**Church History**

**Core Seminar**

**Class 13: 20th Century and Capitol Hill Baptist Church**

*“…He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”* Philippians 1:6

**Introduction**

Last week we walked through a brief history of Baptists and the role of missions. This week we want to end the course by looking at a few major movements in the 20th century and see how these issues still confront us as Christians today. Then at the end of the class we will tell the story of our local church.

Right after the Civil War a new set of intellectual threats to orthodoxy was arriving in schools, seminaries, denominations, and churches. There was tremendous change in American life and culture. From 1870 to 1930, the percentage of Americans living in cities more than doubled, and the overall population of cities multiplied 7 times over, as industrialization lured American families from rural areas to urban, and boatloads of European immigrants swelled the ranks of the new metropolises.

Orthodox Christianity faced its greatest theological challenge since the Enlightenment, perhaps even since the Reformation. A new theology known as “modernism” or “liberalism,” which was really no theology at all but rather a wholesale repudiation of biblical Christianity, had infected many churches, and was leading many pastors and congregations astray.

**Modernism (aka Liberalism (theological))**

What is Modernism? A late 19th and early 20th century movement seeking to preserve the Christian faith by adjusting traditional Christianity to developments in modern culture. In Some ways it began with the Enlightenment we talked about weeks ago. In fact, the sources can be traced to individuals like Immanuel Kant and Friederich Schleiermacher.

An early developer of the ideas of Modernism, Horace Bushnell, developed many of the themes that are key to Modernism are 1) the immanence of God (God worked through natural laws); 2) importance of Christian experience; 3) necessity of doctrinal revision (experience and feeling over doctrine or creeds); 4) poetic nature of religious language. Modernism key emphasis, was not on the Gospel, but on ethics and living in this world. What you have though in Modernism is not truly a new theology at but rather a wholesale repudiation of biblical Christianity. It had affected many churches and was leading many pastors astray, and still leads Christians away today.

What caused this change? There were many forces in psychology, history, sociology. But two of the main drivers for Modernism were: Darwinism and Higher Criticism.

**Darwinism**

In the popular mind begun to turn “science” against “religion” by undermining belief in a Creator God who designed the world and exercise sovereign care over it. So I mentioned the theme of an emphasis on the immanence of God in nature and history held a central place in the liberal impulse. Turning a theistic trick on Darwinism, the pre-eminent idea of the age, modernists argued that God was present in and revealed through the progress of history and the evolution of culture. God worked in the world through natural laws, not by miraculous intervention in the natural order. Traditional distinctions between the supernatural and natural, church and world, were rejected in favor of a stress on the unity of the sacred and the secular. God was not external to the world but permeated all of life.

[This affirmation naturally lent a rose-colored to the liberal world view. The freedom and ability of mankind were emphasized; humans were the fundamentally good, infinitely valuable children of God. Sin was not a radical disjunction between God and humanity but merely a matter of ignorance or bestial remains that could be corrected by Christian education. The significance of the incarnation, therefore, lay not in Jesus' death on the cross as a vicarious sacrifice for the sins of the world but in the Master's revelation of the worth of human personality and the power of love. History, though perhaps marred by minor detours, demonstrated a steady and inevitable progress toward the historical realization of the kingdom of God.

Following the lead of Schleiermacher and Bushnell, liberals contended that experience and feeling, not creeds or doctrine, provided the foundation of Christianity. The ultimate authority for faith was the self-evidencing testimony of the heart to the individual believer. Liberals insisted that Christianity was a growing and changing life rather than a static creed, ritual or organization. Doctrines, which were nothing more than the tentative and historically limited expressions of abiding religious sentiment, necessarily required periodic reformulation to adjust to the ever- expanding knowledge of mankind. Modernists thus deplored the continuing division of the church over anachronistic doctrinal disputes and became enthusiastic supporters of efforts for ecclesiastical reunion.]

**Higher Criticism**

This emphasis on progress and experience were manifested in the Modernist understanding of the Scriptures. Primarily led by the German academy a new method of scholarship that attacked the Bible's claims to: Divine inspiration; theological truth; historical accuracy. Liberalism was attractive because it appealed to their overconfidence in the claims of science and the power of human reason, to their desire to be “relevant” in a changing culture, and to their skepticism about the Bible and historic Christianity.

These liberal clergy did not hide their new beliefs, but rather trumpeted them proudly. Shailer Mathews (1863-1941)- dean of the University of Chicago Divinity School-stated that: “*The world needs new control of nature and society and is told the Bible is verbally inerrant. It needs a means of composing class strife, and is told to believe in the substitutionary atonement...It needs faith in the divine presence of human affairs and is told it must accept the virgin birth of Christ.”[[1]](#footnote-1)*

For modernists like Mathews, the historic doctrines of the faith were at best irrelevant to the true needs of society and at worst simply untrue.

[Inerrancy: The inerrancy of Scripture means that Scripture, in the original manuscripts and when interpreted according to the intended sense, speaks truly in all that it affirms.]

**Fundamentalism**

Thankfully, the Lord did not permit Modernism to go unopposed. Alarmed at these attacks on the Bible and on historic Christianity, a band of Christian scholars came together to make a stand for orthodoxy. *The Fundamentals* – A series of essays written between 1910 and 1915. Leading pastors and theologians set aside their differences and united to make a defense of the faith. The group was denominationally diverse including the venerable Princeton Presbyterian B.B. Warfield, the Southern Baptist leader E.Y. Mullins, the evangelist Reuben Torrey, and the dispensationalist C.I. Scofield.

The cardinal doctrine they united on against the assault of the modernists: the inspiration, authority, and inerrancy of the Bible. Based on this foundation, The Fundamentals defended other basics that modernists rejected, such as “*that Jesus Christ was God in human flesh, was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, died on the cross for the salvation of men and women, rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and would return at the end of the age in great glory; that sin is real and not the product of fevered imaginations; that God’s grace and not human effort is the source of salvation; and that the church is God’s institution designed to build up Christians and to spread the Gospel.*”[[2]](#footnote-2)

How do we get from The Fundamentals to Fundamentalists. The term then had a rather precise meaning of those who affirmed the foundational doctrines of orthodoxy; it soon, however, came to be used more broadly and more disparagingly, as it is today, to refer to militancy, intolerance, and anti-intellectualism. Modernists seize the term- and Harry Emerson Fosdick-a liberal Baptist minister- in 1922 preached a sermon titled “Shall the Fundamentalists Win?” Widely distributed called for tolerance and enlightened thinking in Christianity, rather than what he disparaged as narrow dogmatism.

**J Gresham Machen (1881-1937) and *Christianity & Liberalism* (1923)**

Enter one of the controversies greatest intellectual giants: J. Gresham Machen of Princeton Seminary. You might recall that defenders of Christian orthodoxy came from Princeton: Alexander, the Hodge's and Warfield. Machen wrote a strong rebuttal to the Modernism in his book *Christianity & Liberalism.* He argued that the fundamentalist-modernist dispute was not between two different emphases or interpretations of Christianity, but rather between two entirely different religions. *“the great redemptive religion which has always been known as Christianity is battling against a totally diverse type of religious belief, which is only the more destructive of the Christian faith because it makes use of traditional Christian terminology. This modern non-redemptive religion is called ‘modernism’ or ‘liberalism.’…the many varieties of modern liberal religion are rooted in naturalism – that is, the denial of any entrance of the creative power of God (as distinguished from the ordinary course of nature) in connection with the origin of Christianity.”[[3]](#footnote-3)*

Even those who disagreed with his Christian faith commented on the force and clarity of Machen’s argument, including admirers such as columnists Walter Lippman and H.L. Mencken. Enter the Scopes Monkey Trial*.* Mencken was no ally of fundamentalism*.* 1920 court case was the signature event of the Fundamentalist/Modernist Controversy*.* TN schoolteacher John Scopes was arrested for teaching evolution in violation of state law. These were lost in the tumult of the trial as the media led by Mencken caricatured the fundamentalists as obscurantist, backwards, and bigoted.

Most historians argue that after the 1925 Scopes trial, fundamentalists retreated from public life in shame and resentment, and spent the next decades in the isolated comfort of their own churches and ministries. Partly true; but misses the denominational battles of the 1920s and 30s: Fundamentalists and modernists fought over denominations and seminaries; b) mainly Baptists and Presbyterians; c) modernists effectively won; d) Machen resigned Princeton to found Westminster and left the PCUSA for OPC.

**Neo-Orthodoxy**

Fundamentalist retreat and modernists celebrate; a new group of theologians began to challenge liberalism. These new theologians conceded some to modernist tendencies of biblical authority, but still criticized liberalism for downplaying if not ignoring human sin and divine sovereignty.

Karl Barth (1886-1968) Swiss theologian first achieved acclaim in 1918 with commentary on Romans. Followed over the next several decades by a massive systematic theology entitled Church Dogmatics. Barth emphasized our sinfulness and absolute need for God, the fullness of God in Christ, and God's transcendent sovereignty over all creation. Barth also focused on the individual person’s subjective encounter with God more than God’s objective work in history. He believed the Bible was not the absolute Word of God, but it only “contained” the Word of God, and in turn only “became” the Word of God when read in faith by the individual. Though Barth did much to preserve some semblance of orthodoxy from the ravages of liberalism, he still conceded too much to biblical criticism, and allowed too little for the importance of God’s absolute, objective revelation in Christ and in history.

**Reinhold (1892-1971) and H. Richard Niebuhr (1894-1962)**

Both grad work at Yale; H. Richard careered there; Reinhold served at Union Theological Seminary. Both shared Barth's disaffection with protestant liberalism and sought to recover the reality of sin and divine judgment on the world. H. Richard on liberalism's beliefs: “*A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross.*”[[4]](#footnote-4) Reinhold emerged as a prominent theologian in America; appeared on the cover of time, lectured widely; engaged with intellectuals and policymakers on most pressing questions of the day. “Christian Realism”: urged the church to engage in social and political action and confront the crisis of the day. He always cautioned against liberal utopianism; human action was tainted by self-interest, and that in a fallen, sinful world man could only achieve proximate justice while awaiting God's final justice.

**Neo-Evangelicalism**

The neo-orthodox may have corrected liberalisms worst excesses, but they were not sufficient to fully recover and preserve biblical Christianity. Hard-core fundamentalists remained withdrawn from society in the cocoon of church communities a new movement began to take shape in the 1940s. Neo-evangelicals: ought to preserve fundamentalist orthodoxy while interacting with the broader world, intellectually and socially. Who were these new Evangelcials Popularly: Billy Graham; Intellectually: Harold Ockenga, E.J. Carnell, and Carl F.H. Henry; Brits: John Stott and J.I. Packer. These new Evangelicals also help a variety of beliefs coming from a variety of denominational backgrounds. They however were united on Authority of Scripture, necessity of new birth, the imperative of preaching the Gospel, and importance of engaging with the culture. They were key in establishing para-Church Groups like: National Association of Evangelicals; Campus Crusade for Christ; Youth for Christ; Fuller Theological Seminary; Christianity Today magazine

One of the individuals mentioned was **Carl F. H. Henry (1913-2003)**. Henry was one of the main neo-evangelical voices in the academy. In 1948 Henry moved co Pasadena, California, to be part of the original faculty of Fuller 111eologica1 Seminary, an institution established to engage modern theological scholarship, further world- wide evangelism and reform some of the unattractive elements of fundamentalism. Henry's *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (1947) was a manifesto calling for Christians to develop a comprehensive world view that would encompass all of life, including its social and political dimensions. For many evangelical intellectuals of the post-war era, Henry's book was a decisive influence in awakening their social conscience and overcoming their separatist tendencies. Henry moved to DC in 1956 to become first editor of CT- and to join Capitol Hill Baptist Church, where he was a member for many years until his death.

So what happened to American Evangelicalism in the 60s and 70s. The mainlines or denominations that had moved to modernism declined; evangelicalism becomes “mainstream” Protestantism; 1976 Newsweek declared “year of the evangelical”; Billy Graham crusades boom; churches swell; cities to suburbs; Denominations: Missouri Synod Lutheran and SBC pulled back from liberalism to orthodoxy.

**Evangelicalism Now**

As a movement, effective at preserving orthodoxy, spreading the Gospel and engage with culture. Strengths: conservative theology, passion and energy, thoughtful scholarship, and a unity among Christians from different traditions who shared a common experience of conversion. Not without weaknesses; confusing movement today; No creeds at foundation because it based itself in large part on a shared experience of conversion, and because it sought to bridge denominational divides, evangelicalism did not have much of a creedal foundation. It could not point to an objective, historical confession of faith that defined precisely what evangelicals believed, beyond the barest of bare essentials. Thus problems would arise when others from non-evangelical traditions claimed a similar “born again” experience without affirming a shared theology – for example, there is even a small movement of “evangelical Mormons.”

No roots in the local church evangelicalism never rooted itself enough in the local church. Because it focused so much on para-church ministries and unity across the denominations, evangelicalism in some ways neglected the primacy of the local church in God’s salvation plan. This has in some respects weakened local churches, as many Christians turn to other organizations for specialized ministries to students, men, women, athletes, and other particular groups. Now, in the 21st century, evangelicalism needs to reestablish its roots in the historic confessions of faith, and refocus itself on the local church. This is one reason why our church supports 9Marks, to recover the primacy of the local church in Christian life.

Capitol Hill Baptist Church

* 1. Celestia Ferris and the Prayer group
     1. 1860's began receiving people for prayer meetings in her home on A Street between Second and Third Streets.
     2. Need for a sunday school for idel neighborhood children
     3. So in 1871, the Metropolitan Baptist Association was incorporated and began meeting for Sunday School in a building on the corner of Seventh and A Streets, NE.
     4. In 1872, the corner lot on Sixth and A was purchased and plans were made to build a chapel.
  2. Mrs. Ferris and the bricks
     1. Mrs. Ferris apparently was again a driving force in the work to get a new building erected on the site. One account relates how she instructed the children in the Sunday School to pick up some bricks they saw on the street from all the construction in the neighborhood and put them on the lot. Someone wrote an account of the children’s success: Some of the enterprising children visited a brickyard and asked the owner for a load of brick for the chapel. The load was cheerfully given, which resulted in all brickyards being visited by Sunday School children, and all made similar contributions.
     2. A small chapel was built by the members themselves from those bricks.
  3. Church is formed
     1. By 1878 the group had decided to formally organize a church and brought a request with that intent to a meeting of delegates from the Baptist churches of the city. The group passed the following resolution: Resolved, That we tender to the brethren and sisters composing the Metropolitan Association an expression of our fraternal sympathy in their efforts to establish a Gospel church in this section of the city.
     2. On Wednesday evening, February 27, 1878, the church was organized with 31 constituent members who signed the covenant that now hangs back there on the wall.
  4. Stephen H. Mirick (1877-1878), and he was followed in fairly rapid succession by five other men until 1903. The Metropolitan Baptist Church, as it was known, grew at a steady rate from 31 members in 1878 to 244 by 1892. Even with this growth, though, the congregation still faced challenges that forced them to live by faith in their God. In 1884, when the church was experiencing various difficulties, Francis McLean wrote in the Trustees’ report that the church was “lessened in numbers and without a pastor, but we have faith, and out of faith proceedeth action.”
  5. John Compton Ball accepted a call to the pastorate of the church in 1903. It was during his 41 years of leadership that the church grew numerically to over 3000 and the current church building was constructed. When he first arrived, the church was overcrowded, so the old buildings were razed and a new structure was built and dedicated in 1911.
     1. Dr. Ball was a faithful preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ here at home and maintained the commitment of this congregation to the authority of Scripture and its teachings in an era when many churches, as we have seen, were softening this position.
  6. Dr. K. Owen White followed Dr. Ball as pastor and also faithfully proclaimed the Word. The Articles of Faith adopted at the church’s organization in 1878 have been changed only once in more than a century, a testimony to the congregation’s generations-old adherence to the truths of Christianity.
  7. In 1951, the top three floors of the education building were added. Through the 1950’s, parking needs grew and plans were considered for a new sanctuary on East Capitol Street. A gradual decline in membership began and accelerated sharply with the riots in the city in the late 1960’s.
  8. Early in 1967, the name of the church was changed from Metropolitan Baptist Church to Capitol Hill Metropolitan Baptist Church.
  9. The pastorate was also changing with regularity from 1950, when Dr. White’s pastorate ended, through the end of the 1970’s.
  10. From 1980 to 1988, Walt Tomme, Jr. served as pastor, and Harry Kilbride came in 1990 for two years. Many difficulties troubled the congregation through these years, which are recalled with sadness but also with an assurance of God’s faithfulness.
  11. In September of 1994, Mark Dever and his family came to begin with us yet another new era in God’s work on Capitol Hill. Though the name of the church was changed again, to the Capitol Hill Baptist Church, the dedication to the Gospel remains the same as that prayed for in the home of Celestia A. Ferris over 140 years ago.

1. CONCLUSION
   1. 1600 years ago, Augustine surveyed God’s work in history in his masterpiece, The City of God. He concluded:

[We look to] the eternal rest not only of the spirit but of the body also. There we shall be still and see; we shall see and we shall love; we shall love and we shall praise. Behold what will be, in the end, without end! For what is our end but to reach that kingdom which has no end?

And now, as I think, I have discharged my debt, with the completion, by God’s help, of this huge work. It may be too much for some, too little for others. Of both these groups I ask forgiveness. But of those for whom it is enough I make this request: that they do not thank me, but join with me in rendering thanks to God. Amen.

**GROWING CONCERN: 1870–1900**

**1876**

What will eventually be called the Niagara Bible Conference first meets (meeting annually until 1901); it inspires Bible and prophecy conferences nationally, which defend the Bible’s verbal inerrancy and promote holiness and premillennialism

**1881**

Presbyterian theologians B. B. Warfield and A. A. Hodge write “Inspiration,” which defends the inerrancy of Scripture; such articles begin to appear increasingly

**1889**

Moody Bible Institute founded, inspiring the founding of hundreds of Bible institutes and colleges that will become centers of fundamentalism

**1892**

Charles Briggs, liberal professor of Old Testament at Union Theological Seminary, New York, is convicted of heresy for his liberal interpretations of the Bible

**DEFINING THE ISSUES: 1900–1920**

**1909**

Scofield Reference Bible, whose notes teach dispensationalism and Keswick holiness, published; will become best-selling Bible among fundamentalists

**1910–1915**

The Fundamentals published; promotes conservative teaching

**1910**

Northern Presbyterian Church affirms five essential doctrines: inerrancy of the Bible, the Virgin Birth, Christ’s substitutionary atonement, his bodily resurrection, and miracles

**1919**

World’s Christian Fundamentals Association formed, the largest and longest–lasting (until the 1940s) international fundamentalist association

**1920**

Curtis Lee Laws, editor of the *Baptist Watchman-Examiner,* coins the term fundamentalist

**1920**

Conservatives in the Northern Baptist Convention organize the Fundamentalist Fellowship to combat spreading liberalism

**PUBLIC CONFRONTATIONS: 1920–1930**

**1923**

J. Gresham Machen’s *Liberalism and Christianity*defines liberalism as another religion

**1923**

Baptist Bible Union formed to gather Baptist fundamentalists of various denominations

**1924**

Evangelical Theological College (later Dallas Theological Seminary) founded; will become a dispensational stronghold

**1925**

At the Scopes trial, fundamentalism fares poorly in most Americans’ eyes

**1929**

Presbyterian fundamentalists found Westminster Theological Seminary

**INSTITUTION BUILDING: 1930–1950**

**1932**

Northern Baptist fundamentalists form the General Association of Regular Baptists

**1936**

Presbyterian fundamentalists form the Orthodox Presbyterian Church

**1937**

Disgruntled Orthodox Presbyterians form Bible Presbyterian Church

**1941**

American Council of Churches formed as a conservative alternative to World Council of Churches

**1947**

Moderate Northern Baptist fundamentalists form the Conservative Baptist Association

**LIBERALISM AND NEO-ORTHODOXY**

**1874**

John Fiske’s *Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy* is one of many books that try to combine Christianity and the new scientific learning

**1880**

Society of Biblical Literature formed to promote scientific study of the Bible

**1891**

Washington Gladden’s *Who Wrote the Bible* popularizes the new biblical criticism

**1894**

William N. Clarke’s *An Outline of Theology* is the first systematic theology from a liberal perspective

**1908**

Federal Council of Churches adopts “The Social Creed of the Churches” to promote the social gospel

**1917**

Walter Rauschenbusch’s *A Theology of the Social Gospel* further popularizes the political and social optimism of liberalism

**1922**

Harry Emerson Fosdick creates a stir with his sermon, “Shall the Fundamentalists Win?”

**1924**

Shailer Mathews’s *The Faith of Modernism* will become the most widely distributed book promoting modernism

**1927**

Presbyterian General Assembly decides the five fundamentals are no longer binding for ministerial candidates

**1932**

With Reinhold Niebuhr’s *Moral Man and Immoral Society,* neo-orthodoxy ascends, critiquing liberalism’s optimism and its accommodation to culture

**1936**

John Mackay assumes presidency of Princeton Theological Seminary; leads Presbyterianism in neo-orthodox directions

* 1. Neo-Orthodoxy v. Neo-Evangelicalism
     1. Appreciating Neo-Orthodoxy's contributions, these evangelicals were intellectually astute to the pernicious influence on the church
     2. Karl Barth and Carl Henry at GW:
        1. Identifying myself as ‘Carl Henry, editor of Christianity Today,’ I continued: ‘The question, Dr. Barth, concerns the historical factuality of the resurrection of Jesus.’ I pointed to the press table and noted the presence of leading religion editors or reporters representing United Press, Religion News Service, Washington Post, Washington Star and other media. If these journalists had their present duties in the time of Jesus, I asked, was the resurrection of such a nature that covering some aspect of it would have fallen into their area of responsibility? ‘Was it news,’ I asked, ‘in the sense that the man in the street understands news?’ Barth became angry. Pointing at me, and recalling my identification, he asked: ‘Did you say Christianity Today or Christianity Yesterday?’ The audience – largely non-evangelical professors and clergy – roared with delight. When countered unexpectedly in this way, one often reaches for a Scripture verse. So I replied, assuredly out of biblical context, ‘Yesterday, today and forever.’ When further laughter subsided, Barth took up the challenge: ‘And what of the virgin birth? Would the photographers come and take pictures of it?’ he asked. Jesus, he continued, appeared only to believers and not to the world. Barth correlated the reality of the resurrection only with personal faith.[[5]](#footnote-5)
     3. Niebuhr v. Carnell
        1. Billy Graham crusade in NYC in 1957; Niebuhr wrote an editorial sharply critical of Graham, concluding that he “dread[s] the prospect” of Graham’s arrival.[[6]](#footnote-6)
        2. E.J. Carnell eagerly took up the gauntlet to defend Graham. Since Carnell had written his doctoral dissertation on Niebuhr, he knew well the strengths and vulnerabilities of Christian realism. And he saw a profound difference, he writes,: “Orthodoxy mediates problems of man and history from the perspective of Scripture, while realism mediates problems of Scripture from the perspective of man and history.” Right, so in orthodoxy, you look through Scripture to make sense of man and history. In Christian realism, you look through man and history to understand Scripture. And to Carnell, this was not just academic trifling. He continues, “When it comes to the acid test” of personal faith, “realism is not very realistic after all. A concrete view of sin converts to an abstract view of salvation.” So, Niebuhr might speak of Christ’s cross and resurrection as “symbols” instead of literal realities, but as Carnell noted, “of what value are these symbols to an anxious New York cabby?” At the end of the day, Carnell suggested ironically, evangelical orthodoxy was more “realistic” than Christian realism.[[7]](#footnote-7)

1. Mark Noll, A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1992), 375-76. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Noll, 381. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. . J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1994 reprint), 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (New York: Harper and Row 1937), 193. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Carl F.H. Henry, *Confessions of a Theologian: An Autobiography* (Waco, TX: Word 1986), 211. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Niebuhr, “Editorial Notes,” *Christianity and Crisis*, 5 March 1956, 18-19 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Carnell, “Can Billy Graham Slay the Giant?”, *CT*, 13 May 1957, 3-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)