas of the social gospel movement, which emphasized emulating Jesus' life in practical works of caring for people rather than focusing on the spiritual afterlife." (Paul Harvey, *Through the Storm, Through the Night: A History of African American Christianity* [Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011].) Yet the practice of emulating Jesus' example and actively engaging with the community was neither solely restricted to the social gospel movement nor inherently antithetical to an emphasis on teaching spiritual doctrines. In fact, Edward Franklin Williams regularly urged his listeners toward active community engagement and service as a means of honoring Christ, arguing for instance that Christ's literal resurrection from the dead (and the attendant promise of eternal life with Christ for all who believe) should motivate Christians to "go to the house of mourning, to give comfort and help when we enter homes of poverty not to rebuke, but to cheer and stimulate and give aid, [to] join the ranks of reformers and earnest workers who seek to improve the moral condition of the city and of our homes . . . [and to] do whatever we can to make life better for the toiling millions around us or to prepare a better world in which the millions yet unborn shall live after we have left it." (Edward Franklin Williams, Easter sermon, 27 March 1910, Williams papers, Box 19, Folder 13.) And even as Williams regularly exhorted his congregants toward this sort of interpersonal compassion, social service, and righteous living in this world, he also leveled attacks on what was likely the nascent form of Walter Rauschenbusch's social gospel theology (see chapter four, footnote 6).

[57] Biddle, "The Fundamentals"; Biddle, "The Bible a God-Inspired Book."

[58] For an example of an early scholarly voice among the fundamentalists repeatedly using "vicarious" and "substitutionary" synonymously with respect to Christ's atonement, see Dyson Hague, "At-One-Ment By Propitiation," in *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, ed. R. A. Torrey and A. C. Dixon, vol. 3 (Los Angeles: The Bible Institute of Los Angeles, 1917; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988).

fundamentalists regarding the atonement – was Christ's death vicarious or substitutionary so as to achieve some sort of objective atonement for sin?

While the penal-substitutionary view ultimately came to dominate fundamentalist (and later, neo-evangelical) thinking, fundamentalism initially left room for differing substitutionary theories. For example, *The Fundamentals* declared that "the Christian world as a whole believes in a substitutionary atonement," though it may not "regard any existing theory of substitution as entirely adequate." Any theory of substitutionary atonement must necessarily flow from biblical testimony, but it is "not absolutely necessary" to have a specific theory at all, so long as one professes a substitutionary view of Christ's work on the cross.[59] The real danger was the modernist's moral-example theory of atonement, which held that Christ's death served only as a moral example to stir up love and self-sacrifice in human hearts; this exact concern surfaced, for instance, in John Albert Johnson's criticism of Harnack's "fatal defect" of presenting a Christ who is "a Savior merely by His teaching and example."[60] Both black and white conservatives sometimes used language that seemed to reflect a governmental (as opposed to penal) theory of substitution, but they still fell into the fundamentalist range of the spectrum by virtue of a commitment to substitution over against bare moral example.[61]

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[59]Franklin Johnson, "The Atonement," in *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, ed. R. A. Torrey and A. C. Dixon, vol. 3 (Los Angeles: The Bible Institute of Los Angeles, 1917; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 64, 72.

[60]Johnson, "Critique of Adolf Harnack's *Christianity and History*."

[61]Edward Franklin Williams spoke of Christ's atonement in relation to "the position in the moral government of God which is given one on condition of faith in Jesus Christ." Edward Franklin Williams, "Righteousness," 18 September 1904, Williams papers, Box 19, Folder 12. John Stock's contribution to *The Fundamentals* included similar language, indicating that editors R. A. Torrey and A. C. Dixon likely

So also with the eschatological expectation of Christ's second coming: the fundamentalist position, at its core, diverged from the modernist's at the point of declaring the second advent to be a literal bodily end-times event. As seen above, Christ's return was included in lists of "fundamentals," to be accepted on the basis of, in J. G. Robinson's words, "the apostolic interpretation of the Word of God."[62] Yet in many cases this doctrine was not a heavy point of detailed exposition in comparison with the time devoted to the doctrine of Scripture or the divinity of Christ. Even as Eli George Biddle, for example, briefly cozied up to dispensationalism in a series of articles in 1922, he quickly returned to a vaguer premillennial eschatology and shifted his focus to other topics.[63] And while dispensational premillennialism has come to be intrinsically identified with fundamentalism, it was not always so.[64] In fact, *The Fundamentals* identified the second coming not only as a "fundamental doctrine" and a "Scriptural doctrine . . . held universally by all who admit the authority of Scripture," but also as a doctrine admitting substantial "difference of opinion among even the most careful and

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saw such conceptions as within the bounds of fundamentalist orthodoxy: "A so called Saviour, whose only power to save lies in the excellent moral precepts that He gave, and the pure life that He lived; who is no longer the God-man, but the mere man; whose blood had no sacrificial atoning or propitiatory power in the moral government of Jehovah, but was simply a martyr's witness to a superior system of ethics—is not the Saviour of the four Gospels, or of Paul, or Peter, or John." John Stock, "The God-Man," in *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, ed. R. A. Torrey and A. C. Dixon, vol. 2 (Los Angeles: The Bible Institute of Los Angeles, 1917; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 281.

[62]Robinson, "Preachers – Modernists and Fundamentalists."

[63]Mathews, *Doctrine and Race*, 82.

[64]For example, Southern Baptist E. P. Alldredge, who will appear in chapter five of this dissertation, vehemently defended the fundamentals of the faith over against modernism, but also strenuously criticized what he saw as a dangerous overemphasis on premillennial theorizing coming from J. Frank Norris and other institutionalized voices of fundamentalism. See E. P. Alldredge to L. R. Scarborough, 1 March 1921, Eugene Perry Alldredge Papers, AR 795-134, Box 15, Folder 3, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

For a consideration of the historical connection between premillennial theology and twentieth-century American evangelicalism, see Matthew Avery Sutton, *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014).

reverent students" as to its specific details. Despite the "many varieties of opinion" between various millennial perspectives, the main differences related to "the order, rather than as to the reality of events." Hence, Christian unity over the *reality* of the second coming constituted the central fundamentalist conviction on the matter and marked a time "not for disputing over divergent views, but for united action."[65] The line of demarcation on this fundamentalist doctrine concerned one's willingness to affirm the literal, physical, bodily return of Christ, not a specific millennial or eschatological theory. On this point as on all the others examined heretofore, black and white conservatives alike fell into the fundamentalist range of the theological spectrum, grounding their convictions on church-historic tradition and the infallible testimony of the sacred Scriptures.

Conclusion

It is an irony of history that, even as conservative black Christians were marginalized as superstitious and intellectually inferior by some of the early white fundamentalist leaders, they have likewise experienced exclusion at the hands of historians narrating the early history of Protestant fundamentalism. And this in spite of the fact that, as we have seen throughout chapter two and in portions of chapter three, numerous black Protestants identified themselves and were identified by others as fundamentalists. Of course, labels can be applied quite differently in disparate contexts,

[65]Charles R. Erdman, "The Coming of Christ," in *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, ed. R. A. Torrey and A. C. Dixon, vol. 4 (Los Angeles: The Bible Institute of Los Angeles, 1917; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 301, 312.

and so one quite naturally wonders what black fundamentalists *meant*, exactly, when they spoke of typically fundamentalist doctrines like biblical inspiration or the deity of Christ. This short historical-theological analysis indicates that black conservative theologians, among whom fundamentalists were numbered, not only placed themselves within the fundamentalist range of the theological spectrum with respect to some of the most central doctrinal disputes of the day, but in many cases offered arguments, imprecations, biblical exegesis, and sometimes even linguistic formulations highly consonant with what we see in *The Fundamentals*. Yet even so, this doctrinal similarity did not mean that African American fundamentalists were carbon copies of their white counterparts in either thought or deed; in fact, the next chapter will illustrate some of the different applications that black preachers were apt to draw on the basis of their racial identity and experience.

It must also be noted that to assert a close doctrinal correspondence between black and white fundamentalists on these central issues is not to imply either a subordination of black theologians to their white brethren or even a necessarily causal relationship between the positions and arguments of the two groups, such that black believers might be construed to have been somehow paternalistically reliant on their white counterparts to show them what to say and how to think. In fact the arguments coming from both groups, often so similar in their form and substance, actually pointed as much to a parallel reliance on older church-historical and biblical streams of thought rather than a contemporary borrowing from one another. Both black and white fundamentalists saw themselves as relying for their language, doctrinal formulations,

and arguments firstly on the text of sacred Scripture itself, and secondarily on the testimony of the church through the ages. Hence they were not involved in theological innovation, a charge that they often leveled against their modernist opponents, but were commonly (if separately) engaged in the task of preserving the "faith once delivered to the saints" to which both God's word and two thousand years of church history attested – a perspective which comports with the regular appeals to "old time religion" examined in chapter two.

This shared perspective, however, in no way rendered black and white fundamentalists indistinguishable from one another. Indeed, the fact of this common theological ground in some ways serves to only highlight the very real differences between them. The cultural context in which they lived made improbable, if not impossible, the full elimination of the "dividing wall of hostility" between Christian brethren of different races. As segregation and racial division demarked the boundaries of normalcy in Jim Crow America, unity in fundamental doctrine certainly did not beget unity in all things. Even as preachers of both races used their pulpits to advance clear anti-modernist polemics, black ministers also had to balance and intertwine a religious identity that envisioned twenty centuries of orthodox historical solidarity with a racial identity that modern society demanded be treated as their single most defining characteristic. The polemical content of this sort of preaching, including its expressly anti-modernist contours and its overtly racial applications, will be the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

POLEMICS FROM THE PULPIT:

ANTI-MODERNIST PREACHING AND RACIAL APPLICATION

As chapter three demonstrated, the baseline elements of positive fundamentalist dogma – that is, the positive assertion and definition of the essential doctrines of the "faith once delivered" – were by no means delimited by racial borders. While the socially constructed racial boundaries of the day attempted to absolutely divide "black" from "white," religious commonalities across such inevitably permeable border lines were a reality of life, especially in the realm of Christian theology which not only predated this American segregationist context but also sought to address spiritual problems of eternal and universal significance. In the early twentieth century, theological conservatives from both sides of the color line offered highly congruent formulations and biblical defenses of such central doctrinal pillars as the deity of Christ, Jesus' literal resurrection and return, and especially the commitment to biblical inspiration and inerrancy. Affirming in parallel their alignment with both church-historical orthodoxy and the apostolic teachings of Scripture as validation for their doctrinal stances, both black and white conservative Protestants identified these "fundamental" doctrines as definitional to the true Christian faith.

Yet neither the profession of a broadly fundamentalist worldview (the subject of chapter two) nor the affirmation of these key points of conservative doctrine (the subject of chapter three) were, on their own, sufficient to make what I have termed heretofore a

"doctrinal fundamentalist," in a historical-theological sense. Because fundamentalism in its historical onset was a reactive push back against the emerging modernist theology of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, another element comes into play: overt opposition to modernism. The necessary flipside of the fundamentalist's positive affirmation of the fundamental doctrines of the faith was its negative corollary – the willingness to openly and publicly rebuke and criticize modernist theology. This constituted another common theological trait between white and black fundamentalists; yet even in the face of this commonality, as we will see later in this chapter, black preachers often advanced racially progressive applications of their fundamentalist and anti-modernist convictions that would have been foreign to most of their white counterparts.

Perhaps nowhere did the public rebuke of modernism carry more cachet than from behind the sacred desk itself. From the very beginning of the Reformation, the preached word had functioned as the central focus of the Protestant worship service; no less an authority than Martin Luther remarked that "the preacher's mouth and the words that I heard are not his; they are the words and message of the Holy Spirit."[1] The Reformation's emphasis on the authoritative nature of the preached word was passed down and preserved no less among its black American progeny than its white. Indeed, the role of African American ministers in this era as influential and authoritative voices, both as religious and social figures, has been widely attested.[2]

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[1]Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, trans. Martin H. Bertram, vol. 24, *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John Chapters 14-16* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961), 170.

[2]W. E. B. Du Bois famously noted that "The preacher is the most unique personality developed by the Negro on American soil. A leader, a politician, an orator, a 'boss,' an intriguer, an idealist, -- all

With this in mind, it is well worth noting that black clergy – including some of the same figures who were mentioned in the last chapter – were at times willing to use their position of ecclesiastical authority not only to expound on the age-old doctrines of the faith, but also to expressly attack in vivid terms the encroaching dangers of theological modernism. Preachers from a variety of Protestant backgrounds – Methodist,

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these he is, and ever, too, the centre of a group of men, now twenty, now a thousand in number." W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1903, reprint by Dover Publications, Inc., 1994), 116.

Also contemporaneous with Du Bois, William A. Daniel's 1925 sociological survey of black theological education concluded that "[black theological] students were in substantial agreement that the consensus of opinion among the churchgoers of their home communities is that ministers are 'called of God' in a supernatural way." Daniel proceeded to quote one such student, saying, "I believe men are called to the ministry not by any actual sound they hear, but I believe they see a vision from God." William A. Daniel, *The Education of Negro Ministers* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1925), 71-72.

In his study of mid-twentieth century African American preaching in Macon County, Georgia, William H. Pipes likewise noted that "the old-time Negro preacher is not merely a speaker with a speech: he is the 'Man of God' with God's message to me – the instrument through which the Father talks to His children." William H. Pipes, *Say Amen, Brother! Old-Time Negro Preaching: A Study in American Frustration* (New York: William-Frederick Press, 1951, reprint by Negro Universities Press, 1970), 90.

Edward Wheeler has addressed the idea of the black minister as paradoxically both intimately connected to and profoundly separate or set-apart from his community, on the dual basis of his divine endowment and his role as an exemplar and an agent of social uplift for the community: "The key to understanding the paradox of the separateness of the preachers from their communities is found in the position a man assumed when he became a minister in the black community: as a minister, he was set apart. . . . The call to the ministry and the confirmation of that call by the community placed the minister in a high place of influence that had consequences for his activity in uplifting the race. . . . [A]s a public figure held in high esteem, he had a sacred trust." In demonstrating the high expectations placed upon black ministers, Wheeler quotes from A.M.E. Bishop W. J. Gaines, "The ministry is not a profession, but a calling . . . the high and holy functions which belong to it can be discharged only by the man who has been set apart to it, anointed by the Holy Ghost and divinely endowed for its peculiar and special responsibilities." Likewise, he also quotes one of Gaines' contemporaries, John B. L. Williams, to the same effect, "The Christian pulpit has ever been acknowledged to be a great power for good among all people. Coming as it does divinely commissioned and bearing to man a divine message, it has a claim upon the attention and the acceptance of mankind. . . . To the Christian pulpit the people look for the loftiest ideals of life. In this respect the Negro more than any other people has been largely dependent upon the pulpit." Edward L. Wheeler, *Uplifting the Race: The Black Minister in the New South, 1865-1902* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986), 22-24.

Charles Hamilton has commented on the closeness of the relationship between the African American minister and his congregants, including his authoritative voice in their lives: "A discussion of religion among church-affiliated blacks will frequently include the phrase 'my pastor.' And when the phrase is used, there is a strong sense of mutual, personal attachment. The speaker will quote his pastor, cite him authoritatively, tell what his pastor has done for him, what the pastor said in his sermon last Sunday. There is a feeling of trust and mutual loyalty not found in other relationships." Charles V. Hamilton, *The Black Preacher in America* (New York: William Morrow, 1972), 19.

Baptist, Congregationalist – stood before their local congregations, and sometimes even before their entire denominational bodies, to decry the infidelities of modernist thought as a sure means to shipwreck the faith of those whom it ensnared. A pronounced anti-modernist streak ran through many of the same sorts of voices who, in the previous chapter, were seen giving full-throated positive defenses of the fundamentals. In fact, the pulpit proved to be a place where the two sides of this particular coin – positive affirmation of fundamentalist doctrine and negative polemics against the dangers of modernism – could come together at once, with the authoritative backing of the Word of God as faithfully proclaimed by the servant of God from behind the sacred desk.

That an anti-modernist polemic existed alongside fundamentalist doctrine is perhaps no major surprise, although in the context of the present study, which defines fundamentalism on the basis of both positive affirmations and negative denials, it is undeniably important. But what is perhaps even more interesting in this context is the sort of applications that black ministers drew from their considerations of fundamentalist doctrine and polemics. As with white fundamentalist ministers, there were of course calls to holy living, jeremiads against the moral ills of society such as drunkenness and violence, exhortations to steadfastness in the faith, and appeals urging constant fidelity to historic biblical orthodoxy and orthopraxy. But another strain of application turns up in some, though certainly not all, of the doctrinally fundamentalist sermons delivered by African American clergymen – a willingness to bring the fundamentals to bear on questions of racial equality and to position modernism as a threat not only to Christianity in general but to African Americans in particular. And while typically these sorts of

applications were by not necessarily the central crux of the sermon itself – after all, application is by necessity a subsidiary element of the expository task, flowing naturally from the primary exposition of the biblical text and explication of its doctrine – their very existence at all provides a point of contrast between these conservative black preachers and their white fundamentalist counterparts who very likely would never have even considered making such points of application from the same texts and doctrines. Thus as we consider the fundamentalist polemics emanating from behind the pulpits of black ministers, we will see both the obvious similarities that cross the color line in terms of doctrinal affirmations and anti-modernist arguments, as well as the divergence in application stemming from distinct and racially segregated experiences of American culture in the era of Jim Crow.

Confronting Modernism from the Pulpit

As fundamentalist ministers considered the rising tide of liberal theology within American Protestant churches, they concluded that modernism's challenges to traditional conservative orthodoxy were multitudinous. It offered a naturalist alternative to traditionally supernatural presuppositions, it embraced higher critical methods at odds with the doctrine of divine inspiration, and it presented a strictly human Christ who in his life and death functioned primarily as a moral exemplar rather than a divine atoning sacrifice. But from the fundamentalist perspective, the many errors of modernist theology – whether about the nature of Scripture, the divinity of Christ, the reality of miracles, the literal resurrection, or the atoning work of Christ – all converged on the

central problem, which was modernism's denial of the biblical gospel. Without a divinely inspired revelation, fundamentalist preachers argued, no one could know the truth of the gospel; without a divine Messiah, the law could not be fulfilled on fallen man's behalf; without an atoning sacrifice, sinful man could not have peace with God; and without a literal resurrection, in the words of Paul the Apostle, "we are of all people most to be pitied."[3]

Over and again, one of the recurring charges fired like flaming darts from conservative pulpits was not merely that modernists undermined some esoteric doctrinal footnote, but that in denying central theological tenants of historic Christianity they in fact undermined *the gospel itself*. Perhaps no occasion could be more apt for just such a critique than Easter morning, as pastor Edward Franklin Williams prepared to proclaim the resurrection of Jesus to his congregation from a very familiar gospel text from Luke 24:5-6, as the angels proclaimed to the women at Jesus' tomb, "Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen." As noted in chapter three, we might describe Williams as a "doctrinal fundamentalist" or even a "proto-fundamentalist," since he died in 1919 before the term "fundamentalist" had been officially appended to the theologically conservative reaction against modernism. But throughout his writings and sermons, Williams demonstrates a commitment to the fundamentalist worldview outlined in chapter two, an explicit affirmation of the doctrinal fundamentals, and an overt hostility to modernist theological innovation.

[3] 1 Corinthians 15:19 (English Standard Version).

This particular Easter morning, Williams came to the church with the apparent intent to unload both barrels at these "doubters of the resurrection." Quickly incorporating two more of the five fundamentals in addition to the literal resurrection, he further qualified these "doubters" as those who also "criticize the Gospels" (raising the issue of bibliology) and who "reject the Saviour as a Redeemer" (invoking the issue of atonement). After such an obviously opprobrious introduction, Williams allowed for a brief moment of commonality, admitting that they all shared a "substantial agreement that the teaching of Jesus reaches the high water mark of excellence, that in morals he has no superior, that in example he should be accepted as the only worthy moral leader of men." The problem for Williams, of course, was not that modernists believed that Jesus was a great moral teacher or the supreme example for moral behavior; the problem was that this was *the extent* of what they believed about Jesus. Having noted this point of agreement with modernists, Williams began to lament: "Yet for them, there is no Easter Day. Christ did not rise from the dead. THEY would not go to the tomb to see if it were empty. That would for them be only seeking the dead among the dead. . . . THEY are ethical followers of Jesus, nothing more." Holding up modernists as an express contrast to the disciples, who came to the empty tomb to see it for themselves, Williams made clear their shortcomings relative to his interpretation of the biblical testimony.[4]

Not content to conclude his critique there, however, Williams went on to declare to his congregation that the "Christ" of the modernists is in fact a false and powerless

[4]Edward Franklin Williams, Easter sermon, 27 March 1910, Edward Franklin Williams papers, Box 19, Folder 13, Amistad Research Center at Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana (hereafter cited as Williams papers).

Christ, unable to actually sustain or fulfill the promises of the gospel: "the ethical does not exhaust Jesus. He is ethical because he is something more. If Christ is not risen your faith is vain. . . . Such a Saviour can be nothing more than a dead unrisen Saviour for us. He is no Saviour from sin. He cannot forgive. He cannot purify the heart." Theological liberalism, then, was not merely errant on a few points of doctrine, but was in fact an entirely false system without hope for salvation, forgiveness, or purification – indeed, without a true "Saviour" at all. Modernists "refuse to give [Christ] their confidence or to accept his aid or to credit him with any supernatural power," and therefore "people like these have no real acquaintance with the living Jesus." Undeniably tied up in Williams' opposition to modernism's denial of biblical inspiration, denial of supernaturalism, denial of the atonement, and denial of the resurrection is the single overriding conviction that these theological innovations constitute an essential denial of the gospel itself, and therefore put modernist adherents *outside* the fellowship of true Christian believers. The fact that such people may claim to follow Jesus made no difference to Williams. As far as he was concerned, their denials of essential gospel elements demonstrated that they were absolutely separated from the true Christ and served only a "Christ of their own creation, a creation who has never existed on earth or in heaven."[5]

This idea that these modernists created and worshiped a false Christ was a recurrent one in Williams' pulpit, and he by no means confined his blistering attacks on modernists to a single Easter morning message. Not one to mince words, another Sunday morning Williams took the text of 2 Corinthians 11:3 to paint modernists as the modern-

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[5]Ibid.

day analogues of the superapostles, the Apostle Paul's bitter antagonists in the Corinthian church. They were "false teachers then, now," seeking in their "wickedness" to "pervert men from the ways of truth" so that souls might perish. These men "assumed to be Christian teachers," but in reality sought to undermine the essential message of the Christian faith. "If you can destroy the deity of Christ," Williams proclaimed, "you can discredit his message." The siren song of these false teachers was to call men to "be liberal, be advanced thinkers," and just as in 2 Corinthians 11:3 the Apostle Paul drew a parallel between the deception of the superapostles and Satan's deception in Eden, so Williams carried the idea forward into the twentieth century: "So Eve was persuaded. So are men now." And just as the Apostle went on to decry the fact that some of the Corinthians had been deceived into believing in "another Jesus" and "a different gospel," Williams saw the same foundational problems with the theological liberalism of the early twentieth century.[6] These false teachers sought to deny the divinity of Christ and in their "air of superior learning" tried to convince people not to "narrow [themselves] down to the old gospel"; Williams on the other hand, drawing an unmistakable distinction, exhorted his congregants to "Be on guard lest your minds be corrupted from the simplicity of the gospel that is in Christ." The polemical bite from Williams' pulpit

[6]In this same vein, Williams leveled an attack on what might have been a nascent version of the "social gospel" message popularized by Walter Rauschenbusch. When decrying modernists' rejection of the gospel of individual salvation through faith in Christ, Williams remarked that it is as though they wrongly believe that "a man could save society without saving its units." Rauschenbusch, the preeminent proponent of social gospel theology in the early twentieth century, argued that the Christian message must be adjusted to effect the "regeneration of the social order" in lieu of focusing on individual salvation. For Williams, however, regeneration of the individual was the preliminary foundation upon which meaningful social action and moral reform was built.

Rauschenbusch was active in formulating social gospel theology at least as far back as the 1890s, but for a developed version of his thinking on this point, see Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1919).

assured his hearers that modernists worshiped a false Jesus, preached a false gospel, and sought to devour the souls of their prey. In short, they had far more in common with Satan than they did with Christ.[7]

Others of Williams' contemporaries took a similar tack, if sometimes with less inflammatory language. As Williams drew on 2 Corinthians 11 to castigate the modernist "false teachers" of his day, Bishop John Albert Johnson turned to a closely related text in the same letter – 2 Corinthians 4:1-2 – in order to expound both the proper role of the Christian ministry and the problems of false teaching within the church.[8] As demonstrated in chapter three, Johnson, whose career as an A.M.E. minister stretched well into the 1920s, was a stalwart defender of numerous key fundamentalist doctrines, including biblical inerrancy and the divinity of Christ; modernist perspectives that necessarily denied such doctrines were in his view "vitally defective," being both injurious to man and dishonoring toward God.[9] So as Johnson rose to take his place behind the pulpit this particular Sunday, he did so with the twofold aim of both expounding a positive assessment of the role of the Christian ministry and offering a negative evaluation of those who might seek to undermine it.

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[7]Edward Franklin Williams, "The Simplicity Which is in Christ," 26 February 1905, Williams papers, Box 19, Folder 12.

[8]The full text of 2 Corinthians 4:1-2, which served as Johnson's text for this sermon, reads as follows: "Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God." (English Standard Version)

[9]John Albert Johnson, "Critique of Adolf Harnack's *Christianity and History*," John Albert Johnson papers, Box 1, Folder 4, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library (hereafter cited as Johnson papers); John Albert Johnson, "The Faithful Minister," Johnson papers, Box 1, Folder 4.

Johnson's text from 2 Corinthians chapter four finds the Apostle Paul contrasting the purity of his ministry, as a commission received from God, against the deceitfulness of his Corinthian antagonists, who boastfully called themselves "superapostles": "Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God." Having read the text and introduced its primary intent of contrasting the Apostle Paul against the wicked false teachers in Corinth, turning to his congregation Johnson paraphrased the apostle's message for the current day and age: "We are . . . not handling the Word of God deceitfully – not preaching an adulterated truth as a flexible gospel; not blind to the prejudices, or silent as to the vices, of those who hear us; but by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."[10]

In this initial salvo, the issue of compromise on central Christian doctrines is once again, as in Edward Franklin Williams' preaching, presented as an attack on the very gospel itself. Such compromise is "deceitful," "adulterated," and resulting in a "flexible gospel," and Johnson made clear that those in his crosshairs were, in fact, people who claimed to be Christians and who claimed to present some sort of "gospel" message. The problem was, as with the Corinthian superapostles, their gospel is false and cannot save. Such men, motivated by "eagerness to conciliate prejudice and disarm opposition," have managed only to "compromise . . . the high tone of Christian teaching"

[10]John Albert Johnson, "The Christian Ministry," Johnson papers, Box 1, Folder 4.

with the inevitable disastrous result that "the Gospel is presented [by them] only as one among many systems, which all men may accept, or reject at pleasure." Though he fails to use the exact word, the picture he paints is clearly meant to elicit the image of modernists' theological compromise on such key issues as those enumerated in chapter three. In fact, Johnson directly contrasts these false teachers' gospel of compromise with the doctrinal pillars of traditional Christianity, including the central issues of substitutionary atonement and individual justification. In modernist theology, he concludes, the old gospel "whose sound is always music and whose sight is always joy" is so dreadfully obscured as to make it "hardly to be recognized."[11]

At the same time, Johnson was concerned to make clear the positive duties of the true Christian ministry, built on the essential fundamental doctrines of the "old gospel." Modernist compromise on these core theological issues, he said, was driven by their conviction that the historical orthodoxy of ages past was unable to effectively address the evils and injustices facing modern society.[12] Modernists' ultimate infidelity was

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[11]Ibid.

[12]The idea that fundamentalism was inherently regressive in nature – that is, unable and unwilling to address real problems facing the world – comes across plainly in the writings and speeches of modernists of the era. The most famous modernist preacher of the era, Harry Emerson Fosdick, for example, in his famous oration "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" said the following: "Multitudes of young men and women at this season of the year are graduating from our schools of learning, thousands of them Christians who may make us older ones ashamed by the sincerity of their devotion to God's will on earth. They are not thinking in ancient terms that leave ideas of progress out. They cannot think in those terms. There could be no greater tragedy than that the Fundamentalists should shut the door of the Christian fellowship against such. . . . [What is] needed, if we are to reach a happy solution of this problem, is a clear insight into the main issues of modern Christianity and a sense of penitent shame that the Christian church should be quarreling over little matters when the world is dying of great needs. If, during the war, when the nations were wrestling upon the very brink of hell and at times all seemed lost, you chanced to hear two men in an altercation about some minor matter of sectarian denominationalism, could you restrain your indignation? You said, 'What can you do with folks like this who, in the face of colossal issues, play with the tiddlywinks and peccadillos of religion?' So now, when from the terrific questions of this generation one is called away by the noise of this Fundamentalist controversy, he thinks it almost unforgivable that men should tithe the mint and anise and cumin, and quarrel over them, when the

therefore borne out of “their eagerness to conciliate prejudice and disarm opposition.” But for Johnson this modernist approach seemed especially foolhardy, because the orthodox Christian ministry, armed with the age-old fundamental doctrines of the church historic, was not merely an institution relegated to the realm of otherworldy reflection, but was in fact an institution ordained by divine providence to have an active and effective role in the events of this world. The Christian ministry, Johnson intoned, “has a business with the world. Some people think it has not. It is the divinely appointed agency for the communication of God’s will to man.”[13]

Without question, this duty entailed an otherworldy or heavenly-focused *aspect*. As an agent charged with communicating the divine will to the world, the Christian minister was charged first and foremost with preaching spiritual truths in order to save lost souls. The preacher ought to be an “ever-speaking witness of man’s feebleness and of God’s strength,” his message grounded in “the great truths of God’s will and man’s duty, of the atonement and the sinner’s pardon, of the spirit’s work and the believer’s growth.” The business of the ministry “has to do with eternity,” and the eternal aspect of the business of soul-saving and preaching the gospel thus superseded every other human institution.[14]

At the same time, however, Johnson’s view of the ministry was not *limited* to the otherworldly. This became obvious even from his paraphrase of 2 Corinthians 2:4 at the outset of his sermon. In distinguishing himself from the false-teaching of modernism he

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world is perishing for the lack of the weightier matters of the law, justice, and mercy, and faith.” Harry Emerson Fosdick, “Shall the Fundamentalists Win?” in *American Religions: A Documentary History*, ed. R. Marie Griffith (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 422-23.

[13]Johnson, “The Christian Ministry.”

[14]Ibid.

had noted that "[We are] not handling the Word of God deceitfully – not preaching an adulterated truth as a flexible gospel." But he immediately followed up with a warning against any who would seek to completely isolate the ministry from the problems of the world: "[We are] not blind to the prejudices, or silent as to the vices, of those who hear us." Contrary to those who saw theological compromise on essential Christian doctrines as the only way to effectively "conciliate prejudice" in the world, Johnson seemed to be saying, the Christian minister whose feet were firmly planted on the foundation of biblical and historical orthodoxy was able – was, indeed, duty bound – to identify and address the "prejudices" and "vices" of the world around him. Later on, as he approached the conclusion of the morning's message, Johnson opined on the minister's charge to appeal to men's consciences, once again reaffirming the dual application of the minister's charge: "His wont, his business, his sole business, is to bring out the world's conscience in answer to the truths of Divine revelation. . . . Not simply that people may escape hell, and reach heaven, but that through awakened conscience people may resolve on a holy life." [15]

The minister's duty, then, built upon the "great truths" of the "old gospel" which some modern-thinkers were so eager to cast aside, was bound up in firstly pointing people toward reconciliation with God and eternal life, and secondly overcoming the vice, prejudice, and evil in the world by applying the truths of divine revelation to individual consciences. From this perspective, in fact, only a theological conservative committed to the fundamentals *could* effectively work to overcome prejudice and vice in

[15]Ibid.

the world, because the entire basis of such transformation was the power of the "Divine revelation" of Scripture.[16] Considering that modernists characteristically denied the very inspiration and inerrancy of the biblical text, Johnson's argument for the social duties of the Christian minister naturally entails that the fundamentalist was actually *better equipped* to speak to issues of vice and injustice in society than was the modernist.[17] Far from conceding the arena of prophetic social exhortation, Johnson in fact turned the modernists' presupposition on its head by positing that adherence to the Christian fundamentals, not divergence away from them, was the only sure basis upon which ministers could offer any hope of lasting social change.[18]

In his exposition of 2 Corinthians 4:1-2, Johnson remained relatively vague on the exact types of "prejudices" against which the Christian ministry was to stand as a bulwark – though, his choice of the word "prejudice" in and of itself, given the context of an African American church in the age of Jim Crow, certainly lends implicit racial

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[16]Interestingly, and consonant with the general observations provided in chapters two and three (and those to come in chapter five), Johnson's clear doctrinal convictions regarding the fundamentals and his plain criticisms of modernism did not lead him to entirely separate and dissociate himself from others within his community who disagreed. White fundamentalists often engaged in some measure of strict separatism and were exceedingly skeptical of ecumenical engagements, but Johnson remained connected with others in the A.M.E. denomination who held other views. He attended ecumenical conferences in 1891 and 1901 and continued to associate with AME ministers like Reverdy Ransom, whose editorship of the *A.M.E. Church Review* was marked by a noticeable emphasis on more theologically liberal "Social Gospel" themes.

[17]Johnson's view is obviously set in complete opposition to the modernist view, represented by Fosdick, that fundamentalists think "in ancient terms that leave ideas of progress out" and merely "play with the tiddlywinks and peccadillos of religion" while "the world is perishing for the lack of the weightier matters of the law, justice, and mercy, and faith." Harry Emerson Fosdick, "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" in *American Religions: A Documentary History*, ed. R. Marie Griffith (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 422-23.

[18]For examination of the "prophetic" tradition in the African American church, and its relationship to racial activism during the era of Jim Crow, see David Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004). For a sociological perspective on this prophetic tradition, see Lincoln and Mamiya's analysis of the "priestly vs. prophetic church function" dialectic in C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990).

overtones to the oration. Elsewhere, however, he was pleased to expound in more detail on the social benefits of the old-time gospel of "[salvation] by Grace through faith," which like Christ himself "is the same yesterday, today, and forever." In a sermon tellingly titled "The Outlook," Johnson expressly considered the future of the black race in twentieth-century America by also looking backward to the progress of the nineteenth century. While the Christian gospel ought to remain unchanging through all ages – including the core fundamental doctrines to which Johnson has elsewhere been shown to stridently subscribe, such as inerrancy, substitutionary atonement, and Christ's divinity – he emphasized that changing social conditions still demanded that "new necessities for the *application* of truth arise" [emphasis added]. Again evident here was Johnson's conviction that traditional Christianity represents the proper, God-ordained means of enacting moral advancement in the world. The essential guiding ideals and characteristics of any age, any people, any nation, he argued, were to be found in the predominating religion. "The dominant feature of a people's religion is the dominant feature of the life of the nation," and the one dominating thought of the prior century, Johnson confidently proclaimed from his pulpit, was "emancipation"; the unchanging gospel of a crucified and risen Christ had been applied in the foregoing decades to effect perhaps the most earth-shattering social change in the history of the American nation – deliverance of African Americans from the yoke of literal slavery – and renewed applications of the same truth to new and different circumstances would define their future in the coming century as well. The "future of the negro" in the twentieth century, his "ability to hold his own . . . against the aggressions of his enemies in this country,"

would depend more upon the quality and overt application of his faith-formed character than upon anything else.[19]

While Johnson's encounters with modernist theology, at least in its formalized twentieth-century encapsulation, came toward the latter stages of his career, a fellow Methodist preacher in his district by the name of Isaac Reed Berry was coming of ministerial age during the height of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy. A native of Fodice, Texas, Berry made his way east in his early twenties with a thirst for higher education. After earning a bachelor's degree from Howard University under the tutelage of Dean Kelly Miller, and subsequently training as one of very few black students at the Boston University School of Theology, Berry was ordained to the ministry in 1917. Over the course of nearly five decades in ministry, Berry pastored numerous churches in the upper South, including churches in Virginia and Maryland that fell within the very episcopal district over which John Albert Johnson sat as presiding bishop during the 1920s.

Although Berry's pastoral career was just lifting off as Johnson's was entering its twilight, many of the same themes, theological commitments, and polemical thrusts

[19]John Albert Johnson, "The Outlook," Johnson papers, Box 1, Folder 4. Although the sermon manuscript is undated, several clues offer hints about when the message was delivered. While his ministry stretched from 1875 to 1928, the sermon's repeated references to the United States as "this nation" indicate that he was ministering in America at the time, ruling out most of the first two decades of his ministry that were spent in Canada and Bermuda; he also served as the AME's resident bishop in South Africa from 1908-1916. The sermon's rhetorical treatment of the nineteenth century as a completed whole, and its bookmarked opening/closing remarks indicating a concern for the African American people's future in the twentieth century ("to every century comes its own message…"; "the future of the negro depends…"), seem to point toward either an early-twentieth century date prior to his departure for South Africa (sometime between 1900 and 1908) or a date after his return from South Africa. Pointing slightly toward the latter date, after his return from South Africa in 1916, is Johnson's intentional inclusion of a rather worldwide perspective in his concern for black advancement, noting that "the future of the negro" should entail "his ability to hold his own as a permanent factor in the world's civilization, and against the aggressions of his enemies in this country, or indeed in any country."

against modernism were to be found in both men's sermons. If anything, Berry was perhaps *more* aggressive in his tone and vocabulary when addressing the dangers of modernist theologizing. One especially prominent target of Berry's ire was the practice of higher biblical criticism, which he saw as a profound betrayal of the Scriptures themselves and an enormous danger to his congregants' souls. This emphasis, of course, placed Berry squarely in line with the theological concerns reflected in *The Fundamentals* (completed, incidentally, just two years prior to Berry's ordination), which overwhelmingly focused on issues of bibliology and higher criticism.[20] Chastising the modern church for its wanton lack of spiritual zeal and fervor, Berry thundered out his warning that "The church today is being rocked to sleep by Satan in the cradle of carnality, drugged by such opiates as annihilation, new theology, [and] higher criticism."[21] Given the immediate connection with higher criticism, it is no stretch at all to understand "new theology" to mean theological liberalism. Describing these theological innovations as the essence of carnality, spiritual narcotics, and the very work of Satan himself, there seems to have been relatively little ambiguity in Berry's stance on the issue of modernism and the higher critical approach to biblical scholarship.

On other occasions Berry went to even greater lengths to decry those who would reject the Bible as God's very word. In a sermon entitled "An Attempt to Destroy God's World, Rejecting the Saving Word," Berry took his text from Isaiah 40:8 ("The word of God shall stand forever"), but spent a great deal of his time narrating with a storyteller's

[20]As noted in chapter three, nearly one-third (twenty eight out of ninety) of the essays in *The Fundamentals* were specifically devoted to some aspect of the doctrine of Scripture.

[21]Isaac Reed Berry, "Asleep in Gethsemane," Isaac Reed Berry papers, Box 1, Folder 3, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library (hereafter cited as Berry papers).

flair the account of King Jehoiakim from Jeremiah 36. In short, God commanded Jeremiah to write down his prophecies of judgment against Israel and Judah in order that they might be read and proclaimed publicly in the temple. However, once King Jehoiakim heard about this, he was so incensed at the imprecatory words of the prophet that he confiscated the scroll and, as his scribe read it to him, the king cut the scroll to pieces with a knife and burned the scraps in his fire pot. "The guilty king would not tolerate such a Bible," Berry concluded as the story came to an end. "Jehoiakin [sic] dared to set himself above the Word of God. He hated it because it showed forth the evil of his deeds and therefore he wished to have it destroyed."[22]

Turning to application, and having already adroitly built up the congregation's perception of King Jehioakim's crime as a particularly heinous and wicked affront to God, Berry deftly noted that "Jehoiakin's [sic] knife is still being used against the Bible, and if we look carefully we may be startled to find it in our own hands." Seeking to convict his hearers of their own misdeeds, Berry proceeded to lay out several categories akin to Jehoiakim's sin: willfully rejecting the Bible's instructions, neglecting certain unappealing portions of the Scriptures, treating the text irreverently with jokes and flippant language. These of course are ways that careless Christians might "thrust a knife" into the Bible, but Berry was quick to note that Jehoiakim's knife also rests in the hand of "the course infidel" who would seek to eviscerate the Scriptures. Into such a category, apparently, fell the higher critics: "Higher criticism has dissected [the Bible] and put it through the fiercest fires of investigation. . . . Infidelity has attacked it with

[22]Isaac Reed Berry, "An Attempt to Destroy God's World, Rejecting the Saving Word," Berry papers, Box 1, Folder 4.

every possible kind of knife and fire, but it has kept multiplying and filling the world." In terms quite reminiscent of the language analyzed in chapter three surrounding *The Fundamentals*, Berry laid higher criticism and "infidelity" in parallel, complete with an imprecatory modern-day application of God's judgment on Jehoiakim: "'his dead body shall be cast out in the day to heat and in the night to the frost.' So shall perish in their wickedness all those that try to cut and burn the law of the Lord." Those who might seek to dissect the Bible would pass away, Berry proclaimed, but the "inspired" and "imperishable" Bible itself would always endure without fail.[23]

Higher criticism was not, of course, Berry's only polemical target from the pulpit. He regularly proclaimed core fundamentalist doctrines from his pulpit in great detail, and castigated those who would reject such gospel essentials. One lengthy sermon manuscript, for example, addressed in depth the centrality of the substitutionary atonement of Christ. "The blood of Jesus Christ," he declared, is "God's one essential for salvation":

> Oh, I wish I had the power to write in letters of flame across the skies – 'without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins' for there is no hope of going to heaven without the shed blood of the Crucified Son of God. And the man who rejects the blood will have a fearful time when he meets God face to face. For if there is no remission without the shedding of blood, then the man who rejects the blood is hopelessly lost. We must go by the way of the atonement if we go to heaven. . . . Your only hope and my only hope, and the world's only hope lies in the fountain of Jesus' blood. [24]

The fundamental hope of the Christian religion, for Berry, was inextricably linked to the doctrine of substitutionary atonement as the means of reconciling sinners to God. The

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[23]Ibid.

[24]Isaac Reed Berry, "God's One Essential For Salvation," Berry papers, Box 1, Folder 69.

only way to heaven was, without exception, through faith in the atoning work of Christ on the cross.

Given the weight that Berry placed upon the doctrine of atonement, it should perhaps come as no surprise that those who claimed to be Christians yet denied this doctrine received no quarter in Berry's sermonic onslaught. They were tools of the devil, complicit in "Satan's masterpiece" of convincing men that the blood of Christ is non-essential. Satan's gospel "is a gospel of works and is being preached by a lot of salvation-by-character infidels today." Invoking Matthew 7:21-23, Berry made it clear that these "infidels" were people who explicitly claimed to be Christians while in fact preaching a false and damning gospel.[25] Just as Jesus said, "I never knew you" to the false believers in Matthew 7:23, Berry describes a litany of people who might be told the same thing on the Day of Judgment; they might all be "splendid people" with a "splendid record of good works to their credit," but if they "drifted out to eternity without the blood of Jesus Christ" then they were really nothing more than "the dupes of Satan."[26]

Tellingly, one of the personalities who Berry places in the shoes of the false believers of Matthew 7:23 – that is, one to whom Jesus will say, "I never knew you" – was described as "a member of the Riverside Church." The most famous "Riverside Church" of Berry's day, of course, was the Manhattan congregation of leading modernist

[25]Matthew 7:21-23 reads: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'" (English Standard Version)

[26]Berry, "God's One Essential For Salvation."

spokesman and pastor Harry Emerson Fosdick. This leaves the compelling impression that Berry was not merely calling out a vague idea of liberalism, but was in fact pointing to the most famous of all modernist churches and modernist preachers of the era in leveling his polemic against modernism. With this in mind, it is difficult *not* to imagine that Berry had Fosdick specifically in mind when, barely a paragraph later, he lobbed another grenade: “Some of our greatest preachers, so called, have taken the fire out of hell, the glory out of heaven, the blood out of the atonement, the inspiration out of the Bible, and God out of Christ. They have gone over to Satan, and they are his, bag and luggage.” One would be hard-pressed to find a more succinctly fundamentalist critique, cramming into a single pithy statement the doctrines of afterlife, biblical inspiration, Christ’s deity, substitutionary atonement, and an anti-modernist anathema. Those who would deny the atoning blood of Christ, Berry indicated, really had no legitimate claim to the name “Christian” at all.[27]

But even so, Berry was not content for the Christian faith and the Christian life to simply halt at the doctrine of atonement, or any of the fundamental doctrines. These doctrines formed the basis of the Christian faith, formed the foundation of the Christian’s life in the world, and as such they entailed social applications centered on justice, equality, and fraternity. Taking a Christmas text from Luke 2:14 – the angels’ proclamation of Christ’s birth – Berry tackled at length the subject of human brotherhood and the evils of racial, economic, and class inequality. In doing so, however, he interestingly bookended the sermon with multiple references to Christ’s

[27]Ibid.

atonement as a propitiation (an atoning sacrifice that absorbs God's wrath), as if to set the entire discussion of social conscience within the larger frame of the fundamental doctrines surrounding Christ's person and work.[28] Setting up the concept of human social conscience within the context of the atonement, Berry opened the sermon by reading the text, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace and good will to men," and proclaiming that "Christ came into the world not only to be a propitiation for the sins of men but also to establish and perfect the brotherhood of man."[29]

In order to begin addressing issues of systemic injustice – both racial and economic – Berry defined the "brotherhood of man" as having both individual and social components. This brotherhood not only exists on an individual level "between man and man" but also "between the individual man and society," meaning that there is "an obligation resting alike upon the individual and society." Yet this ideal of human brotherhood was being stymied by the "inequitable distribution of wealth and the lack of equal opportunities for all." Yes, Christ came into the world to become a propitiation for man's sin, and Berry's concern for saving souls remained evident throughout the sermon, but he also believed that meeting physical and social needs often served as essential *preparation* for people to accept the message of Christ's propitiatory sacrifice. The Christian, therefore, should be looking to meet the needs of others (individuals and groups) in society as a way of reaching out with the message of Christ to meet their even greater spiritual need: "Brotherhood comprehends the physical needs first and then it

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[28]The very fact that Berry was able to use the technical theological term "propitiation" throughout his sermon without stopping to explain its meaning indicates that substitutionary atonement (and many of its various corollaries and aspects) was so common a theme in his pulpit ministry as to be simply assumed as part of the general congregational knowledge.

[29]Isaac Reed Berry, "The Brotherhood of Man," Berry papers, Box 1, Folder 8.

looks to the hunger of the soul." It would be impossible for the nation to instill in its children a "high and spiritual character" so long as "means of life are denied to any individual, class, or race to develop into robust manhood and womanhood."[30]

With this mention of race, Berry was able to pivot from inequality in general to racial inequality in particular. The fact that social inequality prevents oppressed communities from developing "robust manhood and womanhood" appears to speak to the dehumanization of the era's racial codes. If African Americans, segregated from the rest of society and treated as essentially second-class citizens, were not fully (or, to use Berry's term, "robustly") masculine or feminine, then it follows that they were essentially being relegated to sub-human status. Race antagonism, he noted, was one of the clearest and most notable hindrances to the brotherhood of man.[31]

But far from simply identifying racial inequality as a problem, Berry went further in proposing that the solution to racial antagonism was to challenge one of the most viscerally emotional elements of the Jim Crow racial hierarchy – the prohibition on racial intermarriage.[32] "When wedlock is unrestricted except by moral law, individual taste and pleasure, the heart of the races will beat as one," Berry exhorted. "When this is accomplished, one race will cease lauding it over and domineering any other race and the race antagonism will melt away like a frost on a bright spring morning before the

[30]Ibid.
[31]Ibid.
[32]Interracial sex had been a longstanding point of agitation for the white ruling elite dating back at least to the colonial era. Kathleen Brown argues that sexual regulation was closely tied to the social construction of racial categories in colonial Virginia, as black sexuality was imbued with "the power to taint." See Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), chapter 6. Winthrop Jordan likewise discusses the construction of racial-sexual categories in colonial America based on power dynamics and psychological impulses. See Winthrop D. Jordan, *The White Man's Burden: Historical Origins of Racism in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), chapter 4.

glare of the rising sun." If this key element of his era's racial codes could be overcome, if the races were able to mix freely within marital and familial bonds, then human brotherhood would be closer to reality and the message of Christ would spread even more prolifically.[33]

It is profoundly notable, then, that Berry's commitment to fundamentalist doctrines like the propitiatory atonement of Christ – which is the context in which he bookended this very message – led him to make racial applications that would have been unthinkable to many of his white fundamentalist counterparts, regardless of how closely they might have aligned on the specifics of their doctrine. The commitment to fundamentalist theology and to anti-modernist polemics did not elicit an obsession with the afterlife to the exclusion of life in this world; indeed, for black ministers like Berry, fundamentalist doctrines appear to have undergirded a commitment to social interventions that challenged the prevailing halls of power.[34] In another sermon on the same topic – after decrying the church for the "great social sin" of "segregating itself" and making certain types of people feel unwelcome, and after crying out for the church

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[33]Berry, "The Brotherhood of Man."

[34]The testimony of Isaac Berry and others in this chapter challenges the common assumption that a theological emphasis on "otherworldly" elements of Christianity necessarily indicates a propensity toward social accommodation rather than resistance. In this respect, this chapter aligns with the sociological research of Allison Calhoun-Brown, who has demonstrated that in modern black churches an otherworldly orientation does not depress racial empowerment, but rather manifests in different *types* of racial activism. Similarly, Sandra L. Barnes and Oluchi Nwosu have argued that even as religious conservatives and religious progressives within today's black community disagree on social issues like gay marriage, both sides rhetorically align themselves with the resistance/protest tradition while categorizing their opponents as accommodationists. These scholars' conclusions about modern black churches also accord with the testimony of the early-twentieth century voices catalogued here. See: Allison Calhoun-Brown, "While Marching to Zion: Otherworldliness and Racial Empowerment in the Black Community," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 37, no. 3 (September 1998): 427-39; Sandra L. Barnes and Oluchi Nwosu, "Black Church Electoral and Protest Politics from 2002 to 2012: a Social Media Analysis of the Resistance Versus Accommodation Dialectic," *Journal of African American Studies* 18, no. 2 (June 2014), 209-35.

to rediscover its old convictions about the deity of Christ, his atoning death, the plan of salvation, repentance, regeneration, and justification – he aptly summarized the intimate connection between his core, uncompromising doctrinal beliefs and his call for social action: "It is well, the two attributes go together. To ache for Christ means to love human beings, for Christ died for such."[35] Thus once again, social application (including *racial* application) stemmed from one of the very old-time doctrines that modernists had come to reject – Christ's substitutionary death as a propitiatory sacrifice.

While preachers like John Albert Johnson and Isaac Reed Berry may not have expressly use the name "fundamentalist" in their polemical endeavors, they nevertheless fit into the category of "doctrinal fundamentalist" as it has been used heretofore in this study, fulfilling three of the main characteristics laid out in the introduction: operating from a broadly fundamentalist worldview (chapter two), stridently propagating the core fundamentalist doctrines (chapter three), and utilizing fundamentalist polemical arguments (current chapter). Their Baptist colleague, Lacy Kirk Williams, however, went even a step further. L.K. Williams sought to overtly adjudicate the bitter and pressing fundamentalist/modernist controversy, and in doing so he clearly, expressly, unequivocally declared that he stood firmly on the fundamentalist side of this great divide.

In September of 1925 Lacey Kirk Williams was in his third consecutive year serving as the president of the nation's largest black Baptist denomination – the National Baptist Convention, Inc. In his annual address to the convention Williams not only spent

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[35]Isaac Reed Berry, "The Fool in Christ," Berry papers, Box 1, Folder 56.

time, as one might expect, informing the convention representatives about the status and affairs of the denomination's various ministry apparatuses, such as the Mission Boards and the Sunday School Publishing Board, but he allocated a substantial portion of his address to adjudicating the pressing issue of fundamentalism and modernism. Just mere months removed from the highly publicized Scopes Trial, Williams ascended to the lectern before the leaders of his convention and boldly denounced modernist religion and the closely related topic of evolutionary theory. Evolution, Williams declaimed, was defective on both epistemological and biblical grounds. Even on its own terms, evolution constituted a "fatal, paralyzing hypothesis" that "has no final word on the origin of the species"; it "does not pretend to account for the origin of matter and this world," which for Williams profoundly undercut its purported epistemological and explanatory power.[36] Given that "evolutionists have no satisfactory explanation" for the origin of matter or the origin of life, Williams wondered aloud "how any person in the guise of true academic freedom or in the name of science, logic, religion or theology can advocate a cause so void of all the attributes ascribed to it."[37] But even beyond the question of its own internal value, Williams confidently declared to the National Baptist Convention that evolution failed the test of biblical scrutiny. To "accept the Biblical account of man's creation," as the president urged his convention to do, was to necessarily "discount the cruel philosophy that he is a creature of fate or a product of the 'survival of the fittest'"; to "believe in the doctrines of the fall of man and consequently

[36]"The Third Annual Address of Dr. L. K. Williams, President," *National Baptist Voice* 10, no. 40, 17 October 1925, 14.
[37]Ibid., 15.

the doctrine of Regeneration by the grace of god through Christ Jesus" was to reject the evolutionary narrative of human origins.[38] On the grounds of both its unsustainable internal epistemological claims and its conflict with the external authority of Scripture, Williams preached that evolution failed the test of veracity.

More than merely a disavowal of the specifics of evolutionary theory, Williams' convention address leveled the crosshairs directly at the entire program of modernist religion itself, even going so far as to invoke one of the classic biblical texts on heresy and false teaching. In a clear reference to 1 Timothy 1:19, Williams charged modernists with employing methods which "if not bravely and wisely combatted are calculated to make shipwreck of the faith of an untold number."[39] Just as Paul the Apostle, in charging his protégé Timothy to hold fast to sound doctrine, held up Hymenaeus and Alexander as an example of blasphemers who had "made shipwreck of their faith" and had consequently been "handed over to Satan" for their rejection of apostolic doctrine, so President Williams held up the modernist movement as a deceptive siren song intended to shipwreck the simple faith of unwary Christians.[40] Undermining both the faith of their proselytes and the definitional doctrines of the historic Christian faith itself, modernists "not only discard the inspiration of the scripture, but deny the Deity of Christ and likewise the doctrine of Salvation through his death and suffering. Thus believing, they

[38]Ibid.

[39]Ibid., 14.

[40]The biblical text in question reads as follows: "This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme" (1 Timothy 1:18-20, English Standard Version). The intimate connections in this passage between the rejection of apostolic doctrine, blasphemy, the "shipwreck" of one's faith, and being given over to Satan are unmistakable, as L. K. Williams himself would have undoubtedly known when he selected his allusion to this particular text.

offer an uncertain dynamic for life and a vague, unsatisfactory immortality, not based upon regeneration, a personal resurrection and a personal relationship to Christ."[41] Hence, calling on three of the most prominent fundamentalist bellwethers – biblical inspiration, the divinity of Christ, and substitutionary atonement – Williams overtly connected modernist rejection of these doctrines with uncertainty in this life and hopelessness for the life to come; a shipwrecked faith, indeed.

In contrast, Williams expressly identified himself – and urged his entire denomination to likewise identify – with the fundamentalists. On grounds biblical, historical, and epistemological, this most influential of black Baptist pastors proclaimed the superiority of the fundamentalist cause. To demonstrate biblical superiority, he invoked all "five fundamentals" in quick succession as examples of fundamentalists' praiseworthy devotion to scriptural teaching over against modernist infidelity:

> [Fundamentalists] accept the teachings of the scripture on the Virgin Birth, the Deity of Jesus Christ, his vicarious sufferings, and his bodily resurrection, his ascension and Second Coming. The Scriptures are to them pregnant with convincing and heart-moving truths. The differentiation, I think, between the Modernists and the Fundamentalists has been very clearly and fairly drawn, and we should not hesitate to take and announce our position. I therefore declare unto you that I believe that we should take our stand with those who believe in the full, sufficient authority of the Scriptures in matters of religion.[42]

Ultimately, then, Williams' endorsement of fundamentalism boiled down at its simplest to the central importance of maintaining a correct doctrine of Scripture. Christ's deity, virgin birth, substitutionary atonement, physical resurrection, and second coming, essential as they all were to the true Christian faith, all found their basis in the

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[41]"The Third Annual Address of Dr. L. K. Williams," 14.
[42]Ibid., 15.

authoritative and inspired testimony of Scripture itself. Compromise on the doctrine of Scripture would finally lead to the abandonment of these fundamental teachings as well; conversely, holding steadfast on biblical inspiration provided the necessary foundation for fidelity on all these other essentials as well. For Williams the choice was clear.

Atop this foundation of biblical certainty, Williams appealed to the subordinate but complementary authority of the church historic as evidence for the cause. If the fundamentalists were standing shoulder to shoulder with the theological giants of the past, those stalwart preachers and teachers whose powerful gospel proclamations continued to ring forth down through the halls of history, then their position was even more unassailable. Added to the inerrant and trustworthy testimony of Scripture was the honored testimony of the saints of days gone by – figures both biblical and modern: "Fundamentalists, it seems, keep very good company. They are with Moses and the prophets, Paul and Peter, with Spurgeon, Toliver, Morris and a numberless crowd. Standing with these, it is a happy blessed companionship." Indeed, standing in solidarity with such towering figures of the past was a desirable and honorable position to occupy, and in fact to deviate from these old-time fundamental doctrines would be a show of arrogance and depredation to the legacy of these forebears; the fundamental faith, Williams declared, was "good enough for them and it is good enough for us."[43]

To this point Williams' anti-modernist polemic sounded very much like what one might have expected to hear from a white fundamentalist preacher. But in a rhetorical turn that would likely never have occurred to his white fundamentalist counterparts,

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[43]Ibid.

Williams judged modernism to be deficient not only on biblical grounds but also on *racial* grounds. The spirit of modernist theological innovation represented not only a break with historical luminaries like Charles Spurgeon but, even closer to home, it represented an attitude of disrespect toward the honored founders of the National Baptist denomination itself, and therefore an affront to both their theological legacy and the racial progress for which they had fought and which God had providentially provided through their activities. As Williams rattled off the names of past figures who stood firm for the fundamental gospel truths, he declared that some of them certainly "built up this denomination. These pulpits are products of their labors, they are the answers and fruits of the progress of a people, grateful to God because of what He did for them." The very pulpits of the National Baptist churches, from which some might be tempted to subvert the fundamentals in favor of the vogue of rationalistic modernism, owed their existence to the biblical fidelity of these saints, whom God had honored by providing their race with the gift of progress.

Williams went on to connect the very Baptist identity itself with the core fundamentalist convictions. These National Baptist pulpits were built upon Baptist doctrines and Baptist money, "and no man can honorably occupy them and at the same time use them to tarnish and discredit the vital heritage turned over to him, by predecessors who believed in the old time religion."[44] Similarly to other black fundamentalist apologists, Williams rhetorically linked faithfulness on the fundamental doctrines of the "old time religion" with both past accomplishments and future hopes in

[44]Ibid.

the arena of racial equality; to undermine these old, time-tested doctrinal truths constituted not only a theological betrayal, but a denominational (and, thus, racial) one as well.[45] To "tarnish and discredit the vital heritage" bequeathed by the long line of black Baptist predecessors was tantamount, it appears, to making "shipwreck of the faith of an untold number" in accordance with the apostasy passage of 1 Timothy 1:19-20, thus underscoring the urgency with which National Baptists must "bravely and wisely combat" modernist incursions into black Baptist life.[46]

This exhortation was undoubtedly even more biting considering that just minutes earlier Williams had held up the National Baptist Convention as the institution best positioned to rebut the racist claim that "Negroes are incapable of self-control," hailing black Baptists as "the only group of religionists who may illustrate that Negroes can live under popular government, enjoy its favors and rights, and share and help to carry its burdens and responsibilities."[47] If indeed National Baptists represented the best chance for African Americans to prove to the skeptical white majority their worthiness and fitness for self-government, and if fundamentalist doctrine represented the faithful historic identity of the Convention and its founders so much so that modernist denials of these doctrines would "tarnish and discredit" the denomination as a whole, then the

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[45]Recall, for example, the argument offered by the *Norfolk New Journal and Guide* editorialist to open chapter two. The June 1925 editorial argued that the fundamentalist faith "has brought [the race] thus far, and the belief is general that it is sufficient to carry us further in the enlargement of higher and better things in human life and living. . . . Yes, the Afro-American people are Fundamentalists, and they can give a reason for the faith that is in them by pointing to what they have become in this free Nation from what they began in the days of the Colonies." This line of argument is substantially congruent with Williams' approach here in September 1925, positing a direct connection between fundamentalist fidelity and racial advancement (both past and future). See: "Our Group are Fundamentalists in Religion," *Norfolk New Journal and Guide*, June 13, 1925, p. 12.

[46]"The Third Annual Address of Dr. L. K. Williams," 14-15.

[47]Ibid., 3.

conclusion is inescapable that in Williams' mind modernism represented a clear and present threat to the social advancement of the race itself. Thus the president of the convention connected the legitimate inclusion of African Americans as true participants in the American identity of democratic self-government – a noble goal shared by members of the race across the theological spectrum – with the preservation and proliferation of those most important doctrines that defined the fundamentalist movement. The fact that a desire to validate African Americans as legitimate participants in the American democratic identity was by no means limited to black fundamentalists, theological conservatives, or even religionists in general, makes Williams' connection between National Baptist fundamentalism and full participation in American identity even more remarkable.[48]

Having laid the foundation of biblical fidelity and added to it the weight of historical constancy, Williams crowned his apologetic defense of fundamentalism by once again returning to the epistemological superiority of the fundamentalist perspective over against that of modernism and evolutionism. Earlier in his address Williams had

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[48]For more in this vein, see the analysis in chapter six of this dissertation regarding Americanism as a contested identity in the context of the fundamentalist controversy in the black community. For an analysis of the widespread drive among African Americans for full participation in the American democratic identity during and immediately after World War I, see: Chad L. Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010). Other works covering later periods likewise include consideration of similar themes with respect to Americanism and military conflicts, such as Mary Dudziak's *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), which considers civil rights advances in the context of America's foreign image during the Cold War, and Kimberley L. Phillips' *War! What Is It Good For?: Black Freedom Struggles & the U.S. Military from World War II to Iraq* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), which contrasts the perspectives of elite and working-class blacks regarding the utility of military service as a means of staking claim to the full rights of American citizenship. With less of a military focus, William Tuttle similarly includes the drive for democratic participation and respect as one of several factors in the July 1919 Chicago race riot: William M. Tuttle, Jr., *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970).

dispensed of the charge that fundamentalists were anti-scientific, explaining that, to the contrary, they accepted science in its truest role: as a useful yet fallible authority with limited explanatory power, subordinate to the infallible authority of divine revelation. To this theme he returned once again to cap his defense of fundamentalism:

> We cannot afford to give up God's true and tried word for that which confesses itself to be a doubtful guess and an obscure hypothesis. To lead men to the light and life, we need, and we have in the gospel, some certainties, some verities and some factors that begin where science and all else, except revelation, limps and gives no final word. On the problem of the origin of this cosmos, while evolution is silent and confesses it does not know, the Bible is clear and definite, its writer knew and said: 'In the beginning God created.' Evolution does not pretend to account for life – the Bible does.[49]

Where modernist skepticism provided no consequential answers for the ultimate questions of origin and meaning, the Bible spoke with authority. Where evolutionism offered merely "a doubtful guess and an obscure hypothesis" which "limps and gives no final word," God's own voice reverberating through his self-revelation promised "certainties," "verities," and "clear and definite" knowledge to lead men to "the light and life" of Christ's gospel. Where modernistic rationalism offered no firm footing upon which to ground epistemological claims at all, the fundamentalist position recognized "God's tried and true word" as the bedrock upon which questions of ultimate knowledge rest. And, of course, whereas modernism represented a betrayal of the faith historic and of the NBC's black Baptist forebears, the embrace of old-time fundamentalist doctrines offered, in Williams' analysis, the chance for black Americans to demonstrate their fitness for social inclusion and to continue to push for racial progress.

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[49] "The Third Annual Address of Dr. L. K. Williams," 15.

Conclusion

Contrary to the historiographical implication that black ministers were far removed from the fundamentalist debates that raged in the first several decades of the twentieth century, we have seen that theologically conservative black pastors, across denominational and geographic lines, readily stood before their congregations not only to positively teach about the doctrines of fundamentalism but also to make pointed attacks on the liberal theology being propagated by encroaching modernists. Indeed, they were willing to use their authoritative position in the pulpit, as the very representatives of God before their congregations, to warn their flocks of the spiritual dangers and pitfalls that accompanied modernist infidelity. In these polemical attacks, black fundamentalist ministers sounded a lot like their white counterparts, just as chapter three demonstrated that their positive presentations of the fundamentals were very similar in nature. Fundamentalists on both sides of the color line exhorted their hearers to remain steadfast and true to both the biblical testimony and the historic orthodoxy of the church, and castigated modernist innovators as theological compromisers, agents of Satan, and the type of dangerous false teachers against whom the New Testament warns.

Where black fundamentalist preachers clearly differed from their brethren on the other side of the racial divide was in their willingness to make social and racial applications on the basis of both their positive theological teachings and their negative polemical warnings. Men like Isaac Berry, John Albert Johnson, and Lacey Kirk Williams connected fidelity to the fundamentals with the black race's hope of progress

in this life (as well as their hope for the next), and conversely portrayed modernists as working (wittingly or not) against the best interests of the African American community. It would self-evidently never have crossed the mind of someone like J. Frank Norris to draw Isaac Berry's application in favor of interracial marriage out of the doctrines of atonement and justification; if anything, Norris would have seen such a thing as an abhorrent betrayal of the God-ordained Jim Crow social order. Even white fundamentalists who were willing to partner with their black brethren on a relatively equal basis – some of whom will appear in the next chapter – typically opposed interracial marriage, and would have undoubtedly balked at Berry's application in that regard.

Yet at the same time, as we will see in chapter five, theological conservatives from across the racial divide *did* sometimes come together in common partnership. Differences in political and social worldviews did not eliminate the bedrock commonalities that they shared in their foundational religious worldviews; and in spite of the prevailing racial tensions and injustices of the day, there were occasions when black and white fundamentalists yoked themselves together in common ministry partnership, to try to improve relations between the races or to help meet some sort of need among black churches. Very commonly these kinds of efforts involved African American theological education – establishing black seminaries or Bible colleges – and they also commonly entailed white dominance at the top of the institutional hierarchy. The next chapter will look at one such partnership – the joint National Baptist and Southern Baptist endeavor to create the American Baptist Theological Seminary – that is

particularly remarkable because of the predominance of African Americans in the faculty, administration, and governing bodies of the school. The ABTS project offers a compelling perspective into both the unifying power of a common religious identity and the ever-present limits imposed on that religious unity by the towering social strictures of the Jim Crow era.

CHAPTER V

INTERRACIAL COOPERATION AND FUNDAMENTALIST EDUCATION: AMERICAN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

As we have seen thus far, black fundamentalism was less institutionally constructed and less overtly separatist than its white counterpart. While whites had fundamentalist-specific newspapers, networks, publishers, and conferences – in many cases separate from, and sometimes even skeptical of, traditional denominational ties – black conservatives were less willing to abandon their traditional associations and denominational affiliations due, at least in part, to the urgency of the racial problem and the pressing need for racial collaboration. Yet the formation and propagation of the black fundamentalist perspective was not a cause wholly bereft of institutional support. Black theological schools, in particular, played a substantial role in igniting and sustaining fundamentalism within the black ecclesiastical structure. Historian Albert G. Miller has argued that the development of African-American Bible schools in the middle decades of the twentieth century was "crucial in the development of the larger black fundamentalist movement." As centers designed "to stop the influence of modernism and liberal biblical interpretation in the African American community," these educational institutions served "vital roles in the development of a fundamentalist worldview in the black community both before and after World War II."[1] In order to

[1]Albert G. Miller, "The Construction of a Black Fundamentalist Worldview: The Role of Bible Schools," in *African Americans and the Bible*, ed. Vincent L. Wimbush (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2000), 718-19.

responsibly evaluate the basic contours of black fundamentalism – including the complex web of relationships that crossed racial lines on the basis of theological solidarity and crossed religious lines on the basis of racial solidarity – it is both helpful and needful to elicit some consideration of black fundamentalist theological education.

One such institution was the American Baptist Theological Seminary in Nashville, Tennessee. Founded and funded as a joint project between the white Southern Baptist Convention and the black National Baptist Convention, ABTS aimed to equip black clergy with a formal theological education on the basis of the common Baptist identity and convictions of these two major denominations. Although it was of course a segregated school, nevertheless it stands as a remarkable historical instance of interracial cooperation and fellowship in the Jim Crow South, based on both shared Baptist distinctives and, as will become clear as the chapter progresses, common fundamentalist and anti-modernist convictions between Southern Baptists and numerous high-ranking denominational and institutional officials from the National Baptists.

In fact, in comparison with the several schools that Miller invokes to substantiate his argument, ABTS stands out as exceptional on at least two counts. First, it is easily the earliest of the group. Of those addressed by Miller, the earliest is the Southern Bible Institute, founded in Dallas in 1928; others include the Manhattan Bible Institute (1938), the Carver Bible Institute (1943), the Cedine Bible Camp and Institute (1946), the Fellowship Bible Institute (1953), and the Manna Bible Institute (1953).[2] In contrast, the American Baptist Theological Seminary opened its doors in the fall of 1924, and was in

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[2]Ibid., 719.

fact the product of cooperative efforts between the Southern and National Baptist Conventions that stretched back well into the nineteen-teens. This locates the initial forays into the founding of the seminary in the early stages of the fundamentalist movement – well before the flashpoint of the Scopes Trial, and closer to the completion of *The Fundamentals* (1915) or Curtis Lee Laws' coining of the term "fundamentalism" (1920). Having been founded in the heat of the modernist-fundamentalist controversy, the institutional records reflect that members of both Baptist bodies were well aware of the dangers posed to fundamentalist Christianity by modernist theological commitments.

Not only is the Nashville seminary substantially earlier than those addressed by Miller, but it also displays significantly more African American initiative and control than the institutions that Miller examines. In his article, Miller sketches in some detail the histories of the Southern Bible Institute and Carver Bible Institute. Both SBI and CBI were unilateral creations of white ministers seeking to address a perceived need in the black community; moreover, the administration and faculty of both schools were, initially and for many years, overwhelmingly white.[3] These institutes might be considered examples of "interracial cooperation" in the sense that both white and black people were involved in the project, but they were involved in vastly different capacities; the fact that the student population was black while the faculty, administration, and founding personalities were almost exclusively white suggests that the schools might well be classed as exercises in paternalism rather than any sort of interracial endeavors allowing for ownership and investment from both sides.

[3]Ibid., 719-24. For Miller's analysis of the Southern Bible Institute, see pp. 719-21; for his analysis of Carver Bible Institute, see pp. 721-24.

The American Baptist Theological Seminary, on the other hand, was an interracial cooperative endeavor from the outset. Not only was the need for black theological education recognized and acknowledged by both the white and black Baptist denominations, but the leadership and governance of the school was likewise shared between the two racial groups. Southern Baptists were granted a two-to-one ratio on the Holding Board, which controlled the school's property, while National Baptists enjoyed the same proportional advantage on the Governing Board (lending the National Baptists a larger advantage in absolute numbers, since the Governing Board was the larger of the two bodies). Not only this, but the faculty was also predominantly composed of black instructors; indeed, the founding documents explicitly provided that the seminary's president would come from the National Baptists. Far from a project predicated on the concept of white leaders exclusively showering their knowledge down upon the theologically-impoverished black masses, ABTS was indeed an interracial endeavor in which both black and white Baptists had financial, administrative, and institutional stakes. And while white participants in this venture did at times display varying shades of paternalistic thought, congruent with their historical context, they also demonstrated a level of cooperation, concern, and fellowship across racial lines that was unusual among their peers.

Given its somewhat unique character, then, it is peculiar that American Baptist Seminary has garnered relatively little attention in the historiographies of fundamentalism, Southern Baptists, or even National Baptists. Not only is it absent from Miller's examination of fundamentalism in black theological schools, it also earns only

passing mention in such books as Paul Harvey's *Redeeming the South* (a monograph explicitly concerned with white and black Baptists in the South) and Lillian B. Horace's biography of L.K. Williams, the National Baptist president who oversaw the seminary's founding. Harvey seemingly dismisses the school as "small, underfunded, and conflicted by its place in a region that had never come to terms with black higher education," an institution whose "ultimate authority for governance was to rest with whites" – a problematic contention, given the school's administrative construction.[4] Horace, conversely, just briefly mentions it as a project with potential to "break down hostility" and "bring about a friendly relation between the racial groups."[5] This view certainly differs from Harvey's regarding the nature of the institution, but both essentially treat the seminary more as a historical footnote rather than a unique object deserving of substantial inquiry.[6]

More than a mere footnote, however, ABTS is a fascinating artifact of study that can shed light on the various racial and religious commitments that characterized life and ministry for black fundamentalists. Though fundamentalism and the black community are rarely connected in the historiography of African-American religion, the American Baptist Seminary was marked from the beginning by fundamentalist doctrine and anti-modernist concerns. Southern Baptists' participation in the venture, in fact, was largely

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[4]Paul Harvey, *Redeeming the South: Religious Cultures and Racial Identities Among Southern Baptists, 1865-1925* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 169, 185.

[5]Lillian B. Horace, *"Crowned with Glory and Honor": the Life of Rev. Lacey Kirk Williams* (Hicksville, NY: Exposition Press, 1978), 107.

[6]Others, such as Mary Beth Swetnam Mathews' *Doctrine and Race: African American Evangelicals and Fundamentalism Between the Wars* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2017), fail to mention ABTS at all in the main text. This is particularly interesting given that Mathews' book is expressly concerned with the issue of fundamentalism and the black church, and that the National Baptist Convention, Inc. is one of the four primary denominations of focus. Mathews' only mention of ABTS comes in a footnote concerning the National Baptist split. See Mathews, *Doctrine and Race*, 169.

contingent on the school's fidelity to the theologically conservative fundamentals of the Christian faith – a concern shared by numerous participating members of the National Baptist Convention and reflected in the early adoption of a confession of faith expressly adherent to, among other things, the five fundamentals.

The story of ABTS offers a compelling display of interracial cooperation and fellowship in the Jim Crow South on the basis of common religious identity – as Baptists and, for some, expressly as fundamentalists. Yet at the same time, this joint educational venture also highlights the limits of such interracial cooperation in this historical context. For white Southern Baptists, even those who professed true concern and heartfelt love toward their black brethren, the ubiquitous specter of white superiority proved impossible to completely outrun. For black National Baptist fundamentalists involved in directing ABTS, the joint venture with their white counterparts in zealous defense of the essentials of the faith intriguingly existed side-by-side with a denominational willingness to include more modernistic thinkers in both membership and partnership in view of their common racial identity and the pressing need for racial advancement.

"A Plan of Fraternal Cooperation": Inception and Founding

Though it opened its Nashville doors to students for the first time in October of 1924, the inception of the seminary dates back to even before World War I. Sutton E. Griggs, serving at the time as the Educational Secretary of the National Baptist Convention, Inc., first offered the idea of a joint venture with the white Southern Baptists in the interest of founding a National Baptist seminary for the training of black

Baptist clergy. Griggs quickly found Southern Baptist kindred spirits in this endeavor, among them Edgar Young Mullins and Orren Luico Hailey, and in the May 1913 meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention Dr. Mullins introduced a resolution pledging the denomination's support of the enterprise and approving a joint committee between the Southern and National Baptists to further explore the feasibility of establishing such a seminary.[7] By September of that year the joint committee was established, declaring it "exceedingly desirable and expedient" to establish "a general seminary for the training of the Negro preachers of the gospel" at the behest of and under the auspices of the National Baptist Convention, in conjunction with the "practical and financial cooperation of other organizations of Baptists who may indicate a desire to share in this important work."[8]

As promising a start as this was, activity on the seminary ground to a halt between 1915 and 1919 on account of both World War I and, even more importantly to this particular undertaking, the looming controversy and eventual split between two factions within the National Baptist Convention.[9] A dispute over control of the National Baptist Publishing House ultimately divided the denomination into two exclusive National Baptist bodies – one unincorporated and one incorporated – the latter of which

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[7]A. M. Townsend, "Some Observations on the History of the American Baptist Theological Seminary," 11 April 1951, p. 1, The Southern Baptist Commission on the American Baptist Seminary Records, AR 630, Box 3, Folder 24, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee (hereafter cited as Commission on ABTS Records); L. S. Sedberry, "Report on the American Baptist Theological Seminary," n.d., p. 1, Commission on ABTS Records, AR 630, Box 6, Folder 37.

[8]"Minutes of a Joint Meeting of the Two Committees of the Southern Baptist Convention and the National Baptist Convention," 18 September 1913, Commission on ABTS Records, AR 630, Box 1, Folder 1.

[9]"Negro Theological Education: Southern Baptist Attitude and Actions, 1913-1938," pp. 4-9, Commission on ABTS Records, AR 630, Box 6, Folder 25.

continued in cooperative fellowship with the Southern Baptists from 1919 forward.[10] In 1914, prior to the project's temporary stay, the joint committee had undertaken to settle on a location for the seminary, ultimately coming down to a decision between Memphis and Nashville. Though the committee initially settled on Memphis, the Memphis delegation's failure to make good on their financial promises prompted A. M. Townsend and the Negro Baptist Ministers' Conference of Nashville to petition for reconsideration, on the basis of Nashville's ability to follow through on its $25,000 proposition thanks to the backing of both the city's Negro Board of Trade and Nashville's white businessmen represented by the Commercial Club. Nashville, the black Baptist ministers promised in early 1915, was eager to house the seminary and to ensure its success because it represented "the first effort made by our White brethren of the South toward the education of our Negro Ministry."[11] Once the seminary project reignited following the

[10]Lillian Horace offers a brief explanation from an insider's perspective of the National Baptist split, and the conditions surrounding the publishing house dispute. See Horace, *"Crowned With Glory and Honor,"* 174-75. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham likewise attributes the National Baptist split to the controversy surrounding the publishing board. See Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 164. Mary Beth Swetnam Mathews also examines the controversy, offering a possible doctrinal component to the denominational split in addition to the commonly cited conflict over control of the publishing house. See Mathews, *Doctrine and Race*, 43-44. Mathews posits that the future trajectory of both bodies' denominational newspapers indicates a theological divide between the more conservative and fundamentalist-friendly Unincorporated group and the more progressive Incorporated group, though she acknowledges that this is essentially suppositional in nature, since "a clear dichotomy between the two conventions . . . is impossible to identify or defend." As we have seen in prior chapters, and as we will see in this chapter, the incorporated body, though it certainly included members with a variety of theological perspectives, nevertheless contained its own contingent of fundamentalists, which happened to include most notably the Convention's longtime president Lacey Kirk Williams.

[11]A. M. Townsend to E. Y. Mullins, 4 January 1915, Commission on ABTS Records, AR 630, Box 1, Folder 1.

National Baptist split, the question of location was revisited and by 1920 Nashville was at last the committee's city of choice.[12]

As the joint committee renewed its work, the question of the physical setting was not the only pressing issue. Given the multiple racial as well as denominational interests vested in the project, any forward movement in the work required that the joint committee first clearly elucidate a set of principles for managing, administrating, and governing the institution. By 1922 the Southern and National Baptists had agreed upon an administrative structure that would later be formally encapsulated in the school's bylaws. Oversight of the seminary would be split between two governing bodies, each with the responsibility to elect its own officers. The Holding Board, consisting of twelve total members with an eight-to-four advantage for the Southern Baptists, would hold ownership of the institution's property and lease the property to the seminary annually for a nominal sum. The Board of Directors, on the other hand, was to have complete direction over the functioning and activities of the seminary itself, and was to be composed of thirty-six members and a two-to-one proportional advantage for the National Baptists. In addition, the president of the Board of Directors and the president of the seminary were both to be National Baptists, while a Southern Baptist was to hold the position of general secretary.[13]

Although the ultimate governing structure of the institution did not necessarily reflect the fullness of the National Baptist Convention's desire, annunciated by the joint

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[12]"Negro Theological Education: Southern Baptist Attitude and Actions, 1913-1938," p. 10, Commission on ABTS Records, AR 630, Box 6, Folder 25.

[13]Ibid., 13-14; Minutes of Board of Directors Meeting, 25 June 1924, Commission on ABTS Records, AR 630, Box 1, Folder 1.

committee in its first meeting in 1913, that the seminary might totally "be controlled by the National Baptist Convention," the distribution of board memberships and administrative offices imparted substantial control and power over the operation and direction of the school into the hands of black Baptists.[14] Not only did National Baptists enjoy the two-thirds majority on the Board of Directors, which along with the presidency of the institution lent them the clear majority in directing the operating affairs of the school, but they also held the advantage in terms of total number of board seats across the two governing bodies, twenty-eight to twenty-two.[15]

Moreover, the significant African-American influence inherent in this governing structure is notable as it markedly contrasts with the examples of other institutions for black fundamentalist education in the same era. Consider for example the Southern Bible Institute (originally the Dallas Colored Bible Institute), founded by Edmund H. Ironside, a white seminary student at Evangelical Theological College (now Dallas Theological Seminary). Ironside founded the institution as a result of his conversations with black preachers in Dallas who desired theological education, and he served as the school's

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[14]"Minutes of a Joint Meeting of the Two Committees of the Southern Baptist Convention and the National Baptist Convention," 18 September 1913, Commission on ABTS Records, AR 630, Box 1, Folder 1.

[15]Largely congruent with A. M. Townsend's 1915 evaluation that ABTS represented "the first effort made by our White brethren of the South toward the education of our Negro Ministry," W. E. B. Du Bois had noted in 1903 that friction often arose between white and black churches on the issue of interracial cooperation because "the white Baptist mission societies have failed to understand the Negro desire for home rule and autonomy, and the Negro recipients have not fully appreciated the help they have received from without." W. E. B. Du Bois, ed., *The Negro Church: Report of a Social Study Made under the Direction of Atlanta University; Together with the Proceedings of the Eighth Conference for the Study of the Negro Problems, Held at Atlanta University, May 26th, 1903* (Atlanta: Atlanta University Press, 1903; repr., Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2003), 153. The structure of the ABTS governing boards, with the numerical advantage for National Baptists, appears to be a step in the direction of white Baptists acknowledging black Baptists' desire for "home rule and autonomy" in the midst of interracial cooperative efforts.

president for the first fourteen years of its existence, thus setting a precedent of white presidential leadership that would remain intact well into the twenty-first century.[16] The Carver Bible Institute in Atlanta, likewise, was founded and largely controlled by a white graduate of Moody Bible Institute, Talmadge Payne.[17] In contrast, ABTS emerged from an interracial cooperative effort between two major denominations, initiated by a major leader in the National Baptist Convention, and boasted a governing structure that was majority African American.[18]

From the start American Baptist Seminary was a testament to both a remarkable willingness to promote fellowship across racial lines and, by way of contrast, the persistent reality of racial barriers that would brook no violation. Both black and white members of the Joint Commission recognized in their 1921 report to the Southern and National Baptist Conventions not only the historical import of this partnership, but also the very basis of the project as grounded in the doctrinal imperatives of Christian love and the brotherhood of all those who partake in the gospel of Christ. The fact that three million white Baptists and three million black Baptists could "unite in an enterprise

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[16]Michael J. F. Cooks, "The Historical Development and Future of the Southern Bible Institute" (Ed.D. diss., University of North Texas, 2008), 28-29; Michael Cooks, "The History and Future of the Southern Bible Institute: A Post-Secondary School of Biblical Studies for African Americans," *Christian Higher Education* 9, no. 2 (2010), 152-53.

[17]Miller, "The Construction of a Black Fundamentalist Worldview," 721-24.

[18]The unusual nature of the interracial cooperation surrounding ABTS might be seen even in the small fact that the Board of Directors minutes reflect that black ministers often led the opening and closing prayers. Contrast this with the testimony of a Mexican-American minister who had been trained in a Presbyterian seminary during the interwar period, who lamented that "At Synod meetings a Mexican American has never directed a study group, said a prayer, or anything." See Rudy V. Busto, *King Tiger: The Religious Vision of Reies López Tijerina* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), 80. Though of course the experiences of Mexican Americans and African Americans in this period are not identical, and the denominational distinctions between Baptists and Presbyterians are not to be dismissed, the contrast is at least suggestive of a desire for legitimate interracial partnership on the part of the founders of the American Baptist Theological Seminary.

which has as its sole objective the training of colored men for the ministry of Jesus Christ" represented a "really a notable event . . . prophetic of better relationships between the races." Moreover, the institution itself would stand as "a monument expressive of the Christian fellowship which exists between the Southern Baptist Convention and the National Baptist Convention" through which "the two races will be more closely bound together in loving devotion to our risen Lord." The committee further reported that at a time "when so many evil-minded persons representing both races, are endeavoring to intensify racial antagonism . . . this commission is made up of those, both white and colored, who seek to incarnate the constraining love of Christ." Thus, as reported to both conventions, this interracial endeavor was not only an important cultural landmark, but it was in fact an essentially theological engagement, necessitated and driven by the theological implications of the gospel. Even more specifically, it was driven by a fundamentalist understanding of theses doctrines: the literal atoning nature of Christ's death entailed that "the racial partitions which separated humanity were broken down," and the literal physical resurrection of Christ was the basis for the increasing "Christian fellowship which exists" between white Southern Baptists and black National Baptists.[19] Yet even the best intentioned of human enterprises cannot fully transcend their cultural context, and the American Baptist Seminary was no exception on either side of the partnership.

From the Southern Baptist position, perhaps no single person better represented the spirit of Christian fellowship and cooperation – and certainly no white man was more

[19]"Report of the Joint Commission Meeting," 6 July 1921, Commission on ABTS Records, AR 630, Box 3, Folder 24.

indelibly associated with the seminary – than Orren L. Hailey. In fact, Hailey himself provides a compelling example of the juxtaposition between an unusually progressive friendliness toward interracial fellowship and the inescapably latent cultural sense of stark racial differentiation. The son of an antislavery southerner, young Orren Hailey absorbed from his father a sense of compassion for the plight of African Americans in the South before, during, and after the Civil War, as well as, in the words of one lifelong acquaintance, "an inveterate adherence to what [he] believed was right, with no consideration of self-interest." Having long aspired to help establish a seminary for black theological education, Hailey devoted much of the last two decades of his life to the service of ABTS, both as a member of the Joint Commission and then as the institution's general secretary – a job which cost Hailey an enormous amount of time and energy traveling the country, visiting churches, raising awareness, and procuring funding for the school.[20]

Hailey's niece later recalled the solemnity and reverence with which her uncle faced the likely prospect of being appointed to the position of general secretary, even to the point of refusing his wife's heart-wrenching plea to turn down the appointment, because he considered the opportunity "a call from God" on his life. Hailey understood that the position would require a man of great conviction, strength, and resolve, for the undertaking guaranteed that all of "the southern traditions and prejudices" would be

[20]"O. L. Hailey: By a Lifelong Acquaintance," Una Roberts Lawrence Collection, AR 631, Box 3, Folder 4, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee (hereafter cited as Lawrence Collection); Willie May Hall to a cousin (unnamed), Lawrence Collection, AR 631, Box 3, Folder 4.

aligned against him and his work.[21] His time working to resolve the National Baptist schism in the mid-1910s had convinced Hailey that a great many Southern Baptists firmly rejected any endeavor intended to help black southerners, meaning that his work for ABTS would involve not only administration and fundraising, but also the overwhelming task of challenging the deeply entrenched racial perspectives embedded in the hearts and minds of numerous white Southern Baptists.[22] Interestingly, though perhaps not surprisingly, among those who experienced a transformed perspective through Hailey's work was his own wife, who in looking back upon her desire to dissuade her husband from the work of the seminary wondered, "How could I have been so prejudiced and so deceived in my attitude toward the Negro?"[23]

Indeed, O. L. Hailey's seemingly endless travel and tireless promotion of the seminary among both white and black churches across the country earned him respect from his National Baptist colleagues as well. In a 1928 letter to the Board of Directors, luminary National Baptist president Lacey Kirk Williams praised Hailey's "heroic and selfless service" to the school.[24] In like fashion, upon Hailey's death in 1934 the seminary's longtime dean James H. Garnett offered a tribute in the *National Baptist Voice*, lauding the secretary's "invaluable mission," having been appointed by divine providence for the task of "bridging the chasm" between the races in the South and creating "deeper interest and greater sympathy on the part of the white Baptists for the

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[21]Willie May Hall to a cousin (unnamed), Lawrence Collection, AR 631, Box 3, Folder 4.

[22]Harvey, *Redeeming the South*, 247.

[23]Willie May Hall to a cousin (unnamed), Lawrence Collection, AR 631, Box 3, Folder 4.

[24]Minutes of Board of Directors Meeting, 11 April 1928, Commission on ABTS Records, AR 630, Box 1, Folder 3.

needs of the colored Baptists."[25] Yet even as he clearly evinced racial views well in advance of many of his Southern Baptist contemporaries, Hailey also showed that the social and cultural milieu of his age was difficult to escape entirely. Prior to the formal establishment of the seminary, he expressed doubts as to whether "some one of the Negro race" was "capable of assuming the duties" of the institution's presidency without prior training from white Southern Baptists.[26] Such an evaluation was likely grounded partly in a recognition of the real educational disparity between white and black communities, but partly also in a de facto assumption of white superiority in matters of the mind.[27]

This dissonance is likewise reflected in a promotional article that Hailey authored, intended to convey to the public the goals upon which the school was founded in the years leading up to its opening. The paper conveyed a spirit of mutual cooperation and a mutual desire that black Baptists would have significant freedom in running the institution while allowing for Southern Baptists to come alongside in an advisory capacity. The goal of the seminary, according to this promotional material, was to "provide for the largest amount of freedom on the part of the Negro brethren in the conduct and support of the seminary, while, at the same time, the Southern Baptist

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[25]"A Tribute to Dr. O. L. Hailey," *National Baptist Voice*, n.d., Commission on ABTS Records, AR 630, Box 5, Folder 25.

[26]Willie May Hall to a cousin (unnamed), Lawrence Collection, AR 631, Box 3, Folder 4.

[27]Curtis Evans has convincingly demonstrated that the idea that African Americans possess a "natural genius for religion," traceable to the "romantic racialism" of the antebellum era, was rooted in an assumption of black intellectual inferiority. Even as abolitionists featured the portrait of "naturally religious" Africans in their antislavery polemics, this "naturally" superior capacity for "religious feeling" and "emotion" was expressly contrasted with Anglo-Saxons' "naturally" superior intellectual capacity. See Curtis J. Evans, *The Burden of Black Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 36-37.

Convention should be in such cordial and fraternal relation that they might be able to give counsel or assistance whenever it might be desired."[28]

At the same time, however, Southern Baptist presence on the governing boards, including a Southern Baptist majority on the Holding Board, guaranteed that the "white friends should have the assurance that their liberality would be administered under the combined counsel of both peoples," and therefore that no essential Southern Baptist convictions would be violated.[29] Obviously, part of that assurance was geared toward issues of doctrinal fidelity – including faithfulness relative to fundamentalist perspectives, as will become clear later in this chapter; but even beyond doctrinal concerns, it is no stretch to imagine that issues of cultural importance to white southerners, such as institutional segregation, were also motivations (even if below the surface) in the Southern Baptist involvement and support. After all, neither Hailey nor any of his compatriots appear to have so much as considered the idea of integrating the extant white Baptist seminaries after which ABTS was to be modeled.[30] Moreover, the assurance that the school would include significant white administrative input was placed in counterpoint to the National Baptists' administrative freedom to "call into play all their native powers" – a likely reference to the common perception that African

[28]O. L. Hailey, "A Plan of Cooperation Between the Southern Baptist Convention and the National Baptist Convention," Minutes of Board of Directors Meeting, 11 April 1928, Commission on ABTS Records, AR 630, Box 1, Folder 3.

[29]Ibid.

[30]Fascinatingly, in a circumstance that will be explicated at some length later in this chapter, nearly two decades later the chairman of the Southern Baptist Commission on the seminary, Eugene Perry Alldredge, would tentatively suggest that Southern Baptist Theological Seminary begin to accept black graduates of ABTS into its graduate programs as a hedge against modernist incursions into the black community.

Americans were “naturally religious.”[31] If this reading is indeed correct, then the article subtly implied that, while the black leaders of the school would employ their superior affinity for emotional religious connection, the whites would be there to ensure that the intellectual and strictly doctrinal trajectory of the school remained in proper alignment. So with seminary preparations now in full swing, the color line was indeed being crossed in terms of interdenominational cooperation and even interracial fellowship on the basis of a common religious identity, but assumptions about inherent racial distinctions and the propriety of segregated institutions were too deeply ingrained in the cultural mindset to be questioned.

Interestingly, such attitudes were not merely the domain of white Southern Baptists. National Baptists, on the one hand, recognized the significance that this project represented in the context of the Jim Crow South. As noted earlier, the Negro Baptist Ministers’ Conference of Nashville characterized the project as “the first effort made by our White brethren of the South toward the education of our Negro Ministry,” grounding their enthusiastic support for the seminary at least partly in its unique character as a cooperative venture designed to offer white support while leaving substantial control in the hands of black leaders.[32] Likewise, the 1921 Joint Commission report reflected the

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[31]Hailey, “A Plan of Cooperation Between the Southern Baptist Convention and the National Baptist Convention.” As noted previously in footnote 27, Curtis Evans’ *The Burden of Black Religion* has demonstrated the intimate connection between the presentation of African Americans as “naturally religious” and the assumption of black intellectual inferiority.

[32]A. M. Townsend to E. Y. Mullins, 4 January 1915, Commission on ABTS Records, AR 630, Box 1, Folder 1. The Negro Baptist Ministers’ Conference’s conception of ABTS as a unique venture accords well with James Melvin Washington’s evaluation of the circumstances that led, at least in part, to the founding of the National Baptist Convention as a racially and ecclesiastically separate body in 1895: “There were few white Baptist leaders who were open enough to listen to black views, and moderate enough to share social power wherever possible.” James Melvin Washington, *Frustrated Fellowship: The Black Baptist Quest for Social Power*, paperback ed. (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2004), 159.

hopes of the black Baptist participants as much as the white that ABTS would represent a social and theological bridge to bring the races into closer fellowship.[33] At the same time, however, National Baptist leaders also explicitly supported the seminary as a segregated institution due to either their understanding of the distinctive ecclesiastical challenges facing black pastors, their acceptance of prevailing theories of racial differentiation, or both.[34]

While both the 1913 and 1921 reports of the Joint Commission strongly implied the need for ABTS to exist as a black seminary in order to address the particular social circumstances facing black clergy, a letter from Sutton E. Griggs to the Southern Baptist Convention in 1920 suggests that a concurrent sense of indelible racial differences, influenced undoubtedly in part by the day's theories of scientific racism, impacted the National Baptist founders of the seminary as well as the white Southern Baptists.[35] Writing to thank Southern Baptists for their support of black education, Griggs posited that "the human family has been divided into various races" and that nature had assigned "each racial group its special task even as she has done the cells of the human body."

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[33]"Report of the Joint Commission Meeting," 6 July 1921, Commission on ABTS Records, AR 630, Box 3, Folder 24.

[34]Given the recurring claims about the vital need for an educated black clergy, ABTS can certainly be conceptualized as an exercise in "racial uplift." For a historical consideration and critique of racial uplift as a widespread strategy for race advancement in the twentieth century, see Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

[35]Explicating the concept of "scientific racism," Matthew Frye Jacobson provides a compelling analysis of the ways in which theories of racial hierarchy, evolutionism, and eugenics served as popular scientific justifications for racist and xenophobic attitudes in the United States early in the twentieth century. See especially chapter 4 of Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876-1917* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000). For analysis of how the scientific racism of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century related to the common characterization of black religion as "emotional" and "sensual," see Curtis Evans, *The Burden of Black Religion*, especially pp. 121-135.

Invoking the bloody specter of World War I, Griggs argued that the German threat of "enforced amalgamation" was defeated only by "the attachment of men to their respective races. . . . French *enthusiasm* and British *persistence* [overcame] German *organization*. If there had been a fusion of the English and the French, French enthusiasm might have been swamped by British coldness, and British persistence might have given way to French volatility." This violent example testified to "the possibilities of evil bound up in the question of race adjustment" – evils that had recently become evident even in Chicago, the "great city of the liberal west," in the form of race riots.[36]

For Griggs the solution to the problem of "race adjustment," at least for the distinct white and black races in America, was black Christian education, equipping African Americans to "use their consecrated lives and their trained powers to induce a spirit of love in the hearts of all men, knowing that from such a spirit there can come forth no unjust laws, nor unjust administration of laws."[37] With an eye toward the accomplishment of this goal, Griggs approached the Southern Baptist Convention to

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[36]Sutton E. Griggs to the Southern Baptist Convention, *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention 1920* (Nashville: Marshall and Bruce Co., 1920), p. 122, The Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee, http://media2.sbhla.org.s3.amazonaws.com/annuals/SBC_Annual_1920.pdf.

For background and analysis of the Chicago race riots of 1919, see William M. Tuttle, Jr., *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970); for a broader evaluation of the widespread violence and rioting during the Red Summer of 1919, including the Chicago riots, see Chad L. Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), especially chapter 6.

[37]Much of the text of Griggs' letter, both in outlook and in language, is to some degree reminiscent of Booker T. Washington's "Atlanta Compromise" address in which he famously declared, "In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress." Griggs' hope that an educated black clergy would "induce a spirit of love" in all men that would ensure "no unjust laws, nor unjust administration of laws" is reflective of Washington's hope that African Americans being "prepared for the exercise of these privileges [of the law]" might ultimately bring about a "higher good . . . in a blotting out of sectional differences and racial animosities and suspicions, in a determination to administer absolute justice, in a willing obedience among all classes to the mandates of law." See Louis R. Harlan, ed., *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, vol. 3, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974), 583–587.

"express our warm appreciation of the interest you are manifesting in our education" and to promise that "the educated Christian negroes will not disappoint their sponsors." This investment in black theological education would provide for the ultimate end of both races living "in peace and justice by the side of each other" – side by side but, as with the cells of a body, nevertheless distinct and separate.[38] Though Griggs obviously did not countenance the idea that the black race was inherently inferior, his affirmation of the idea that blacks were inherently different and separate did seem at least partly in line with the scientific theories of racial differentiation common to this era.[39] From this perspective blacks needed their own seminary not only because they faced a unique set of *social* circumstances, but also because they faced a unique set of *biological* circumstances. On this point, consistent with the cultural and racial milieu of the early twentieth century, members of both the white and black Baptist conventions agreed.

Hence, while the American Baptist Theological Seminary represented a landmark effort in some respects regarding Baptist interracial cooperation and fellowship, it also demonstrated that any such effort was simultaneously circumscribed by cultural assumptions about race that were difficult for either side to entirely jettison.

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[38]Sutton E. Griggs to the Southern Baptist Convention, *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention 1920*, pp. 122-123.

[39]In this respect, Griggs was not singularly unique even among black ministers. Bishop L. W. Kyle of North Carolina, addressing the 1924 A.M.E. Zion General Conference, made similar comments on the topic of blacks' constitutional rights of citizenship: "The position we take on this subject is not based upon any desire on our part for the amalgamation of the races. We are content to follow the divergent trend of the races in things purely racial. . . . We are willing to develop our distinct racial characteristics and to shape our character after the standards of Christianity. . . . Our contention is based upon the desire for the full enjoyment of all the rights of citizenship guaranteed by the Constitution." W. H. Davenport, "Bishop L. W. Kyles Applauded While Delivering Sentiment of Bishops to Delegates," *Star of Zion*, 15 May 1924, p. 1. National Baptist E. W. D. Isaac also expressed similar ideas about the propriety of southern race relations. See E. W. D. Isaac to I. J. Van Ness, 2 April 1928, I. J. Van Ness Papers, AR 795-112, Box 16, Folder 6, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

This juxtaposition made the seminary a compelling mixture of cultural progressivism and cultural conservatism on the issue of race, even while it was an institution marked theologically by a commitment to doctrinal fundamentalism.

Doctrines and Disputes

Having explored the circumstances surrounding the founding of American Baptist Theological Seminary, including both racial and (to some degree) theological perspectives characterizing both sides in the decade leading up to the school's opening, the question remains as to the theological character of its teaching and administration – that is, whether it can really be characterized as a "fundamentalist" institution. An examination of the seminary's official doctrines as well as the theological controversies and disputes that arose over the first two decades of its existence will demonstrate that it was, both in institutional leadership and in denominational administration from both racial groups, an institution dedicated to the doctrines of fundamentalism and opposed to theological modernism.

Shortly before ABTS opened its doors for the first time in October of 1924, the Board of Directors officially approved the school's Confession of Faith, a document intended to set the theological guiderails within which the institution could and should function. The chain of events leading ultimately to the adoption of the confession began in 1919, when Southern Baptists received the alarming news that the National Baptists had joined hands with the Interchurch World Movement as part of an enlarged denominational fundraising campaign. O. L. Hailey, delivering the report of the

seminary commission to the 1920 Convention, sought to alleviate the concerns of his Southern Baptist brethren, noting that the National Baptist leaders "assure us that this arrangement does not call for any change in either their doctrines, or polity, nor any exchange of finances, further than a return to the Interchurch World Movement such money as was advanced them to carry out their enlarged undertaking."[40] Just two years later, however, the National Baptists further alarmed their Southern Baptist counterparts by joining with the Federal Council of Churches – a move that caused Southern Baptists to question the propriety of their involvement in the seminary project. E. P. Alldredge, the man who would chair the committee appointed to draft the ABTS Confession of Faith, later recalled that these associations prompted O. L. Hailey to address the Board of Directors in April of 1924. Hailey informed the Board that the Southern Baptist Convention would only continue this joint effort to build and launch ABTS on one condition: "that the Seminary should work out and adopt a clearcut Confession of Faith which would be approved by both Conventions represented on the Board of Directors and would be signed by all presidents and all teachers of the Seminary."[41]

Forged in such an environment, it is little surprise that the confession unanimously adopted by the Board in September 1924 was a document intended to safeguard the theological conservatism and doctrinal fundamentalism that Southern Baptists feared would be compromised by the NBC's associations with more ecumenical and modernist organizations. The school's confession affirmed each of the "five

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[40]"Report of the Commission on the Negro Theological Seminary," *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention 1920*, p. 119.

[41]E. P. Alldredge to R. W. Riley, 9 April 1949, Commission on ABTS Records, AR 630, Box 3, Folder 27.

fundamentals" within the first three articles (cf. chapter three), and also proceeded to include an explicit denial of evolution as well as explicit recognitions of the personality of Satan, the reality of heaven and hell, and the literal resurrection of all men on judgment day.[42] At this exact historical moment Southern Baptists were also crafting the Baptist Faith and Message, which the convention would adopt in 1925. It should come as no surprise, then, that the ABTS confession was highly congruent with the 1925 SBC confession, which characterized itself as "a reaffirmation of Christian fundamentals" occasioned by "the prevalence of naturalism in the modern teaching and preaching of religion." One notable point of distinction is that the seminary's confession explicitly mentioned race in its article on evangelism, affirming that the gospel equally applies to all people "without regard to race or color or creed," while the SBC's statement more vaguely spoke of the Christian's duty to "extend the gospel to the ends of the earth." With respect to basic fundamentalist theology, however, the two confessions were of a piece.[43]

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[42]In 1921, just three years prior to the formulation of the ABTS Confession of Faith, Carter G. Woodson devoted a chapter of his *History of the Negro Church* to reflections on the differences between "conservatives" and "progressives" among black Christians. Woodson's dichotomy included both theological and social elements. Theologically, he contrasted the conservative's commitment to "the crude notions of Biblical interpretation [and] the grotesque vision of the hereafter" with the progressive's "developed mind [which] found itself unwillingly at war with such extravagant claims and seeking a hearing for a new idea." Socially, Woodson contrasted (among other things) the conservative's intellectual weakness and hostility toward education with the progressive's commitment to education on the basis that "there can be little revelation of God where there is arrested mental development." See Carter G. Woodson, *The History of the Negro Church*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: The Associated Publishers, 1921), 178-79. ABTS, however, seems to complicate this paradigm. The school's confession affirmed traditional doctrines about hell and Satan, which presumably fit into Woodson's categorization of conservatives' "grotesque version of the hereafter," in contrast to progressives' search for "a new idea" in theology. Yet at the same time, this conservative theology did not manifest in hostility toward education, as Woodson's paradigm would seem to predict; on the contrary, the entire existence of ABTS was based on the idea of uplifting the race by making education more affordable and accessible to black Baptist clergymen.

[43]"Confession of Faith," Minutes of Board of Directors Meeting, 13 September 1924, Commission on ABTS Records, AR 630, Box 1, Folder 1; "1925 Baptist Faith and Message Statement of

The conservative bent of the seminary's confession was not solely a function of Southern Baptist influence and concern, for certain. While the National Baptist Convention was by no means a categorically fundamentalist denomination, there were substantial fundamentalist impulses within the convention, even among some of the most influential leadership. For example, the denomination's deeply respected president, Lacey Kirk Williams, exhorted all of the convention delegates in 1925 to side with the fundamentalists, proclaiming that modernism must be "bravely and wisely combatted" by churchmen lest it "make shipwreck of the faith of an untold number."[44] Williams himself was closely involved with the founding of ABTS; he was named in the school's charter as one of the original members of the Board of Directors, and in the year leading up to the school's opening he participated in numerous committees, including the Committee on Permanent Organization, the Committee on Finance, and the Committee on Incorporation.[45] Similarly, Lewis Garnett Jordan – who was involved in recruiting for ABTS and served the convention as the general secretary of the Foreign Mission Board, the denominational historian, and the General Missionary – represented a commitment to doctrinal fundamentalism within National Baptist leadership. Seeking to acquire several thousand copies of the SBC's Baptist Faith and Message to distribute at his convention, Jordan lauded the document as a noble repudiation of "unsound views of the Bible," functioning as "a reaffirmation of Christian fundamentals" and a needful remedy to "the

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the Southern Baptist Convention," The Reformed Reader, accessed 10 July 2017. http://www.reformedreader.org/ccc/1925bfam.htm.

[44]"The Third Annual Address of Dr. L. K. Williams, President," *National Baptist Voice* 10, no. 40, 17 October 1925, 14.

[45]Minutes of Board of Directors Meeting, 12 March 1924, Commission on ABTS Records, AR 630, Box 1, Folder 1; Minutes of Board of Directors Meeting, 25 June 1924, Commission on ABTS Records, AR 630, Box 1, Folder 1.

prevalence of naturalism in the modern teaching and preaching of religion." Lamenting the many religious schools teaching doctrinal "infidelity," Jordan even felt justified in revoking the appellation "Christian," categorizing them as merely "so-called Christian schools." Though he admitted that some good men in the NBC came from such schools, Jordan nevertheless echoed L.K. Williams' admonition from 1925, warning that the "conflicting doctrines" of modernist sensibilities "must finally bring discord."[46]

In other words, the fundamentalist doctrine of the seminary's confession of faith was not merely forced upon it by concerned Southern Baptists, but was also reflective of the theological commitments characteristic of some of the major players in the National Baptist Convention as well. At the same time, National Baptists seem to have been somewhat more theologically diverse than their Southern Baptist brethren, willing to accommodate a wider theological latitude within the convention as well as in external partnerships. As a peculiar counterpoint to Williams' dire warnings to the convention about the dangers of modernistic teaching, National Baptists' willingness to associate with organizations such as the Interchurch World Movement and the Federal Council of Churches indicated a much higher tolerance toward potentially heterodox partnerships than existed among Southern Baptists, who viewed association with these organizations as cause for suspicion. Within the membership of the convention, as well, there existed more theologically liberal or progressive elements sitting side-by-side with the fundamentalism espoused by the likes of L.K. Williams; Mary Beth Swetnam Matthews

[46]L. G. Jordan to E. P. Alldredge, 9 August 1938, Commission on ABTS Records, AR 630, Box 5, Folder 58.

has convincingly demonstrated, for instance, that the *National Baptist Voice* was among the more friendly black denominational publications toward theological liberalism.[47]

The coexistence of such disparate doctrinal perspectives within the NBC was not necessarily easy or painless; conflicting views on issues of doctrine eventually manifested in theological controversies surrounding ABTS. Indeed, not only did the disputes demonstrate the avowedly fundamentalist underpinnings of the school – eliciting along the way affirmations of the seminary's fundamentalism from both Southern Baptist and National Baptist sources – but, consistent with Mathews' findings, individuals associated with the *National Baptist Voice* were often the ones seeking to push the school in a more modernistic direction.

Illustrative of this reality is the fact that, at least as early as 1930, NBC president L.K. Williams was expressing concerns about the editorial direction of the *Voice*. In a letter to Eugene Perry Alldredge – the chairman of the Southern Baptist commission on ABTS and, after O. L. Hailey, perhaps the foremost white advocate of the seminary – Williams requested advice on "the scope and place of the Denominational paper, that is, one of the Baptist Denomination." Williams admitted that the role of a denominational newspaper "has been and is today with many a very difficult problem," and his concern was to determine "how far and wide it may open its columns to articles that might be considered incendiary and in opposition to the expressed policy of the Denomination."[48] Considering Williams' and Alldredge's common commitment to basic fundamentalist

[47]Mathews, *Doctrine and Race*.

[48]L. K. Williams to E. P. Alldredge, 3 March 1930, Commission on ABTS Records, AR 630, Box 7, Folder 43.

doctrine, their common work for the advancement of the seminary, and the National Baptist Convention's (then as now) official adherence to the theologically conservative 18 Articles of Faith, it is no stretch to understand Williams' concern to be rooted in a perception that the *Voice* was liberalizing its direction. Notably, Williams' appeal to Alldredge for advice came in the same year that the *Voice* welcomed Dr. Russell C. Barbour as its new editor – an erudite man with a progressive bent, an openness to the Social Gospel, and a fondness for modernist exemplar Harry Emerson Fosdick.[49]

Even beyond L.K. Williams' concerns, Barbour's editorship of the *Voice* seemed to agitate at least one of the stalwarts of the ABTS faculty and administration: Dean James H. Garnett. Having been on the seminary's faculty since it first opened in 1924 and served as the school's dean since 1927, Garnett was the longest-tenured educator and among the most respected personalities associated with the institution.[50] He was also wholeheartedly devoted to the seminary's success, whether that meant academic service, administrative responsibilities, or even literally getting his hands dirty by personally effecting building repairs on the campus.[51] In fact, for several years beginning in 1934, Garnett was one of only two men left to shoulder the entire teaching and administrative workload at ABTS, causing E. P. Alldredge to categorize Garnett's work as "heroic" and

[49]Mathews, *Doctrine and Race*, 66, 144-45.

[50]Minutes of Board of Directors Meeting, 8 April 1925, Commission on ABTS Records, AR 630, Box 1, Folder 1; Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting, 28 October 1927, Commission on ABTS Records, AR 630, Box 1, Folder 66.

[51]J. H. Garnett to the Board of Directors, 7 November 1934, Commission on ABTS Records, AR 630, Box 1, Folder 70.

to question whether "any Negro school in America was ever blessed with a greater dean and teacher than J. H. Garnett."[52]

So in early 1936, after twelve years of service at the seminary and nearly a decade as its dean, the octogenarian Garnett felt compelled to push back against the modernism he felt encroaching from the direction of R. C. Barbour and the *National Baptist Voice*. Spurred by one of Barbour's recent editorials, Garnett took to the floor at the Southeastern Regional Meeting of the National Baptist Convention. After lauding the seminary's accomplishments, calling it "a work of providence" and "the finest opportunity for cooperation of the two races in the mission work that has ever been worked out in the South Land," he took aim at Russell Barbour. The editor had argued that "our great Theological Seminaries are liberal and modernistic in thought," and unless ABTS was developed after that pattern "the School will become a joke." Taking the rhetorical posture of reminding Barbour of something that he should already have known, Garnett offered his rejoinder: "We wish to remind Dr. Barbour that the American Baptist Theological Seminary will never pattern after the modernistic teaching of the University of Chicago, nor any modernistic teaching. But, it will feel safe in following the teaching of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary at Louisville, Ky." In these few words Garnett offered both a positive affirmation of fundamentalist doctrine (in embracing the pattern of SBTS) and an explicit repudiation of modernism, indicating the seminary's commitment to a fundamentalist worldview. In closing Garnett offered

[52]E. P. Alldredge, "The American Baptist Theological Seminary," 1934, Commission on ABTS Records, AR 630, Box 5, Folder 25; E. P. Alldredge, Report on the American Baptist Theological Seminary, 1935, Commission on ABTS Records, AR 630, Box 5, Folder 26.

what might well have been intended as a subtle reminder to Barbour and his allies that Garnett's perspective *was* the institution's perspective: "The approaching commencement will close the twelfth year of the operation of the ABT Seminary. And, this will close my twelfth year in active service with this seminary."[53] Garnett's tenure at ABTS was coextensive with the school's existence, and his longtime position as dean gave him substantial control over the seminary's operations, lending a weight to his rebuke that few others could have matched.[54]

In an intriguing instance of familial legacy, conflict once again arose between ABTS and the *National Baptist Voice* several years later – this time with J. Pius Barbour, who had taken over the editorship of the paper from his brother. Barbour took to the pages of the *Voice* to lament the fact that men trained in "the Historical approach," which constituted "the vast majority of qualified Negroes" who also happened to be "trained in the Northern schools," felt unwelcome at ABTS. The "Historical approach" almost certainly refers to the historical-critical or higher-critical methodology of biblical interpretation – a modernist staple that was perceived by fundamentalists as fatally

[53]J. H. Garnett, Address to the Southeastern Regional Meeting of the National Baptist Convention, 20 February 1936, Commission on ABTS Records, AR 630, Box 5, Folder 27.

[54]Garnett's pointed response to Barbour's explicit efforts to liberalize the seminary may also shed light on a biting editorial that Barbour published two years earlier, expressing outrage over being denied the chairmanship of the Board of Directors. Barbour lost to A. M. Townsend in what the editorial saltily described as "a surprise attack which came at a time when the leaders of our Convention are working together as never before, with no thought of ambitious rivalries." Given Barbour's desire to model the school after the modernistic style of the University of Chicago, his indignation over being denied the chairmanship may well have been related to his goal of setting the school in a new, more modernistic direction. Moreover, his sentiment that this turn of events would undermine the cooperation of NBC leaders who were "working together as never before" could also be taken to indicate substantive division within the convention between the more fundamentalist-leaning members, like Garnett and L. K. Williams, and a more progressive or modernist faction. Interestingly, despite this division, neither side seems to have called for separation as was common for white fundamentalists of the day, perhaps indicating that black fundamentalists prioritized cooperation on the basis of racial and denominational identity above strict doctrinal conformity on issues like modernistic methodology. See "Dr. Townsend Finally Defeats Editor Barbour," *National Baptist Voice* 18, no. 32, 28 April 1934.

undermining the inspired and inerrant nature of Scripture.[55] E. P. Alldredge quickly fired back, excoriating Barbour's desire to allow "learned infidels" to inject their "poisonous infidelities" into the bloodstream of the seminary and make "infidels out of our Seminary students"; this was a "scheme" on Barbour's part to allow "modernistic teachers to sow infidelity in the minds and hearts of the Seminary students." Alldredge pointed back to the seminary's confession of faith, arguing that ABTS could never "tolerate any man as teacher who could not and did not whole-heartedly accept this fundamental statement" – a statement that represented "the faith once for all delivered to the saints."[56] In response Barbour asserted his own claim to orthodoxy, being at once a proponent of "the historical approach" yet also "believing in such doctrines as the Divinity of Christ and The Virgin Birth."[57] Interestingly, Barbour conspicuously left out any mention of inerrancy or inspiration, the animating concern of fundamentalists with respect to historical-critical methodology.

Meanwhile, Alldredge brought this matter to the attention of National Baptist president D.V. Jemison, whose response again demonstrated the ambiguous tension that existed within the denomination on the question of fundamentalism and doctrinal diversity. Initially expressing surprise at Barbour's attacks on ABTS, Jemison affirmed his own and the denomination's fundamentalist character:

> We are fundamentalists and will not tolerate any modernistic teaching in the Seminary nor support a modernistic as editor of our National Baptist

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[55]J. Pius Barbour, "Is There Religious Freedom At Our Seminary?" *National Baptist Voice*, 1 December 1945, Commission on ABTS Records, AR 630, Box 7, Folder 34.

[56]E. P. Alldredge, "Editor Barbour Makes a Bad Suggestion," Commission on ABTS Records, AR 630, Box 7, Folder 34.

[57]J. Pius Barbour to E. P. Alldredge, 27 December 1945, Commission on ABTS Records, AR 630, Box 7, Folder 34.

> Voice. . . . We will not stand for any one of our Convention who is not a fundamentalist and whose writings are not conductive to fundamentalism. . . . our president is a fundamentalist and of course the teachers who teach in our Seminary and Training School will necessary [sic] be fundamental.[58]

This is a sweeping, if generic, affirmation of fundamentalism and repudiation of modernism from the president of the NBC. Yet just three weeks later, Jemison had moderated his tone on the controversy considerably. Assuring Alldredge that he requested for Barbour to "change his course" lest Jemison would "have to make some changes relative to the publication of the National Baptist Voice," Jemison also expressed his desire for Barbour to remain in his editorial position and warned Alldredge not to continue this dispute because it would "destroy the usefulness of Dr. Barbour" in promoting the seminary.[59] Jemison's professed fundamentalist convictions notwithstanding, Barbour's utility to the goal of racial progress represented by ABTS outweighed his promotion of historical-critical biblical methodology – a quality that would have unquestionably been a deal-breaker in white fundamentalist circles.

Concerns about modernistic intrusions were not limited to the seminary proper, but extended also to the auxiliary Women's Training School. By the early 1940s, the Southern Baptist Women's Missionary Union had begun to express apprehensions about the Training School harboring teachers with modernist views and assigning "textbooks that are distinctly modernistic . . . not for graduate students who would know how to receive the teachings of these books, but . . . young women who are decidedly immature

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[58]D. V. Jemison to E. P. Alldredge, 18 December 1945, Commission on ABTS Records, AR 630, Box 7, Folder 34.

[59]D. V. Jemison to E. P. Alldredge, 5 January 1946, Commission on ABTS Records, AR 630, Box 7, Folder 34.

in their thinking and reading and studies." If these errors were not corrected, the W.M.U. vowed, "all further help and moral support will be withdrawn from the school."[60] Ultimately, E. P. Alldredge happily reported to a concerned Southern Baptist woman that "we have removed several of these rationalistic and modernistic text-books, also some of the teachers, and one dean, and we have secured an order from the Board of Directors that both the text-books and the teachers should be sound in their views." This victory concluded a "three year fight to bring this Training School back in line with our Negro Seminary and with orthodox methods and orthodox teachers." When the issue came to the attention of the Board, it "took its stand with the Seminary – which from the first has been rock-ribbed orthodox Baptist."[61] Not only does this evaluation reinforce J. H. Garnett's assessment of the seminary as essentially anti-modernist in character, but the fact that the NBC-controlled Board made these changes indicates once again that the resolution was not merely an instance of Southern Baptists imposing a standard from without, but was also reflective of fundamentalist and anti-modernist convictions on the part of National Baptist administrators. At the same time, these textbooks initially appeared in the Training School because of the NBC's partnership with the International Council of Religious Education, reaffirming that, even though many National Baptists may have been fundamentalist in their doctrine, they were much more comfortable with non-fundamentalist associations than were their white counterparts.

[60]E. P. Alldredge to Professor J. J. McNeil, 9 April 1941, Commission on ABTS Records, AR 630, Box 6, Folder 11.

[61]E. P. Alldredge to Mrs. C. H. Ray, 16 July 1942, Commission on ABTS Records, AR 630, Box 6, Folder 43.

Hot on the heels of this resolution, and seemingly in response to the ever-looming modernist threat, Alldredge made a remarkable proposal. In a letter to Ryland Knight, a member of the SBC's Home Mission Board and an original member of the ABTS Board of Directors, Alldredge proposed that the white Southern Baptist seminaries begin to admit black graduate students from American Baptist Seminary. Acknowledging that this would require "some adjustments and readjustments in the operation of our three white seminaries," he argued for the proposition on three counts. First, it would help ABTS attract and retain students at a time when enrollment was at a low ebb. Second, it would "constitute a step toward further fellowship and comradeship between the two great Baptist racial groups." And third, it would allow the most talented black men "a chance to get the highest and best training in the nation without the necessity of wading through the rationalism and paganism of some of the higher institutions of learning in other sections of the nation."[62] In the context of theological higher education, Alldredge's concern about "rationalism and paganism" can hardly be read as anything but a worry about modernist influences, revealing that his push for the acceptance of black students into white seminaries was driven by the imperative to propagate a fundamentalist worldview among southern black clergy. Given that representatives of both races understood ABTS to represent "the ideals of the South, separate in race, united in Christ," Alldredge's initial overtures toward blurring the line of institutionalized segregation indeed qualifies as remarkable.[63] Just a year later,

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[62]E. P. Alldredge to Ryland Knight, 2 June 1942, Commission on ABTS Records, AR 630, Box 6, Folder 7.

[63]J. M. Nabrit, "A Response to a Vote of Thanks for the Southern Baptist Convention," Commission on ABTS Records, AR 630, Box 6, Folder 19.

Alldredge urged National Baptists to ask Southern Baptists that its "white seminaries admit colored Baptist students to the senior classes – as the Southern Baptist Seminary at Louisville is doing this year."[64] The fear that modernism would take hold among black Baptists was substantial enough to drive some Southern Baptists to explore options that would violate the southern cultural dogma of racial separation.

Such a desire to protect black churches from external threats that might undermine a fundamentalist perspective was in fact an animating motivator for ABTS agents of both races – not only with respect to modernism in particular, but also such threats as communism and Catholicism. In July 1937, seminary president J. M. Nabrit named "the rise of Communism," which threatened to "turn the religious faith of the Negro into ashes," and the "rise of liberalism in religion," which sought to eliminate "old-fashioned regeneration" with bare moralism, represented the two great foes of black ministers, against which ABTS was attempting to guard.[65] Likewise, in an article for *The Christian Index* and reprinted in the *National Baptist Voice*, Ryland Knight urged Southern Baptists to give greater financial support to ABTS on the premise that without solid conservative theological education, a mis-educated black clergy and an uneducated black laity would be "easy prey" for influences "subversive of American ideals," such as Communism. Thus the danger of theological modernism ran parallel to the danger of Communism, and fundamentalist pastoral education was the solution to both.

[64]E. P. Alldredge to A. M. Townsend, 13 October 1943, Commission on ABTS Records, AR 630, Box 7, Folder 32.

[65]J. M. Nabrit, "The Need of a Trained Leadership for Negroes," *Home and Foreign Fields*, July 1937, Commission on ABTS Records, Box 2, Folder 66.

In much the same way, the imperative of this type of black clerical education was at times driven by the threat of Catholicism.[66] Fundamentalists like Curtis Lee Laws, recycling the old stereotype of blacks as "naturally religious" but intellectually inferior, understood Catholicism to have a marked appeal to the "average uncultured Negro" because its worship was "calculated to work on the credulity of one who is naturally superstitious" – a threat which "compels us to provide an educated colored Baptist ministry."[67] A booklet by the SBC's Home Mission Board was less racist in its reasoning, but similarly saw Catholics as "making a bid for [the Negro] on the basis of equal treatment," which should impel Southern Baptists to "cultivate a more interracial mind and cooperate more fully to attack the deep social and cultural wrongs of our denominational kindred" – a prospect which included better support for ABTS.[68] E. P. Alldredge also fretted over the southern expansion of external religious bodies, including both Catholics and the Federal Council, on the basis of their racial programs, concluding that the only way to combat these encroachments was for Southern Baptists to "work out and follow out a worthy program of racial readjustment with their colored brethren in the South."[69] Such fear of Catholic intrusion was even reflected in students of ABTS such as

[66]For other works examining fundamentalist thinking on race in connection with concerns about Roman Catholicism, see Mathews, *Doctrine and Race*; Barry Hankins, *God's Rascal: J. Frank Norris and the Beginnings of Southern Fundamentalism* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996), especially chapter 9. For an analysis of the Catholic Church's relationship with African Americans during this time period, particularly surrounding the competing Catholic traditions of theological interracialism and residential segregation, see John T. McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth-Century Urban North* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

[67]Curtis Lee Laws, "The Negro and Roman Catholicism," *The Watchman-Examiner* 19, no. 9, 26 February 1931, 265.

[68]Henry Alford Porter, "Christianity and Race," Lawrence Collection, AR 631, Box 1, Folder 9.

[69]E. P. Alldredge to E. A. Pickup, 4 March 1935, Commission on ABTS Records, AR 630, Box 5, Folder 26; E. P. Alldredge, "To Legalize Interracial Marriage," n.d., Commission on ABTS Records, AR 630, Box 5, Folder 53. Alldredge offers a complementary perspective to that advanced by scholars like

Illie E. Malry, a former member of the Seminary Singers – a student musical group that traveled the country to raise funds and awareness about the seminary.[70] After leaving the school and settling in Chicago, Malry wrote to Alldredge expressing his concern that "so many of our people are being taught and led into CATHOLICISM." In light of this concern, his hope was that the seminary "may continue to be an uplift to humanity" by providing Christian training to combat Catholic efforts among African Americans.[71]

Conclusion

Clearly, then, in both its inception and execution ABTS was an institution devoted to doctrinal fundamentalism and reflective of certain fundamentalist social and political concerns on other topics, such as communism and Catholicism. Founded and funded on the basis of a unique type of southern interracial cooperation, yet nevertheless beholden to concepts of stark racial differentiation and institutional segregation, the seminary displayed at once the unifying potential of common religious identity and the

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William Glass, who argue that southern fundamentalists used racial topics like intermarriage as examples of "modernist" threats in order to rally southern white support. Alldredge's words and actions indicate that the modernist and Catholic adoption of relatively progressive racial stances also prompted some southern fundamentalists to reach out to blacks in order to promote a better conservative theological consensus and eliminate potential modernist or Catholic footholds in the South. See William R. Glass, *Strangers in Zion: Fundamentalists in the South, 1900-1950* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001).

[70]Malry and his fellow Seminary Singers, in fact, were welcomed to perform and give messages in such avowedly fundamentalist churches as Ford Porter's First Baptist Church of Princeton, Indiana. As a separatist fundamentalist congregation (having abandoned American Baptist missionaries in favor of independent Baptist missionaries due to disputes over the fundamentals), Porter's expression of theological congruence with the Singers and the seminary indicate the institution's fundamentalist *bona fides*. For FBC Princeton's history of strict fundamentalism, see "History of First Baptist Church of Princeton, Indiana," accessed 11 March 2018, http://www.fbcprinceton.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/History-of-First-Baptist-Church-of-Princeton-2014-update.pdf. For Porter's discussion of the Seminary Singers, see Ford Porter to R.W. Hailey, 21 October 1936, Commission on ABTS Records, AR 630, Box 5, Folder 39.

[71]Illie E. Malry to E. P. Alldredge, 21 April 1937, Commission on ABTS Records, AR 630, Box 6, Folder 11.

entrenched limitations of such unity due to cultural traditions. The conflicts and controversies of the school's first decades illuminated the complex set of allegiances that tugged at the National Baptist fundamentalists, as they earnestly sought to contend for the faith without denying denominational or ecclesiastical fellowship to their opponents. Alignment with white fundamentalists on matters of doctrine, even in opposition to members of their own denominational body, was no sufficient reason to anathematize fellow National Baptists who were also co-laborers for the cause of racial justice. And on the other end of the racial spectrum, ABTS illustrated a similarly complex relationship between southern racial precepts and fundamentalist impulses, as pressure to preserve fundamentalist beliefs among southern African Americans caused at least some white Baptists to consider southern race relations in a light that challenged aspects of the status quo.

CHAPTER VI

CONTESTED IDENTITIES: PROTESTANT FUNDAMENTALISM, RACE, AND AMERICANISM

In the 1920s and 1930s, passionate conversations unfolded within the African American community surrounding the issue of Protestant fundamentalism, often centering on questions of identity. How did the fundamentalist's religious identity square with a black racial identity? Were fundamentalist convictions compatible with (or even essential to) being an African American, or did fundamentalism represent a betrayal of the race? The very fact that, contrary to the historiographical silence on the matter, some black clergy and laymen overtly adopted the "fundamentalist" mantle set the table for debates within the black community about whether such theological commitments constituted a help or a hindrance in the quest for social progress and cultural advancement for the black race as a whole. In a social-historical context that more or less dictated the ubiquity of racial identity as a defining characteristic for African Americans, fundamentalism was far from an esoteric issue confined to the arenas of theological debate and philosophical speculation. This was evident in the example of the American Baptist Theological Seminary in chapter five, as the institution was envisioned as a means of uplift and legitimization for the black community – a vision that suffused even the conflict between J. H. Garnett and R. C. Barbour over modernist theology and the future direction of the school. Debates over fundamentalism and its relative impact on the race as a whole, in fact, stretched beyond seminary classrooms and theological

publications, enfolding voices from across the theological spectrum, and even those without much religious inclination at all. Even if fundamentalism *per se* might not have held a particular interest or relevance to all such commentators, racial progress certainly did, and so fundamentalism was treated not only as a religious issue, but also as a *racial* issue.

In many civil rights contexts during this era and during the "long civil rights movement" as a whole, African American activists often emphasized nationalist themes of American democracy, American identity, and black people's rights to fully participate in the American experiment.[1] So while discourses about fundamentalism's utility to the black community often centered on theological issues like biblical literalism and divine creation, or on social issues such as intellectual credibility, it is less than surprising that

[1]The phrase "long civil rights movement," intended to offer a new perspective on the foundations of the civil rights movement extending back into the 1930s, was coined by Jacquelyn Dowd Hall in her landmark article "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (Mar. 2005): 1233-1263. While Hall's articulation of the "long civil rights" thesis constituted a historiographical flashpoint, earlier historians also explored elements of civil rights in these earlier decades. See Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal For Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue: The Depression Decade* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); John Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day: The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement in the South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994). For a brief overview of recent historiography in light of Dowd's long civil rights thesis, see John A. Salmond, "'The Long and the Short of It': Some Reflections on the Recent Historiography of the Civil Rights Movement," *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 32, no. 1 (July 2013): 53-61.

For works touching on the propensity of African Americans to use themes of American democracy, American political participation, and American military service in advancing the cause of black civil rights, see Chad L. Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); William M. Tuttle, Jr., *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970); James Leiker, *Racial Borders: Black Soldiers along the Rio Grande* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2002); Garna L. Christian, *Black Soldiers in Jim Crow Texas 1899-1917* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1995); Kimberley L. Phillips' *War! What Is It Good For?: Black Freedom Struggles & the U.S. Military from World War II to Iraq* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

overtones regarding American identity also inevitably crept into the conversation.[2] Even as black fundamentalists promoted doctrinal conservatism via the pulpit or the pen (approaches detailed in chapters two through four), they concomitantly staked their claim to legitimacy as partakers in the American experiment by lauding not only a theological continuity with "old-time religion" but also a degree of historical continuity with America's supposed identity as a historically "Christian people." Rhetorically connecting their fundamentalist faith with the ideals of emancipation, liberty, and democracy, these conservative religionists offered a version of Christian nationalism that promised hope for both the propagation of true religion and the advancement of their race.

At the same time, others in the black community were skeptical or even outright hostile toward fundamentalist religion, convinced that such backward thinking amounted to an albatross around the neck of the African American people. As such opponents voiced their criticism, particularly in print media, they cast fundamentalists as out of step with preeminent American ideals such as free thinking, free expression, and religious toleration; reliance on any sort of exclusivistic fundamentalist identity, from this perspective, was seen as profoundly unhelpful to the black community because the "intolerant" perspectives of both religious and racial dogmatism were considered to go hand in hand. For these critics, fundamentalism was not to be associated with the desirable aspects of American heritage and American identity, but rather with the small-

[2]Examples of biblical literalism, creationism, evolution, and intellectual credibility as important elements in the African American community's discussions of fundamentalism can be found in chapter two of this dissertation.

minded intolerance represented by antebellum southern slaveholders and America's history of racism. So, while both the pro- and anti-fundamentalist sides of the debate actively sought racial advancement for African Americans, they did so out of markedly different perspectives regarding both American identity and the social value of dogmatic Christian fundamentalism.

Fundamentalism: Religion of Racial Progress, or Racial Regress?

As black fundamentalists argued for the utility of their faith, they often tied it to historical instances of racial progress. For example, recall the June 1925 editorial that appeared in the *Norfolk New Journal and Guide* less than a month before the start of the Scopes Monkey Trial, entitled "Our Group are Fundamentalists in Religion." Expanding on the title's rather straightforward thesis statement, the editorialist claimed, "Yes, the Afro-American people are Fundamentalists, and they can give a reason for the faith that is in them by pointing to what they have become in this free Nation from what they began in the days of the Colonies." The fundamentalist religion of the African American people, which here included "accept[ing] the Bible as our sufficient guide," was in fact "the same simple faith that a majority of the Christian people of the United States have." This simple religious faith, the editorialist opined, "is sufficient for all of our National and personal requirements." Evidence for the utility and sufficiency of such a fundamentalist faith was immediately located in the national experience of the African American people: "It has brought us thus far, and the belief is general that it is sufficient to carry us further in the enlargement of higher and better things in human life and

living. We have seen so many radical changes to our advantage in the gradual evolution of the past half century, and we are seeing so much of the like sort from day to day that we see no good and sufficient reason to waver in the Faith or stumble in the Promises."[3] So not only was fundamentalism attractive and needful on the basis of historical continuity with the community's traditional "old-time religion," but it also served as the religious bedrock that undergirded the community's corporate survival during the era of slavery and advancement during the decades following emancipation.[4]

Moreover, the author's overt connection between fundamentalist religious identity and black racial identity allowed him to connect the African American community as a whole with the Christian heritage – or as he put it, "the majority of the Christian people" – of the United States, thereby rhetorically positioning blacks as historical partakers (and, by implication, continuing future partakers) in the benefits of freedom and liberty accorded to participants in the American experiment. African Americans, he claimed, could justify their religious fundamentalism by "pointing to what they have become in this *free* Nation from what they began in the days of the Colonies" [emphasis added]. Not only that, but the proposed connection between fundamentalist religion and African American identity was so tightly knit that if blacks were to "waver and stumble, as so many are doing, in denying the faith and running after false gods," the inevitable result would be that "we shall prove false to ourselves" – that is, a betrayal of their racial as well as religious heritage. This simple faith, then,

[3]"Our Group are Fundamentalists in Religion," *Norfolk New Journal and Guide*, June 13, 1925, p. 12.

[4]For examination of the terminology of "old-time religion" in relation to Protestant fundamentalism in the black community, see chapter two of this dissertation.

according to the editorialist, intricately connected the religious, racial, and national identities of African Americans; such a fundamentalist faith, as an essential part of the African American heritage, allowed black people to participate in the *freedom* that accompanied American identity and citizenship – a participation that was rhetorically justified by the race's advancement from "the days of the colonies," a clear reference to slavery and abolition.

This issue of slavery and emancipation, in particular, became a point of argumentation for both sides in the contestation over fundamentalism. The AME's John Albert Johnson once again entered into the conversation. As demonstrated in previous chapters, Johnson's ministry was replete with examples of his express affirmation of the central fundamentalist theological positions – doctrines such as biblical inerrancy, Christ's divinity, the hypostatic union, substitutionary atonement, the reality of Christ's miracles, and the literal resurrection – as well as overt polemics warning his flock of the dangers of modernist theology. This time Johnson joined in the conversation by connecting the old-time faith of the fathers with the destruction of American slavery and the hope for future racial advancement. Johnson declared from his pulpit that "The dominant feature of a people's religion is the dominant feature of the life of the nation," and that therefore the dominating feature of nineteenth-century America had been determined primarily by the nation's commitment to orthodox Christianity.[5] What then,

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[5]John Albert Johnson, "The Outlook," John Albert Johnson papers, Box 1, Folder 4, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library (hereafter cited as Johnson papers). Johnson affirmed much the same idea in another sermon manuscript, commenting on Matthew 6:33: "When our Lord said 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness' he declared plainly that it was most important to know the main factor in civilization, that faith as distinguished from specialized, secularized reason, or intellect was the main factor – the initial, essential, dominant element in

Johnson asked in his sermon, was "the one dominating thought of the Nineteenth Century? In a word – 'Emancipation.' And where did it find it? In its religion." Emancipation was "the application of truth" necessitated by the particular "conditions of life" in nineteenth-century America, but firmly and ultimately grounded in the unchanging and unchangeable gospel message that "Men in all ages need the Cross, for pardon, cleansing, renewal, hope and inspiration . . . [and] must be saved by Grace through faith."[6] So it was that Johnson visualized a remarkable constellation connecting fundamentalist religion, the gospel message, emancipation, and American identity in much the same way as did the *Journal and Guide*'s 1925 editorial.

Yet assertions like Johnson's or the Norfolk editorialist's were by no means allowed to pass unchallenged by those in the black community whose opposition to fundamentalism revealed a manifestly different perspective on the legitimacy of fundamentalist religion and the history of slavery and abolition. Fundamentalism's opponents within the black community, in fact, came not only from liberal pulpits and liberal churches – that is, those on the "other side" of the religious spectrum regarding the modernist-fundamentalist controversy – but also from members of the black community who were on the religious periphery or outside the religious spectrum altogether – people whom historian Jeffrey Moran has classified as the "secular black elite."[7] Both modernists and secularists opposed fundamentalism from a belief that it undermined the intellectual credibility of the race, and thus retarded hope for social

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civilization." (John Albert Johnson, "Faith and Intellect as Factors in Progress," Johnson papers, Box 1, Folder 4.)

[6]Johnson, "The Outlook."

[7]Jeffrey P. Moran, *American Genesis: The Antievolution Controversies from Scopes to Creation Science* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 88.

progress; thus, it is not surprising that such critics pushed back against fundamentalists' attempts to associate themselves with emancipation and racial advancement. Refusing to cede fundamentalists the moral high ground of freedom and emancipation, critics sought instead to actually align this religious perspective with the great national sin of slavery. Not only should the fundamentalists (black *or* white) be denied their identification with the ideals of American freedom, opponents reasoned, but they should in fact be identified with the forces of slavery and oppression instead!

One such member of the "secular black elite," and a fierce opponent of fundamentalism, was Ernest Rice McKinney, himself the grandson of a West Virginia Baptist minister. Having imbibed his grandfather's dedication to union activism without the concomitant religious commitments, McKinney became an aggressive labor organizer, a founding member of the Conference for Progressive Labor Action, and a devoted voice for black workers' rights and for the full integration of blacks into American life and society.[8] He also became a harsh critic of the fundamentalism he observed within the black community. With biting invective, McKinney took the occasion of an August 1925 editorial column to reflect on Protestant fundamentalism in light of the recently concluded Scopes trial in Tennessee. In the process, he excoriated fundamentalists of both races as "imbeciles and morons" who "get a volcanic eruption sensation in the head when they try to think," and he proceeded to lay out his caustic argument against any sort of positive fundamentalist presence in the American historical narrative as follows:

[8]Pamela Twiss, "Ernest Rice McKinney: African American Appalachian, Social Worker, Radical Labor Organizer and Educator," *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 10, no. 1/2 (Spring/Fall 2004): 95-110.

> These people don't know or refuse to believe that the progress of the world has been brought about by the Skeptics, Agnostics, Atheists, Radicals and Free Thinkers. Whoever heard of a Conservative or a Fundamentalist precipitating progress at anytime or anywhere? How could they when their look is always backward? The advance of civilization necessitates a push and a pull forward. The Fundamentalist simply sits by the brake and holds it down tight. He doesn't know why he does it. All that he knows is that Change and Light are poison to him. It was the heterodox who destroyed slavery in America and England. The Orthodox Fundamentalists wanted slavery to continue.

Insofar as fundamentalists deserved to identify with any element of the American past, McKinney made clear, it was with the wickedness and backwardness of slavery, not with the ideals of emancipation and freedom. He even went so far as to imply that blacks who adopted the fundamentalist worldview were not fully or authentically part of the race at all; they amounted to "white southerners with negro mothers [and] Negroes with white fathers."[9]

More than just a one-off critique, this idea recurred in McKinney's editorial writing. In another 1925 column McKinney set out to excoriate black fundamentalists as intellectually backward impediments to the race, once again invoking the specter of slavery to press his point. It was "the Fundamentalists in the protestant Episcopal Church," he said, "who were the backbone of slavery in the South." Fundamentalism, therefore, represented "a barrier, an obstacle to civilization to climb over and batter down." This was especially true, for McKinney, within the African American community itself because of the high number of influential fundamentalist ministers among the black population: "The Negro race is filled to overflowing with these 'Fundamentalist' gentlemen. . . . They keep us poor, ignorant, and weak. But some day,

[9]Ernest Rice McKinney, "This Week: Skeptics, Agnostics, Atheists, Infidels and Free Thinkers," *The Broad Ax* (Chicago), 15 August 1925, p. 2.

we will revolt and then someone will have to get another job or starve."[10] While conservatives like John Albert Johnson and the Norfolk editorialist visualized old-time fundamentalist religion to be intricately tied to black identity and to racial progress, McKinney vociferously argued exactly the opposite. To be a fundamentalist was, from this perspective, to entwine oneself with white culture, with the advocates of slavery, and with racism; racial progress required a movement *away* from fundamentalist religion, not an embrace of it.

Others argued in much the same vein. In a 1927 column in the *Chicago Defender*, George Singleton castigated "the form of Christianity worshiped . . . by the gloriously orthodox and the manifestly fundamentalists" as "crass superstition, literalism and formalism" with no utility whatsoever for the African American race. In fact, blacks who adopted such fundamentalist perspectives were practicing "a hand-me-down religion from the American white man from slavery days."[11] Not only was black fundamentalism to be rhetorically linked to the propagation of slavery, it was in fact, as far as Singleton was concerned, an artifact of slavery itself with absolutely no utility for African Americans; once again, for blacks to adopt a fundamentalist identity was here portrayed as a fundamental betrayal of their own blackness.

Along similar lines, a 1932 column in the *Chicago Defender* honoring the nineteenth-century agnostic and Civil War veteran Robert Ingersoll severely chastised the "amen brethren" of the black community who identified with the Christian fundamentalism of William Jennings Bryan, calling them "long on shouts but short on

[10]Ernest Rice McKinney, "This Week," *New York Amsterdam News*, 15 April 1925, p. 9.
[11]George A. Singleton, "Religion Worth Having," *Chicago Defender*, October 15, 1927, p. A2.

reasoning." Ingersoll, the columnist chided, "fought for your liberty and rights when the 'Bible-backs' were preaching that slavery was God's work. . . . Your ministers who paint him as your enemy forgot to tell you that."[12] Once again, the *Defender* linked fundamentalist religion with the great American ignominy of slavery, and blacks who participated in such religion were considered to be working contrary to the interests of the race as a whole. Far from a theological tradition in line with the virtuous ideals of freedom and liberty, these critics cast fundamentalism as a relic of the dark side of American history, a vestigial remnant of a dark and sinful past.

But the contestation over fundamentalist identity extended well beyond rhetoric about slavery and emancipation. Black fundamentalists presented their religious tradition as intimately intertwined with the propagation of liberty and democracy itself, while their detractors painted them as unalterably and diametrically opposed to the American ideals, as enshrined in the Constitution, of free speech, free thought, and religious toleration. Consider once again John Albert Johnson's sermon that grounded the emancipatory spirit of the nineteenth century in the steadfast religious character of the nation and the unchanging gospel of salvation "by Grace through faith." After asserting that the spirit of emancipation sprang forth from America's essentially Christian character, Johnson went on to expand his discussion beyond the strict limitations of slavery and abolition. "Emancipation from what?" he queried. "From everything that hinders the development into the perfect nation, the perfect man." [13]

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[12]"The Week," *Chicago Defender*, 30 April 1932, p. 1, col. 2.
[13]Johnson, "The Outlook."

For Johnson, then, the traditional fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith not only undergirded the literal emancipation of African Americans from their long nightmare of enslavement, but also provided the cultural bedrock on which rested the *future* progress of the American people and in fact the *perfection* of the American ideals of freedom and liberty on both national and personal levels. The same religious foundation that supported literal emancipation would uphold further metaphorical emancipation into the future, especially for blacks. “The future of the negro,” Johnson concluded, “depends more upon character than upon anything else. He must stand fast in his liberty.”[14] One can hardly avoid the conclusion, given the surrounding context of the sermon, that the “character” upon which the race’s future depended was primarily religious in nature, but it also had a clear political correlation in the willingness to steadfastly contend for “liberty.” Just as America’s Christian character had motivated the abolition of slavery in the nineteenth century, Johnson implied, so the same Christian character would nurture into full bloom the American commitment to liberty, especially for blacks, as both the nation and the race strove ever closer toward perfection. This sentiment, connecting racial progress with a historic Christian nationalism, would be striking enough in a vacuum, but it is even more so considering that it rang forth with the authority and weight of the pulpit behind it.[15]

International political concerns over the years likewise prompted some black fundamentalists to reflect on the relationship between their religious convictions and the

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[14]Ibid.

[15]For a brief consideration of the importance and authority of pulpit ministry in the Protestant tradition in general, and in black Protestantism in particular, see the introduction to chapter four of this dissertation.

nation's character. In 1915, for instance, in the shadow of the Great War, Chicago minister Edward Franklin Williams preached a sermon on Psalm 44:20-21 titled "Forgetting God and stretching out our hands toward a strange god." A longtime pastor in Chicago, Williams' ministry lasted into the late 1910s and evinced both a steadfast commitment to teaching doctrines that had by this time come to be identified as "fundamentals" (at least in the context of *The Fundamentals*, which was completed in 1915) and a penchant for biting polemical evaluations of the modernist liberal theology that had already begun to coalesce in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century.[16] In the shadow of the Great War, Williams found himself on this particular Sunday morning contemplating the relationship between the orthodox Christianity that characterized his teaching ministry, the terrors of the modern world, and the position of the United States in international affairs. "Has Xty [Christianity] failed?" he asked in his sermon notes, reflecting on the horrors of a world at war. "Xty concerns primarily the soul. A supply of moral force for it. . . . It is not Xty wh[ich] has caused this war but the lack of it." Williams, an eloquent critic of modernist theology and a defender of "fundamentalist"

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[16]For discussion of Edward Franklin Williams' positive instruction on fundamental doctrines and his negative polemics against modernist liberalism, see chapters three and four of this dissertation, respectively. While Williams did not use the term "fundamentalist" to describe himself (the term was not coined until 1920), his ministry did extend into the period after the publication of *The Fundamentals* and he was undoubtedly aware of the controversy between theological conservatives and liberals that would ultimately come to be labeled the "fundamentalist-modernist controversy." A colleague wrote to Williams in 1906, for instance, seeking to assure him that a revivalist preacher coming to Chicago was untainted by "the modern viewpoint" which might "threaten the very ground-work" of the faith. (Frank Dyer to E. F. Williams, 5 April 1906, Edward Franklin Williams papers, Box 10, Folder 12, Amistad Research Center at Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana [hereafter cited as Williams papers].) With all this in mind, Williams meets the description of a "doctrinal fundamentalist" as it has been used in this dissertation – that is, someone who ascribes to the general fundamentalist worldview as defined in chapter two, who teaches and defends the central "five fundamentals" as examined in chapter three, and who is willing to publicly and overtly criticize modernist liberalism as unfaithful to the biblical and historic faith of the church as explored in chapter four.

doctrines even before that term entered common parlance, was quick to dissociate true Christianity from the violence and horrors of war, in fact drawing a sharp moral distinction between Christianity and science; while the Christian religion commanded men to seek God's kingdom in lieu of material things, he argued, "Science teaches men how to kill each other. . . . HERE the god worshipped is the god of war, Satan, not Xt [Christ]." [17]

Interestingly, even as he condemned warfare as Satan-worship, Williams immediately lifted up the United States as a moral exemplar, arguing that while "the administration and industry of Prussia, all its prosperity has been opposed to morality," explicitly accusing the Central Powers of embracing the false god of war, this state of affairs was "utterly unlike [the condition] of the U.S." If the Central Powers were "opposed to morality," then America was in contrast a purveyor of morality, perhaps even of the "moral force" which Williams considered so central to orthodox Christianity itself. Further commingling religious and patriotic sentiments, Williams concluded that the lessons for his listeners should be "the necessity of a personal faith," "the need of ability to withstand temptation," and "the necessity of national protection by a reasonable defense."[18] This staunch preacher, whose teaching ministry was suffused with the traditional doctrinal pillars of fundamentalism (even before that term was coined), evidently saw an intimate connection between Christian morality and American

[17]Edward Franklin Williams, "Forgetting God and stretching out our hands toward a strange god," 27 July1915, Williams papers, Box 19, Folder 13.

[18]Ibid.

identity in the midst of an international conflict that would ultimately elicit America's intervention as a self-appointed purveyor of democracy.

Even two decades later, in the face of another international threat to American national interests and national security, similar perspectives persisted. With communism posing a potential danger to American interests both domestically and internationally in the 1930s, James Madison Nabrit, Sr., president of the American Baptist Theological Seminary in Nashville, weighed in about the future of the African American race. The Nabrit family's subsequent storied history of civil rights activism speaks to the values instilled by Nabrit in his sons; J. M. Nabrit, Jr. went on to work closely with the NAACP Legal Defense Fund during his legal career, including serving as a strategist for *Brown v. Board of Education*, while Samuel Nabrit provided support to Texas Southern students who initiated the civil rights protests in Houston in the early 1960s during his tenure as president of Texas Southern University.[19] Given his family's later trajectory, it is no surprise that Nabrit, Sr. also evinced a deep concern not only for Christian orthodoxy but

[19]On James M. Nabrit, Jr.'s involvement as a strategist in the *Brown v. Board* case, see Katie McCabe and Dovey Johnson Roundtree, *Justice Older Than the Law: The Life of Dovey Johnson Roundtree* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 96-97, 104-7, 119, 128, 132-33. On pp. 96-97 Roundtree reflects on the impact that the religious life of the elder J. M. Nabrit had on the legal career of the younger: "And though the fair-skinned Professor Nabrit . . . cut quite a different figure from his fiery father, he had a whole lot of minister in him. The home from which he came was a place infused with Christianity, and though he never uttered an overtly religious word in the classroom, I felt in him a sense of the law as a ministry and of the flow of history as divinely ordained."

On Samuel Nabrit's support for the Texas Southern student protesters, see: Thomas R. Cole, *No Color is My Kind: The Life of Eldrewey Stearns and the Integration of Houston* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), 33-34. Cole recounts that "When it became clear that the sit-in movement in Houston was not going to fold, Mayor Cutrer and others increased the pressure on Nabrit. While presidents at other state universities capitulated to white politicians, Sam Nabrit stood firm. . . . he was not afraid to lose his job. He and his wife could afford to live on their savings if necessary. Nabrit viewed the issue as one of citizenship rather than of academic policy. The students had violated no laws or TSU regulations, and he had no desire to control their activities. . . . 'Our view then is that it is the democratic right of students to seek remedial measures for social injustices within the framework of law. *We stand with our students.*'"

also for the social well being of the black community at large during his presidency at ABTS.

So, as Nabrit took up his pen in 1937 to address the urgent need for formal theological education among black leaders, he reflected on the relationship between racial advancement and looming foreign threats facing the nation. There were two foes lurking in the modern world that black ministers absolutely must be prepared to confront with force, Nabrit warned: the twin threats of communism and religious liberalism. "The rise of Communism," he argued, "threatens to destroy utterly all that has been accomplished, and turn the religious faith of the Negro into ashes . . . and the rise of liberalism in religion . . . means substitution of morality, human goodness and mere culture for the old-fashioned regeneration and spiritual power. Against these two new foes the minister must bring not sound but sense."[20] As Nabrit rhetorically paired communism and theological liberalism as threats to blacks, he likewise implicitly paired democracy and theological conservatism. If communism must be combatted by black clergymen because of its potential to "turn the religious faith of the Negro into ashes," then American democracy was by default a means of protecting the race; if religious liberalism threatened to undermine the foundational pillars of "old-fashioned regeneration and spiritual power," then adherence to the old fundamental doctrines was the solution. Indeed, if communism and liberalism were paired as, respectively, the preeminent political and theological threats to the black church, then democracy and

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[20]J. M. Nabrit, "The Need of a Trained Leadership for Negroes," *Home and Foreign Fields*, July 1937, The Southern Baptist Commission on the American Baptist Seminary Records, AR 630, Box 2, Folder 66, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee (hereafter cited as Commission on ABTS Records).

fundamentalism were implicitly tied together as the political and theological means of protecting the community.

But while the likes of Nabrit, John Albert Johnson, and Edward Franklin Williams propounded these ideas from their local pulpits or from their administrative offices, perhaps never was the connectivity of fundamentalism, black racial identity, and Americanism given a more public and prominent vocalization than in September of 1925, when the president of the largest black Baptist denomination in the country – the National Baptist Convention, Inc. – took to the floor of the national convention to deliver his annual address. Lacey Kirk Williams, who even as a little boy growing up in the rural South had always tried to play at being a preacher, had by the 1920s become one of the most respected and recognizable sermonic voices in the black religious community.[21] So as he stood to deliver his third annual presidential address to the convention, he did so with the knowledge that his voice carried a great deal of weight both by way of reputation and ecclesiastical position.

Perhaps the most notable element of Williams' convention address was his extended consideration and adjudication of the modernist-fundamentalist controversy. A timely topic, coming as it did in the immediate wake of the Scopes trial, Williams excoriated modernists as false teachers who shipwreck the faith of their acolytes, exhorting his convention to stand with the fundamentalists on biblical, historical, and epistemological grounds.[22] Modernism was a betrayal of the biblical doctrines

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[21]Lillian B. Horace, *"Crowned with Glory and Honor": the Life of Rev. Lacey Kirk Williams* (Hicksville, NY: Exposition Press, 1978), 38, 202.

[22]For an extended analysis of this portion of Williams' address, including his express affirmations of fundamentalism and rebukes of modernism, see chapter four of this dissertation.

represented by the “old time religion,” and to embrace it would “tarnish and discredit the vital heritage” of the National Baptist Convention itself. Thus, opposition to fundamentalist theology constituted not only a *religious* departure from the historical orthodoxy of the Christian church but also a betrayal of the African American racial heritage represented by the black Baptist founders of days long past.[23] But that was not all; Williams also invoked both African American racial progress and American democratic citizenship as elements tied together with his National Baptist religious identity. The National Baptist churches, he said, represented “the only group of religionists who may illustrate that Negroes can live under popular government, enjoy its favors and rights, and share and help to carry its burdens and responsibilities.”[24] In essence, the success of black Baptists to faithfully govern themselves constituted the means by which African Americans could lay full claim to the “favors,” “rights,” and “responsibilities” of democratic government. And the success of the National Baptist Convention itself, as discussed in chapter four, was intricately tied in Williams’ rhetoric to doctrinal fidelity on the “fundamentals” of the faith.

Having already identified fundamentalist doctrine with true biblical Christianity and denominational fidelity – endorsing fundamentalist doctrine as “accept[ing] the teachings of scripture” and condemning modernism as a “shipwreck of the faith” which needed to be “wisely combatted” – L.K. Williams interestingly enough turned *immediately* to the issue of race relations, and in doing so he again invoked categories of

[23]“The Third Annual Address of Dr. L. K. Williams, President,” *National Baptist Voice* 10, no. 40, 17 October 1925, 15.

[24]Ibid., 3.

American citizenship and democratic participation as essential markers of racial progress. The church, he urged, was called to take the *leading* role in American culture on this issue by seeing "inter-racial cooperation substituted for race antagonism and mutual regard for race selfishness and brotherly kindness for prejudice and cruel jealousies." In fact, the role of the church in this task was so central that it could brook no challenge: "We cannot let go unchallenged the efforts made by some secular and semi-secular organizations to transfer from the church the right and authority to say the true and final word in racial matters."[25]

Williams laid this burden upon the church – the true church, which held to the fundamental "teachings of scripture" – to not only model interracial cooperation and brotherly love, but to push for social solutions that would allow blacks to participate more fully in the American democratic ideal. First among these solutions was the duty of the church to push for black education (a consistent theme throughout Williams' life and ministry and consonant with his involvement in the American Baptist Theological Seminary project).[26] While some might view this approach with skepticism, he declared, "let it be known that Negroes are Americans with an undivided devotion. They realize that a correlative of America's best citizenship is Education. They have proven their patriotism under circumstances more exacting than any white man knows. They have proven their ability to acquire education and that money thus spent is a state's safest and most profitable investment." Hence, the church was given the duty to actively press for

[25]Ibid., 14-15.

[26]Horace, in her biography of Williams, repeatedly discusses his commitment to education – both regarding his commitment to his personal education and his conviction about the need for increased educational opportunities for African Americans as a whole.

state-supported black education, and this on the explicit basis of *patriotism*. Education here was associated with the ideal of American citizenship, and the state's interest in offering more educational opportunities for African Americans was based on both the black race's past "proven patriotism" and their future promise of becoming a "profitable investment" as part of "America's best citizenship." Religious, racial, and national identities began to overlap substantially.[27]

A second social solution to the race problem – whose implementation was once again incumbent upon the church as the rightful leading voice in race relations – was a political one. African Americans needed to have full, unencumbered access to the ballot; otherwise "[the Negro] is not a full, free man, or an accepted and fully accredited American citizen. The right and privileges of a democracy, yea, of America, as between races, cannot be arbitrarily bestowed. We need the Ballot to help save ourselves, and more to help save those who would deprive us of it." Racial progress here was tightly connected with the ideals of American democracy and the full participation in American citizenship, and the rightful means of advancing this goal was through the leadership of the church. Indeed, after laying out the educational and political solutions to race antagonism, Williams proceeded to once again reaffirm orthodox Christianity's leading role in this entire endeavor. In the social context of the day, Christianity was charged with the duty "to change the first and original thinking of whites on the Race Problem." Indeed, it could not be truly said that the American race problem was "solely an

[27]"The Third Annual Address of Dr. L. K. Williams," 15.

economic and a political question. . . . It is above all a moral and a religious question."[28] For Lacey Kirk Williams, as for J. M. Nabrit and others, the well-being of the black community and the advancement of the race involved propounding and laying claim to the American ideals of citizenship, liberty for all, and democracy itself; and the foundation from which the race could attain and defend these essential virtues of American identity was an ecclesiastical commitment to congruence with the race's religious leaders of the past, to formal education, and to fidelity with the biblical and historical orthodoxy represented in the main doctrines of fundamentalism.

In direct contradistinction to such claims, however, stood the critics whose denunciations of fundamentalist religion cast it not only as a perceived hindrance to racial progress but also as altogether opposed to the American ideals of free speech and constitutional democracy. Such arguments appeared repeatedly, for example, in the *Chicago Defender*, one of the most widely circulated African American periodicals of the day. In 1929, for instance, the *Defender* cited "the fundamentalism of southern democratic clerics" and the concomitant "sectional bigotry opposed to human freedom" as quintessentially representative of "the worst of Democracy."[29] Or recall once again the *Defender*'s editorial valorizing the agnostic Civil War veteran Robert Ingersoll. Even as the author sought to link fundamentalism with slavery and to display the virtues of Ingersoll as a free thinker, he also offered William Jennings Bryan as a pointed counterexample, as someone "who died fighting for fundamentalism in Christianity,

[28]Ibid., 16.
[29]"What the Republican Party Can't Be," *Chicago Defender*, November 9, 1929, p. A2.

[and] was also fighting against your fundamental rights in the Constitution."[30] In this context fundamentalists were portrayed not only as undermining American virtues, but in fact as disrespecting the very foundation of the American democratic system itself – the Constitution.

Similar arguments made their way into the black press with some regularity, unsurprisingly, in the immediate aftermath of the Scopes Monkey Trial. An article from the NAACP Press Service in August 1925 attacked Tennessee fundamentalists as "the same people who permit lynching and make bastardy legal in order to render their race 'pure'" and disparaged the Dayton proceeding as "a menace and warning, . . . a challenge to Religion, Science, and Democracy."[31] Presumably, this evaluation of fundamentalism as innately anti-democratic would likewise apply to members of the black community who supported Williams Jennings Bryan or his partisans in the Scopes Trial. Published within a month of L.K. Williams' convention speech in September 1925, this article diametrically opposes the NBC president's evaluation of fundamentalism relative to the black community. While Williams saw modernism as a danger to be combatted and fundamentalism as the basis for theological and racial fidelity, the NAACP Press Service presented a portrait of fundamentalism as racially oppressive, socially regressive, religiously obtuse, anti-scientific, and a danger to the very democratic ideals of America itself. Both sides in the debate over fundamentalism

[30]"The Week," *Chicago Defender*, 30 April 1932, p. 1, col. 2.

[31]"September Crisis Scores Prejudiced Fundamentalist," *Philadelphia Tribune*, 22 August 1925, p. 15.

in the black community pressed their cases by appealing to racial and national identity, but they did so in completely opposite ways.

In a similar vein, an article from the *Norfolk New Journal and Guide* the following year demonstrates that concerns over southern fundamentalism and the specter of the Scopes trial did not fade quickly from anti-fundamentalist authors in the black press. In a September 1926 editorial provocatively titled "American Intolerance and the Menace of a State Church," the author contended that the "rising tide of Fundamentalism," as most obviously manifested in the Scopes trial, represented a clear and present threat to the foundational American values of free thought, religious toleration, and separation of church and state – amounting, in fact, to "the establishment of a State Church in Tennessee." The pressing need was for a "New Luther" to rise up in order to "kill American intolerance." This intolerance so closely associated with dogmatic fundamentalism was perceived not only as religious, but also racial in character, as demonstrated by the author's concluding observation that "intolerance and race prejudice sleep in the same bed and are all but indistinguishable."[32] By implication, African Americans who embraced such an "intolerant" religious tradition aided and abetted whites in not only subverting the basic American ideals of free thought and freedom of religion, but they also became complicit in the racial prejudice and bigotry that was so often associated with the fundamentalist movement. Far from L. K. Williams' assessment of the church's leading role in subduing racial antagonism, or from J. M. Nabrit's rhetorical pairing of fundamentalist doctrine and American

[32]"American Intolerance and Menace of a State Church," *Norfolk New Journal and Guide*, September 11, 1926, p. 12.

democracy as stalwart protectors of the black community, here the terms were inverted so that the religious exclusivism of the fundamentalist position was directly tied to the racial exclusivism of Jim Crow white supremacy. As the dispute over fundamentalism raged on, both opponents and detractors argued on the basis of racial identity and American virtues – the former lauding fundamentalism as a foundational building block for the black community's access to the full experience of American citizenship, and the latter casting it as essentially subversive of the best aspects of both blackness and Americanism.

Conclusion

The very fact that the fundamentalist movement and the doctrinal sentiments surrounding it prompted such substantial disagreement and debate among African Americans offers some intriguing conclusions. Simplest among these may be that the very existence of such an argument within the black community *assumed* that fundamentalism possessed, in some significant sense, a meaningful presence within the ranks of black Protestant clergy and laymen. This assumption on the part of the historical actors considered herein constitutes a compelling challenge to the prevailing historiographical approaches that either remain essentially silent on the topic of race or expressly deny, by definition, the possibility that African Americans could be fundamentalists at all.[33] Contrary to these historiographical occlusions, African

[33]Good examples of the former approach include Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); and George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture,* 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006). A good example of the latter perspective is Nancy T. Ammerman, "North American Protestant

Americans on both side of the issue between 1915 and 1940 asserted that fundamentalism was present in the community; the question was whether embracing it was good or bad for the race. While the fact that the "fundamentalism" described among African Americans was less of the institutional variety and much more of the broader historical-theological variety may explain historians' general silence on the issue, the reality that black people from across the religious spectrum identified fundamentalists in their midst (either positively or negatively) must prompt historians to take seriously the idea that this movement exerted a cultural, social, and theological (though perhaps not so much institutional) influence across racial lines.

In addition to the assumed fundamentalist presence within black Protestant churches, these debates among African Americans also offer a window into the intersecting lines of identity that were being discussed and contested in the black community during the era of Jim Crow. As disputes over fundamentalism unfolded, proponents and detractors demonstrated sharply divergent perspectives as they fought over the contested battleground of American identity. Black fundamentalists tied their religious identity innately to conceptions of racial progress and American virtue in numerous ways. Some, like John Albert Johnson, laid their claim to legitimacy as partakers in the American experiment by asserting their congruence with a historical understanding of America as an essentially Christian nation; the inherently Christian character of the nation and its people manifested in the promotion of personal liberty (a value concretized by, among other things, the abolition of slavery) and in a democratic

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Fundamentalism," in *Fundamentalisms Observed*, eds. Martin Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 3.

order which served to propagate morality and Christian freedom. Staking claim to this concept of a Christian America allowed them to see themselves as both proponents of racial advancement and adherents to a historic American identity rooted in historical Christian orthodoxy. Indeed, in some cases they saw their fundamentalism as a vehicle for racial progress *because* of its congruence with what they understood to be America's historic Christian character. Others, like L. K. Williams, offered alongside his affirmation of fundamentalism and condemnation of modernism the concept that the faithful Christian church stood as both the vehicle for identifying with black leaders of the past and the primary engine for driving the race toward fuller access to the benefits, responsibilities, and rights accompanying American identity and citizenship.

But as critics eschewed both the concept of a Christian nationalist identity and the idea of fundamentalist Protestantism as an engine for social change, emphasizing instead an understanding of fundamentalism as inherently opposed to the values of religious toleration and free thinking, it became clear that the two sides diverged on both the conceptualization of American identity and the circumstances of racial advancement. Detractors instinctively linked the theological intolerance and exclusivity of fundamentalism to racial intolerance, and conversely the proliferation of more inclusivistic modes of liberal or modernist thinking to racial advancement, thus portraying black adherents to fundamentalist dogma not only as out of step with essential American values but also as stumbling blocks to racial progress. Both sides undoubtedly sought the ultimate good of their race, but in their approaches they demonstrated significant differences in their evaluations of Americanism and of the value of

theological dogmatism. Whether those fundamentalists within the black community represented a religion of racial progress or a religion of racial regress, therefore, remained an open and contested question.

Perhaps it should come as no surprise that pro- and anti-fundamentalist factions emerged in the black community with respect to the ever-pressing issue of racial advancement. After all, not only was fundamentalism itself a contentious issue during this period, but African Americans' drive to find ways to combat the oppression of Jim Crow also produced numerous strategies, movements, and leaders that often clashed with one another – be it Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois, Du Bois and Marcus Garvey, or (much later) Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X. With this in mind, the fact that black fundamentalists pursued the cause of racial progress in ways that sometimes differed from their more vociferous critics makes sense. A common recognition of the problem of racial oppression did not necessarily entail a common solution. Yet the testimony presented in this dissertation demonstrates that black fundamentalists ought not be dismissed out of hand as, in the parlance of Ernest Rice McKinney, obstacles and barriers to African American progress. In a variety of ways, black fundamentalists proudly proclaimed the alignment between their religious convictions and the interests of their race as a whole. Whether leading their congregations toward direct political engagement (as with John L. Henry), overtly making racial applications of core fundamentalist doctrines (as with John Albert Johnson and Isaac Reed Berry), rhetorically connecting fundamentalist theology with racial fidelity and the need for governmental support for civil rights (as with L. K. Williams),

or seeking to secure better and more accessible education for theologically conservative clergymen (as in the American Baptist Theological Seminary project), these historical figures connected their conservative fundamentalist theology with activities designed to challenge some aspect of the racial oppression and inequality that had been institutionalized under the white supremacist system of Jim Crow. In this sense, then, black fundamentalists took the conservative theology inherent in Protestant fundamentalism and applied it in ways that were sometimes far from socially or politically conservative. Much as their detractors might have wanted to paint these black fundamentalists as backward-looking albatrosses hung around the neck of their entire racial group, their own testimony shows a concern for racial justice that belies such an evaluation. Indeed, taken on their own terms these historical actors might rightly be understood as *progressive* fundamentalists.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

The presidential election of 2016 proved to be an exceptionally divisive moment in the United States along both religious and racial lines, as an overwhelming majority of white evangelicals gave their vocal support to Donald Trump, while many people of color (both within and without conservative evangelical circles) expressed deep concerns and fears about Trump as a conduit for overt racism and white nationalism to spill into America's social mainstream. In the immediate aftermath of Trump's election, Jemar Tisby took to the airwaves to express his frustration. Tisby is an African American who identifies with the Reformed theological tradition, one of the most theologically conservative streams within the American evangelical landscape. And so, as a graduate of the very conservative Reformed Theological Seminary, a member of a predominantly white Reformed church, and an active public commentator on issues of racial reconciliation in the church, Tisby found himself in an uncomfortable position. As he reflected on the wave of white evangelical support for Trump, even in the midst of a campaign that appeared to give an increasingly visible platform to the white nationalist "alt right" movement, Tisby offered his visceral response: "Here it is, just the raw honest truth. I really, this Sunday, don't feel safe worshiping with white people."

These comments kicked off a storm of controversy, and Tisby soon offered clarification in his blog on the Reformed African American Network website. "I am **not** saying that I feel physically unsafe around white Christians or churches," he

explained. “I am, however, highlighting the impact of white evangelical support for this man. Right now I feel misunderstood, alienated, and anxious. . . . That so many white Christians have overlooked or simply don’t understand this reality indicates a troubling lack of understanding across racial lines.”[1] Less than a year later, on the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Protestant Reformation, Tisby led his organization to change its name from the “Reformed African American Network” to “The Witness: A Black Christian Collective.” With the prior year’s post-election hubbub undoubtedly still in the back of his mind, Tisby explained that including “Reformed” in the organization’s name had brought along with it the tendency “to make faith overly intellectual and theoretical,” and so he and his compatriots at RAAN had realized that “while there is always a place for theological clarity, we did not want our work to end there.” Changing the organization’s name to “The Witness: A Black Christian Collective” was intended to represent the conjunction of their commitment to historic Christian orthodoxy and their desire to apply their theology in a way that “affirms the embodied experiences of black people as significant and within the scope of Christian dialogue and application.”[2]

Jemar Tisby’s experience is just one of many that demonstrate the disjunction that often exists at the intersection of race and religion in the United States. Even in a context of intense theological unity, Tisby is not unique as he testifies to feeling “misunderstood, alienated, and anxious” when peers seemingly fail to grapple with the

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[1]Jemar Tisby, “Trump’s Election and Feeling ‘Safe’ in White Evangelical Churches,” *The Witness* (blog), 18 November 2016. Accessed 31 January 2018. https://thewitnessbcc.com/trumps-election-feeling-safe-white-evangelical-churches/.

[2]Jemar Tisby, “The Journey from RAAN to ‘The Witness: A Black Christian Collective,’” *The Witness* (blog), 31 October 2017. Accessed 31 January 2018. https://thewitnessbcc.com/raan-witness-black-christian-collective/.

deeply ingrained concerns that emerge out of his embodied experience as a black American. Because of the historical legacy of slavery, racial discrimination, Jim Crow, segregation, and white supremacy in the United States, racial context significantly influences the type of social and political concerns toward which many people press their theological applications. This is true now, and it was true a century ago.

This of course raises a problem when considering movements, like early American Protestant fundamentalism, that include manifestations on both an expressly historical-theological level as well as on a social, political, and institutional level. If the historical-theological and the social-political are considered to be inexorably and necessarily conjoined, then social orientation becomes sufficiently definitional to membership as to exclude many of those who would self-identify with the movement on a historical-theological basis. In the case of fundamentalism, this means that a particular conservative sphere of social and cultural militancy has come to be definitionally identified with the movement, thus excluding many African American voices who identified themselves as fundamentalists in religion but whose political and social concerns were oriented more toward progressive issues surrounding racial equality and advancement. The vastly different social circumstances facing whites and blacks in the Jim Crow era meant that, even in the face of theological unity on the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith, the primary issues garnering social concern and theological application varied widely from one side of the color line to the other. This being the case, it is easy to see why scholars have typically treated fundamentalism as an essentially white movement. The most widely visible leaders pushing fundamentalist

issues in the political and social spheres – those with the largest platforms, the most social capital, and the biggest institutions – *were* white, and were usually operating out of a context that assumed the white conservative racial politics of the day. Hence, if these political and institutional affiliations are indeed considered to be absolutely definitional, then it is no wonder that African Americans have been left out of the picture.

This is why the historical-theological approach I have undertaken in this dissertation is helpful. In disentangling the historical-theological roots of fundamentalism from the specific social and institutional manifestations that grew out of this theological context in the white community, this approach offers a different way to look at fundamentalism that allows for heretofore muted voices from the black community to be heard. This is not by any means intended to denigrate or minimize the importance of the social and institutional approach to studying fundamentalism, but it is to offer another perspective that adds to our multifaceted picture of early fundamentalists.

Taking this historical-theological approach allows us to grapple with the explicit commentary we find in the black press regarding the widespread influence of fundamentalism among African Americans – the triumphal declaration of a Virginia editorialist that "the Afro-American people are Fundamentalists," or the lament from the pen of Ernest Rice McKinney that the race was "filled to overflowing" with fundamentalist impediments to modernization and progress. It allows us to identify and to consider on their own terms black churchmen, like the A.M.E.'s J. G. Robinson or

National Baptist L.K. Williams, who explicitly aligned themselves in print and speech with the fundamentalism of their day, over against the innovations of modernist theology that they saw as a threat to the church. The ability to identify African American fundamentalists in the historical record is one of the advantages that the historical-theological approach has lent to this dissertation.

Moreover, the identification of these black fundamentalists in the historical record in turn offers a deeper reading of the social commitments associated with and stemming from fundamentalist theology. While fundamentalist religion has long been associated with a certain brand of conservative social activity, the experience of black fundamentalists suggests that fundamentalism could also be applied in socially and politically progressive ways. Locating fundamentalism in a black social context changes some of the social applications that emerge from the theology, because the oppressive circumstances of Jim Crow drove issues of racial justice to the forefront of black fundamentalists' minds in a way that was impossible for their white counterparts to experience. This being the case, black fundamentalists often demonstrated a willingness to work and associate with other African Americans who were more theologically liberal, since they had a common interest in pressing matters of racial justice – an attitude that would have been foreign to most white fundamentalists of the day. As in the experience of Jemar Tisby, and as in the story of the Southern Baptist resolution on the "alt right" with which the dissertation opened, so with early fundamentalists unity across racial lines on issues of conservative doctrine did not necessarily entail uniformity in the areas of political mindset or social action.

At the same time, examining black fundamentalism also offers a glimpse into the interracial cooperation that could be forged out of a shared religious creed, as well as the social strictures imposed on any such unity by the ubiquitous presence of Jim Crow. The story of the American Baptist Theological Seminary demonstrates that racial lines were not *absolutely* impenetrable for theological conservatives and fundamentalists, as cooperation on the ABTS project involved a decades-long process of connection and fraternization across racial lines on the basis of a common Baptist identity and the shared fundamentalist doctrinal convictions expressed by such men as E. P. Alldredge (on the Southern Baptist side) and J. H. Garnett (on the National Baptist side). The history of ABTS displays the consistent thread of longtime cooperation in the interest of improving black education, as well as occasional examples of mutual respect and friendship across racial lines. Yet even so, the seminary's very existence as a segregated institution testified to the ever-present reality of racial prejudice in Jim Crow America, and many of the seminary's white advocates (as invested as they might have been in black theological education, and as far ahead of their fellow white Southern Baptists as they might have been) nevertheless still displayed attitudes that reflected elements of paternalistic thought. Religious identity and fundamentalist theological convictions, then, did provide the basis for a degree of unity across the color line, but the realities of racial context in a segregated society still restricted the degree to which any such unity could extend. As L.K. Williams pointed out at the dedication of the seminary's first building, white Baptists were to be sincerely commended for their support, but their debt to the black race had not yet been fully settled.

As much as these observations and conclusions may say about the historical record and the fundamentalist movement of a century past, they also reflect a reality that continues to persist in American life. Therefore I want to conclude with a final contemporary application and exhortation. Now as then, racial context often impacts the social applications drawn out of conservative theological propositions, and divisions along racial lines are still evident even within the context of a unified, theologically conservative Protestant tradition. The examples of Jemar Tisby and the SBC's alt-right resolution serve to demonstrate the point that even within a conservative religious tradition, the disparate social contexts of race in American life can easily lead people to emphasize and prioritize different types of social and political action – as was the case when black fundamentalists undertook racial activism in lieu of some of the cultural battles that occupied their white counterparts. This might prove to be a point of profitable reflection for theological conservatives of today, in denominations like the Southern Baptist Convention. In such circles disagreements along racial lines still often elicit heated responses on all sides (as is evident in the examples cited above), and so perhaps the interests of Christian fellowship and Christian charity might prompt us all to respectfully seek to understand the contextual *reasons* that we may disagree rather than dismissing one another out of hand. Such an approach does not mean that we must necessarily change our positions or come to a full agreement, but rather that in seeking to honestly understand one another we might demonstrate an attitude of humility and Christian love rather than one of pugnacity and offense.

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