A Survey of Evangelical Criticisms of Protestant Fundamentalist Hermeneutics: 1994–2004

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Introduction

Since the second half of the 20th century, a certain segment of Protestants called fundamentalists have received a great deal of criticism and are often considered "reclusive," "adolescent," and "anti-intellectual."[1] As recently as 1988, Vern Poythress of Westminster Theological Seminary, stated that within the history of interpretation the fundamentalist camp has held to the "full authority of the bible" but "denied the profitability of scholarly reflection."[2] This short study asserts that a survey of evangelical criticisms of fundamentalist hermeneutics reveals that they are often made without any reference to primary sources materials and that the criticisms are focused on problems that plague both evangelicals and fundamentalists. The format of this investigation focuses specifically on criticisms made against how fundamentalists understand the place of the reader in the author-text-reader relationship.

The scope of this survey is primarily focused on works published during 1994–2004, on those that are from an evangelical perspective, and focused on hermeneutics or interpretation. This date range has the benefit of evaluating whether prior evangelical hermeneutical studies had any im-

1 Robert Gundry, *Jesus the Word According to John the Sectarian: A Paleofundamentalist Manifesto for Contemporary Evangelicalism, Especially its Elites, In North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002) xiv.

2 Vern Poythress, *Science and Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), 72; Vern Poythress, *Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 473.

pact upon American Fundamentalism.[3] By focusing primarily on literature regarding hermeneutics and interpretation a general pattern can be established while interacting with some of the wider literature.[4]

But why assess evangelical criticisms of fundamentalist hermeneutics? The answer to this question is best described in light of the similarity that exists between fundamentalism and evangelicalism. At the beginning of the century most evangelicals understood themselves to be fundamentalists, but this eventually changed. Differences arose around the 1950s with the presence of new or neo-evangelicalism. While recognizing the deep differences over doctrines such as separation and perspectives on culture, both hold to some form of the doctrine of inerrancy.

While historical taxonomy is a difficult matter, it is not incorrect to maintain that evangelicals are historically related to their fundamentalists cousins. This study assumes a similarity between evangelicals and neo-evangelicals as well as assuming that they could be considered two distinct ecclesiological groups. These assumptions are helpful in sketching the scene of hermeneutical studies during 1994–2004 because they reflect the depth of ecclesiastical probity given to these relationships. In other words, many of the criticisms of fundamentalist hermeneutics are not accompanied by a thorough explanation of who they are and what criteria defines them.

A Critique of Fundamentalist Hermeneutics

The careful reader of literature on hermeneutics from 1994–2004 will note that terms are left undefined and the difference between evangelicalism and "fundamentalism" is left untreated or driven by unarticulated assumptions. The issues at stake are methodological because it is not always clear the hermeneutical stance held up as superior is in fact

3 Evangelical studies such as Grant Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1991) and Robertson McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying the Bible* (Chicago: Moody, 1992).

4 Robert Thomas comments on the negative impact of Anthony Thiselton's *The Two Horizons* on evangelicalism, but an analysis of how such works impact American fundamentalism remains to be seen. Robert Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics: The New Versus the Old* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2002), 18.

unconnected to the problems attributed to fundamentalist hermeneutics.

This lack of depth may be surprising due to commonality in doctrine and history. One would expect that a survey of criticism between the two should expect nuanced and detailed arguments in criticisms.[5] What is clear from the outset is that an assessment is needed in order to further hermeneutical studies and also to determine whether justice is being done in this area of history of interpretation. To further these ends, this analysis considers three criticisms: that fundamentalist readers are 1) authoritarian, 2) have unwarranted certainty, and 3) are ahistorical.

Fundamentalist Readers Are Authoritarian

The first criticism of fundamentalist readers charges them with being unjust or unethical readers who create environments wherein the text is not allowed to speak for itself and divine authority is muted. While never connecting "fundamentalism" with Christian groups specifically, I. H. Marshall asserts that fundamentalists "in different types of religion" are not simply appealing to an "authoritative text."[6] Rather, he charges that appeals are made to "the authority of a human leader or leaders who so identify themselves with a policy that they justify from the sacred text that any challenge to their authority can be treated as a challenge to the authority of the text."[7] He is essentially arguing that the interpretive method of fundamentalists is to resort, not to the text, but to an authority that is tightly connected to an interpretation.

Marshall's criticism that fundamentalism's authoritarianism is "postbiblical" is qualified with the insert "I don't say

5 Many non-evangelicals simply attack inerrancy; for example David F. Ford states: "any apologetic fundamentalist biblicism which appeals to the verbal inspiration and inerrancy of the canonical Scriptures goes wrong." David Ford, *Reading Texts, Seeking Wisdom: Scripture and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 243.

6 I. H. Marshall also makes the claim that "One of the results of the surge of contemporary fundamentalisms in different types of religion and even in politics has been a closer scrutiny of the nature of the phenomenon." The goal of the investigation is examine the nature of such scrutinzation. I. H. Marshall, *Beyond the Bible: Moving from Scripture to Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004) 31.

7 Ibid., 31.

always."[8] Ironically, Hart makes a familiar deconstruction of evangelicalism, stating that "antiformalism" and a desire to be free from "leaders and structures" has caused evangelicalism to become post-confessional Protestant.[9] Thus, according to Marshall and Hart, both fundamentalists and evangelicals are largely "post-biblical" or "post-protestant."

The charge of authoritarianism begs for clarification. Greg Clark's analysis of post-Reformation Protestantism finds that "the Protestant biblical hermeneutic was at fault" as it mirrored the priests "parading their own opinions as God's commands."[10] To reasonably apply this charge of authoritarianism to fundamentalism, it seems as though it would have to proven that evangelicalism itself has a sufficiently different hermeneutic than post-Reformation era Protestantism. In other words, evangelicalism itself may be prone to this particular criticism.

The fact that it is not at all clear that fundamentalists should be criticized by evangelicals for authoritarianism also flies in the face of criticisms that evangelicals have made of their own camp. For example, with regard to the "question of the role of tradition (or church) in interpretation" Gordon Fee states: "[A]lthough most Protestants in theory deny apostolic succession to reside in its clergy, de facto it is practiced in vigorous and sometimes devastating ways é in the 'one-man show' of many denominational churches or in the little dictatorships in other (especially 'independent') churches."[11]

Here Fee makes a much wider conclusion, finding the problem of authoritarianism throughout all Protestantism, where "Protestant popes" rule over churches. While "inde-

8 Ibid., 32.

9 "[E]vangelicals have substituted their own religious forms for the ones that historically governed Christianity." D. G. Hart, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004) 30.

10 Greg Clark, "General Hermeneutics" in *The Face of New Testament Studies*, eds. Scot McKnight and Grant Osborne (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004) 107.

11 Fee, *Listening to the Spirit in the Text*, 159. Originally published in *JETS* 28 (1985):141–151. Fee also applied this specifically to fundamentalists in 1991: "First, an evangelical sympathizes with, but finally rejects, the fundamentalist's anxiety over the need for *absolute* authority., which tends thereby to replace the authority of the word with the authority of the interpreter." Italics his. Gordon Fee, *Gospel and Spirit: Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991) 31. No primary sources are cited.

pendent" churches are highlighted, it is not limited to these churches.

The assessments of evangelicals such as Fee and Hart lead to three points regarding this criticism. First, if evangelicals want to claim that fundamentalist interpretation is largely characterized by authoritarianism, they should support their case with data. Second, it seems more likely that this problem occurs in Protestantism due to doctrines such as the rejection of Papal authority, *sola Scriptura* and the priesthood of all believers. The third point is evident in Gordon Fee's reference to authoritarianism being found especially in "independent" churches. This comment may highlight the fact that authoritarianism may thrive in certain ecclesiastical structures rather than in fundamentalism as a movement. Independent Pentecostal, Southern Baptist, and independent bible churches who align themselves with evangelicalism may contain just as many "Protestant popes" as independent fundamental churches.[12]

There is reason to take this criticism seriously in all churches who support a form of congregational polity, but as it stands there is little evidence that it should be applied specifically to or to the entirety of fundamentalism.

Fundamentalist Readers Have Unwarranted Certainty

Alongside the charge that fundamentalist readers create authoritarian environments that attach meaning to leadership is the charge that fundamentalist hermeneutics are characterized by an unfounded epistemological certainty and naïveté.[13] For example, Timothy Ward states that his hermeneutical proposals are not "fundamentalist" because he calls for "epistemological humility in the biblical interpreter, who must recognize that no reader ever fully grasps

12 Furthermore, it is not clear how this charge would hold up against fundamentalist Presbyterian denominations such as the Free Presbyterians or the Bible Presbyterians.

13 This quote is representative of the criticism: "A distinctive evangelical achievement in apologetics, worldview philosophy repudiates fundamentalist's *naïve dogmatism* and obscurantist fideism by arguing for Christianity's rational superiority among the worldview options." Timothy Phillips and Dennis Okholm "The Nature of Confession: Evangelicals and Postliberals" in *The Nature of Confession* (ed. George Lindbeck; Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1996) 19. For another connection between naïveté and fundamentalism see Stefan Reif, "Aspects of the Jewish contribution to Biblical Interpretation," in *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation* (ed. John Barton; NY: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 144.

the content of the texts."[14] In this view all interpretations are characterized by tentativeness.[15] This criticism is also framed in terms of reductionism; that fundamentalists are "simplistic."[16]

The origins of this criticism go back to the divide created between fundamentalists and evangelicals in the middle of the 20th century. Iain Murray notes that E. J. Carnell was careful to distinguish between the truths for which fundamentalism stood and its "mentality" which can be summed up as epistemological naiveté. Carnell, a foundational leader in neo-evangelicalism viewed the schism in terms of hermeneutics: the fundamentalists have certainty that is not balanced by a recognition of their own sinfulness.

That the divide between fundamentalists and evangelicals can be understood as a debate over hermeneutics seems a crucial point. From the fundamentalist's perspective, the divide is over refusal to separate from and condemn those who hold to heretical doctrines including neo-orthodoxy and liberalism. From this perspective, the issue is about doctrine é the fundamentals of the faith. But the divide between fundamentalists and evangelicals can also be characterized by a divide over hermeneutics. E. J. Carnell, for example, seemed to think that militant separation is based on a false sense of security in one's own interpretation of Scripture. What is important to note is that Carnell wants to question certainty on the ground that sin has effected the mind as well as the will.[17] Charges of compromise on one side are countered with a defence of hermeneutics on the other. What seems to be neglected in the evangelical position is the fact that almost any Christian doctrine that is thought by some

14 Timothy Ward, *Word and Supplement: Speech Acts, Biblical Texts and the Sufficiency of Scripture* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2002) 304.

15 A view held by McCartney and Clayton. Dan McCartney and Charles Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand: A Guide to Interpreting and Applying the Bible* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002) 164. Certainty is attacked by liberals as well. For example, David Jasper associates conclusive readings with biblical fundamentalism. David Jasper, *A Short Introduction to Hermeneutics* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2004) 58.

16 Gerald Bray, "The Church Fathers and Their Use of Scripture," in *The Trustworthiness of God: Perspectives on the Nature of Scripture* (eds., Paul Helm and Carl Trueman; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002) 167.

17 Murray quotes Carnell's definition of this mentality: "The mentality of fundamentalism comes into being whenever a believer is unwilling to trace the effects of original sin in his own life." Iain Murray, *Evangelicalism Divided* (Carlisle, PN: Banner of Truth, 2000) 38.

to be heresy involves an interpretation and can thus always be reduced to the claim that the difference is *merely* a hermeneutical issue.

The validity of this criticism of certainty is compounded by the fact the matter revolves around "fundamentals" of the Christian faith. How much certainty should be accorded to those doctrines which are the pillars of Christianity? Some evangelicals such as Robert Thomas state that God intended for his people to have certainty.[18] But it remains to be seen in specifics how fundamentalist hermeneutics deal with the author-text-reader relationship in such a way as to promote undue certainty in areas of minor dispute.

Darrell Bock addresses some of the issues surrounding the matter of certainty in an extended form of his ETS presidential address. Bock aligns himself with Alister McGrath in adhering to what he calls "critical realism."[19] Critical realism is an approach to epistemology that could be described as humble. It has humility, recognizing that people are not infallible and do not have exhaustive knowledge. It has strength, being backed up with the assertion that there is an outside reality that is objectively knowable and that our accounts of it are substantially referential to it.

This approach is also related to "biblical foundationalism," a label that identifies what Bock wants to do in grounding issues of reality and knowledge in the Bible. He explains how certainty and doubt relate to the Bible in this way: "I am a chastened, biblical foundationalist because I accept the presence of truth and metanarrative as grounded in the thrust of Scripture's account as a base for my worldview, even if I cannot comprehensively prove the viability of all aspects of that foundation with indubitable proofs."

Bock's understanding of critical realism and biblical foundationalism combines both certainty and elements of doubt. However, notice how this doubt is qualified. It is admitted that not "all" aspects are provable. There seems room within critical realism for a hierarchy of certainty and doubt. It is unlikely that Bock would be willing to say that the resurrection of Jesus should officially be accorded a de-

18 Robert Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics: The New Versus the Old* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2002) 48.

19 Darrell Bock, *Purpose Directed Theology: Getting our Priorities Right in Evangelical Controversies* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2002) 19.

gree of doubt so that we can continue to debate and re-examine the matter. Those doctrines which Christianity has held as fundamental should indeed be the objects of certainty.

Kevin Vanhoozer defends his position against the label "fundamentalist" in his apologetic work *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* He asks: "First, is mine the approach of a fundamentalist who craves objective certainty and encourages individuals to interpret the Bible for themselves, using their own common sense?"[20] He answers, "Not exactly. On the contrary, I have espoused a critical realism that aims for adequate knowledge and suggested that such knowledge depends on a person's having cultivated interpretive virtues."[21] The problem with this position is that he has not proven that fundamentalists actually ignore virtues such as literary genre in interpretation in theory or in practice (and the dispute over the Genesis record is not sufficient).[22] He is quite right to admonish those who hold to a view of meaning and truth that forces every text to have a historical referent where the author clearly did not demand one.[23] But once again, this needs to be proved as taking place in fundamentalist literature.

Vanhoozer goes on to say, "The fundamentalist is overeager to say 'I know' when he or she should say 'I believe.'"[24] While critical realism acknowledges the need to be critical on the basis of our own sin and context, such a truth should not remove the "craving" for objective truth and a press toward it through the hermeneutical spiral. On the other hand, an evangelical theologian, Robert Thomas notes that God "gave revelation to Paul in order 'that we might know the things freely given to us by God' (1 Cor. 2:12b NASB),

20 Kevin Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning In This Text?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998) 424.

21 Ibid., 424.

22 Timothy Ward also defends his position against the charge of "fundamentalism" which "short-circuits the difficulties of biblical interpretation" by ignoring literary genre. Once again, this is asserted but no primary sources are cited. Ward, *Word and Supplement: Speech Acts, Biblical Texts and the Sufficiency of Scripture*, 303.

23 Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 426.

24 Ibid., 426. No primary sources are cited.

not that we might tentatively theorize regarding what God may have given us."[25]

The critique of "craving objectivity" is also counterbalanced by the evangelical Gordon Fee who states, "The longing for absoluteness on all matters, which compels the fundamentalist mindset, is ever with the evangelical as well é precisely because of the conviction that Scripture is *God's* word above all."[26] The craving for objectivity that Vanhoozer associates with fundamentalist hermeneutics appears to be found within broader evangelicalism methodologies as well.

Having analyzed this second criticism a pattern begins to emerge. Here, fundamentalist hermeneutics are characterized by unwarranted certainty and epistemological naïveté. However, this is not proved and more importantly, literature indicates that the identical charge could be laid at the feet of the broad evangelical movement. The Christian interpretive tradition has always given a role to certainty. Heresy exists because Christians can have certainty about the text and the truth of core Christian doctrines. The question of which doctrines are "fundamental" is another matter, but it seems enough to say that there is equal room for militancy and tentativeness when considering matters throughout the entire biblical corpus. For example, a militancy toward justification by faith alone is proper alongside a tentativeness toward head-coverings.

This criticism of fundamentalist hermeneutics also raises sociological questions. Vanhoozer's criticisms include the notion of "interpretive virtues" that the readers need to bring to the text. Are these virtues recognized and cultivated within the sociological context of fundamentalist churches and para-church organizations? And in contrast, are they being cultivated within the ministries of broad evangelicalism? Further research into these questions may shed light on the real nature of interpretation and hermeneutics in the evangelical and fundamentalist tradition. And if the well acknowledged trends toward theological shallowness in broader evangelicalism have any merit, this criticism may be cancelled out as well.

As it stands in this case, the evangelical literature against fundamentalism has only provided more cause for questions.

25 Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics: The New Versus the Old*, 48.

26 Fee, *Gospel and Spirit*, 33.

Fundamentalist Readers Are Ahistorical

Another charge against fundamentalist hermeneutics is that readers are viewed as ahistorical, contextless, Cartesian subjects.[27] This charged is closely connected with the attack upon certitude but it follows a more philosophical line of reasoning and is oriented around presuppositions and pre-understanding. The ahistorical reader is one who engages the text with the only starting point that Descartes began with when he proclaimed: "I think, therefore I am." Thus, an attack upon fundamentalist hermeneutics in this regard is also an attack on epistemology for it is a corresponding truth that ahistorical readers begin with the assumption that historical contexts are not necessary for knowledge. For example, Jens Zimmermann charges fundamentalists with epistemological naiveté in this manner: "Contrary to idealist and Christian fundamentalist dreams of a pure, ahistorical consciousness, which is often equated with 'the self,' philosophical hermeneutics reminds us of our humanity, our embeddedness in history and culture."

Zimmermann is claiming that fundamentalists begin and end with the self, even as Descartes began and ended with the self. While Carnell wants to hedge interpretive certainty against a sinful mind, Zimmermann wants to set it against a culturally based identity that can never fully grasp the "other."

The attack against undue certainty takes other forms which also focus on epistemology and the idea of critical-realism. Richard Lints also frames his charge against fundamentalist hermeneutics in philosophical language. He distinguishes between evangelical hermeneutics and fundamentalist hermeneutics through a discussion of critical-realism. He asserts: "In that strain of evangelicalism called fundamentalism, theology has always been considered culturally neutral. Fundamentalists have always been fearful of the historicist notion of theology."[28] Here, Lints follows Jeffrey Stout in defining "historicism" as: the Bible affirming

27 Kevin Vanhoozer addresses the issue of how fundamentalists view the text as limited in genre to "historical reference." While his example of literal six days of creation is objectionable, his case against genre-less reading could have merit if given in conjunction with primary source evidence. He does not demonstrate how this does not apply to evangelicals as well. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 307, also 424–425.

28 Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomena to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993) 22.

"certain beliefs and practices because of the historical setting in which it was originally written."[29] What Lints asserts is that fundamentalists reject the idea that the reader's horizon is different from the horizon of the original hearers or the original context. He boldly proclaims that fundamentalists perform textual induction "with little concern for the context of the original passage or differences of meaning between a first-century and twentieth-century context."[30]

The claim that fundamentalist readers are "ahistorical" coincides with the argument against having certainty: if fundamentalists realized how different their context is from the original, they would not be so dogmatic about the meaning of biblical texts. Lints asserts that while fundamentalists reject what he calls the "bias principle" or the willingness to admit biases and wrestle with them, evangelicals have taken the higher road by employing both the realism principle and the bias or critical principle.[31] In other words, evangelicals follow critical-realism and fundamentalists follow naïve-realism. A consideration of Lint's thesis should keep in mind these two caveats: first, he himself acknowledges that *everyone* engaged in theology incorporates both critical epistemology and some realist epistemology and secondly he does not cite any primary sources from fundamentalism.[32]

It is quite ironic that fundamentalism is charged with being ahistorical when even the most recent evaluations of fundamentalism by evangelicals view it in terms of events or characteristics that are fifty years old or more. Karen Bullock's review of the history of post-Reformation Protestant hermeneutics discusses "Classical Fundamentalism" at length but never ventures beyond the 1920s.[33] Gerald Bray's historical survey of interpretation leaves fundamentalists in

29 Ibid., 23 n26.

30 Ibid., 23. No primary sources are cited. Although outside the direct scope of the survey, Gordon Fee contradicts Lints by stating that "some fundamentalists" do accept "expressions of accommodation" as found in various biblical accounts and genres. Fee, *Gospel and Spirit*, 22, also 34.

31 Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology*, 23.

32 Ibid., 24. Emphasis mine.

33 Bullock simply states: "Today, fundamentalism is continuing to redefine itself, as it has in every decade since its inception." Karen O'Dell Bullock, "Post-Reformation Protestant Hermeneutics" in *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 2nd ed. (eds. Bruce Corley, et al; Nashville, TN: B&H, 2002) 128.

the 1930s.[34] It seems the fundamentalism is forever condemned to live in the early to middle of the 20th century, no matter what may take place today. This is even more confusing in light of the fact that some fundamentalists of the early 20th century, such as J. Gresham Machen, are often referred to in a positive light.[35]

J. I. Packer describes the early fundamentalist alliance in North America as "making up by ferocity what it lacked in depth and weight of matter."[36] In light of Packer's acknowledgement that there was not even an initial reaction to Liberalism in England, this is more of a compliment. In this way early American fundamentalism may indeed reflect certain characteristics of early Christianity: imprecise, floundering, and intellectually unprepared for battle. Yet it does not follow that the problems surrounding the beginning of a movement must characterize it several generations later. To assert as much is truly an unsubstantiated leap.

Critiquing the Critiquers

Reflection on the evangelical response to fundamentalist hermeneutics from 1994–2004 evidences several things about evangelicalism and its strategy. Before a brief critique is given, it should be clearly stated that there are several evangelical works on hermeneutics, both recent and in the past, that do not seem interested in attacking or exaggerating simply out of desire to distance themselves from fundamentalists.[37] A critique of the criticizers means making broad statements about a group that is characterized by its breadth. What prevents this critique from succumbing to the same faults it finds is that it follows a survey of the relevant literature and sources.

34 Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past & Present* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1996) 540.

35 Walter Kaiser and Moises Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994) 258.

36 J. I. Packer, "Theology and Bible Reading" in *The Act of Bible Reading: A Multidisciplinary Approach to Biblical Interpretation* (ed. Elmer Dyck; Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1996) 73.

37 These often lack depth of reflection and more importantly, research from current, primary sources.

Lack of Primary Sources

The first critique of evangelical critiques can be made on the ground of common hermeneutics language. To ignore primary-source fundamentalist literature for a decade or more is certainly a case of failing to do justice to the "other." This is not a trite matter for any Christian, regardless of camp. The fact is that other groups and trends have been analyzed microscopically while fundamentalists have been neglected. The great temptation of the neo-evangelical strategy is to court the respectability of the world and the secular academy so much that some Christians (fundamentalists) are simply canon-fodder.

The pervasive lack of primary-source research in critiques of fundamentalist hermeneutics is certainly not due to a lack of resources . Bernard Ramm's assessment that fundamentalist presses have produced "hundreds of millions" of tracts and other materials is no hyperbole.[38] He also notes, "Even in the present decade [1970's] the avalanche of fundamentalist literature is so great that no person could hope to read all of it that is published in any given month."[39] Certainly the time frame considered here has a sufficient amount of primary sources as well.

Such indifference to primary sources is grounds for claiming a straw man attack. Non-evangelicals also seem prone to use an undocumented straw man attack in this area.[40] From all appearances, it seems that sociologists have put the most work into evaluating Christian fundamentalism, albeit with a wider focus than interpretation. While neo-evangelicalism is oriented toward academic excellence, such achievements must not arrive from selective hearing.

Lack of Penetrating Analysis

The second criticism of evangelicals is that their own criticisms are too shallow and lack penetrating analysis. This survey has flushed out a pattern wherein many of the charges laid against fundamentalists could also be rightly

38 Bernard Ramm, *The Evangelical Heritage: A Study in Historical Theology* (1973 reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: 2000) 88.

39 Ibid., 88.

40 For example, Richard Bauckham and Trevor Hart state that the eschatological notion of a "world week" is "still alive in some Christian fundamentalist circles." No primary sources are cited. Richard Bauckham and Trevor Hart, *Hope Against Hope: Christian Eschatology at the Turn of the Millennium* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999) 2.

laid against evangelicalism as well. The problem of authoritarianism is not limited to fundamentalists, nor is epistemological naiveté or ahistorical reading of the text. It is quite possible that these characteristics predominate fundamentalists, but we simply cannot know this without interacting with primary sources. Problems that exist across the board that are only spoken of in partisan and unsubstantiated terms evidence *at least* a failure to properly interpret the condition of the whole Church.

Moving Forward

But how has this happened? How have so many evangelical scholars with strong research backgrounds neglected such a large area of primary sources and built straw men or largely unsubstantiated foundations for their attacks? Before assuming a vast conspiracy, it seems best to view this neglect in light of evangelicalism's neglect of denominations in general. The criticism that evangelicals have neglected fundamentalists sounds similar to D. G. Hart's criticism that evangelicalism has become exclusively oriented around the mega-church and para-church.[41] In his work *Deconstructing Evangelicalism* (2004), Hart argues that the evangelical academy has ignored "Churchly expressions of Christianity," including Methodists, Baptists and others.[42] This is no different from an assessment produced more than a decade ago when Richard Lints noted in *The Fabric of Theology* (1993), "The movement (evangelicalism) sustains itself by steering clear of the party politics of each individual denomination."[43] In sum, the very nature of the evangelical movement which focuses on least common denominators is able to gloss over fundamentalism because a sustained introspection is perceived as detrimental to the whole movement.

While Hart laments concern for denominations, his suggestion provides a forward looking strategy for issues between evangelicalism and fundamentalism. He chides historians for looking at issues too broadly and assuming

41 "Fundamentalism is a continuing player in American Christianity; it demands serious attention, not dismissal." Roy Harrisville, *The Bible in Modern Culture: Baruch Spinoza to Brevard Childs* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002) 213.

42 Hart, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism*, 197.

43 Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology*, 25.

that the glue that holds evangelicalism together is really as broad as many would like it to be. A similar exhortation could be made toward evangelicals today: theologians should stop assuming that events in the 1920s are the key to fundamentalist hermeneutics today without evaluating current primary sources in the present generation.[44]

Conclusion

While more detailed analysis is needed, it seems that there is a disconnect between evangelicals and fundamentalists on the reason for current schism. Evangelicals focus on more philosophical issues like critical-realism while fundamentalists focus on practical issues such as the refusal to separate from apostasy. This may be due to apologetic concerns within the neo-evangelical dialogue model and it may be residual from original concerns from the early 20th century.

A survey of evangelical literature on hermeneutics from 1994 to 2004 reveals that challenges to fundamentalists are strong but lack thick descriptions of why their charges are legitimate. The charges that evangelicals place against fundamentalists may indeed be true, but the research has not been done to back up the claims.

44 For example, the KJV-only controversy has played a large role in creating divides within fundamentalism itself. Such divisions were not present or as clear during the formation of the Neo-evangelical and fundamentalist factions in the early 20th century. It is also not clear how many fundamentalists who practice secondary separation have not practiced primary separation from those who have altered fundamentals of the faith regarding the nature and inspiration of scripture in the KJV-only position.