

Faith Pulpit

Three Perils of Fundamentalism's Next Generation

The twentieth century has closed, and the world has moved into a new era. With the passing of the 1900's, Fundamentalism is at least one hundred years old. During this time, there has also been the passing of Fundamentalism's first and second generations. There are few men, if any, who were alive at the formation of the movement, and there are decreasing numbers who saw the rise of New Evangelicalism and warned others of its dangers. For those who remain, their days of service and leadership are drawing to a close. A new generation is rising to the forefront of leadership in Fundamentalism. One must ask, "What are the perils that this new generation faces?" Although this question could be answered many ways, there are at least three significant perils that should be considered.

I. The Peril of Persecution

Christians need to be aware that society's mindset has shifted. This country which was formed to protect religious freedom has moved from tolerance of religion toward a position of intolerance. "Religion" is viewed as a good thing as long as it does not get in the way of the social agenda of multiculturalism. Toleration is the absolute of today's culture, except when it comes to religious absolutes.

One characteristic of postmodernism is not just disdain for absolutes or a debate with absolutes, but also an attack on absolutes and on those who hold them. When Fundamentalism declares positions such as the complete authority of the Bible (1 Timothy 3:16, 17), the sin of homosexuality (Romans 1:26, 27), and the leadership of the parent in the home (Ephesians 6:1), it places itself in a head-on collision with postmodernism and multiculturalism. One must realize that morality, truth, honesty, and character are qualities that are no longer honored by today's standards. The world has forgotten that private morality determines public policy. The "live and let live" slogan of the sixties is now the

pervading philosophy of the day, except when that philosophy encounters Fundamentalism. At that point, there is no allowance for the absolutes of a Fundamentalist.

What should be done in light of this predicament? We must train our young people to stand for Christ despite a culture that is adrift. We must recommit ourselves to expository preaching and to the anchoring of ourselves in the Word, in order to avoid the infiltration of false ideas from an errant society. We must brace ourselves for the coming tide of religious persecution. Just because we live in the United States does not mean that we are safe. One friend of mine said that he thought he would never live to see the day when a Christian in America would be killed for his faith. Sadly, last spring we saw that day when a young lady in Colorado was martyred. We tend to forget that the Bible never promises religious protection to those who live in the United States. The Constitution makes that guarantee, but the Constitution is only as good as the men who interpret and enforce it. The tide of persecution may only be a ripple on the sea of time now, but it could expand quickly into a full-blown hurricane.

II. The Peril of Pride

The new generation of Fundamentalists faces the peril of thinking that they are superior to the founders of the movement. There is the temptation to look at foibles of past men and respond with disdain toward them and the positions they advocated. There is the danger of thinking that one is enlightened, and therefore that past battles were trivial. When this mindset grips a young man, he is in danger of allowing, or perhaps even promoting, a drift from the movement's founding commitments.

In a previous *Faith Pulpit* article (May/June 1996), Dr. Robert G. Delnay discusses "Third-Generation Christians." He states that "in the third generation the importance of deliverance and of the founding issues gets less and less." He further warns of the possibility that "the third generation will have brought about the end of the founder's dream." These trends can also be a possibility within Fundamentalism. Personal and ecclesiastical separation, and an exposition and defense of the faith can all become less significant to one who is unaware of their importance or Biblical basis. One may even reject the whole stand with the excuse that "he knows better." He may struggle with the pride of youth and view himself as superior to those who have sacrificed for his spiritual growth.

What should be done to avoid this temptation? Those leaders who are in the autumn of their service must realize that they still can make a contribution. They need to pass on to younger men an understanding of the importance of the issues that formed Fundamentalism. Moses, for example, rehearsed Israel's history to remind the new generation how the nation had come into existence (Deuteronomy 1:5). Later in his article, Delnay states that "those who would arrest the process [of toleration] will have to do a serious ministry of teaching history. If the coming generation does not know the past, it will have little basis on which to appraise or preserve anything." While the errors of past generations should not be glossed over, neither should their victories and successes.

Fundamentalism is not a movement filled only with defeats.

The older generation also needs to train, prepare, and at times even rebuke the next generation. In short, there must be a mentoring process. Those men who are rising to places of leadership or are training for leadership must accept this mentoring process and patiently grow under it. They must learn to be less critical of the past and more appreciative of the successes of those who have preceded them. This point is especially true when young men have grown up in the ministries of the men they now criticize. Our young men must be willing to be mentored by seasoned veterans, and the older men must be willing to undertake that mentoring responsibility. The younger generation must become a bedrock of faith and practice, and the older generation must continue to speak out on significant issues.

III. The Peril of Pluralism

The next generation faces the temptation to avoid controversy under the guise of toleration. There is an attitude that affirms that one's salvation is all that matters and that doctrinal distinctives are insignificant. The idea is that, as long as one is born again, he should allow all distinctives to be amalgamated into the melting pot of Christianity. This amalgamation, however, is pluralistic. Religious pluralism can be defined as the absorption of many religious beliefs into one system, despite the incompatibility or inconsistency of those beliefs. One individual asked, "When I stand before Christ, will He really be concerned about all these distinctives?" The answer is "yes" because they are part of His inspired Word (2 Timothy 3:16, 17), and man is held accountable for all of it.

Being a Fundamentalist is not just wearing a label. It is a firm exposition of and commitment to a theological position, and, in particular, to personal and ecclesiastical separation. It is the application of all doctrine to everyday life. It seems that some, in their attempt to promote a softer and less distinct Fundamentalism, have forsaken their commitment to its declaration and practice. At the heart of this issue is an attempt to be more relevant to mankind while forgetting faithfulness to the Lord and to His Word. When one attends ecumenical conventions for male leadership, when one uses "Christian Rock" or Contemporary Christian Music to build his youth group, when one is unwilling to defend and declare personal and ecclesiastical separation, he is guilty of religious pluralism. He is combining the world with the Word and clouding the lines of distinction between them.

What should be done in light of these blurred distinctives? We must expound the Scriptural truths of separation and apply those truths to daily living. We must recommit ourselves to holiness in the home and in the church. We must remember that man's primary goal in life is to glorify God (1 Corinthians 10:32), and we must make all other purposes secondary to this one objective. We must teach and preach the basis for our position. If we do not explain this theological rationale, we will raise a whole generation who have no clue why they are or need to be Fundamentalists.

Fundamentalism faces new challenges as it faces a new century. Three of these tests are the peril of persecution, the peril of pride, and the peril of pluralism. The next generation must be aware of these pitfalls and brace themselves to overcome them.

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