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BOOK REVIEWS

Selling the Old-Time Religion: American Fundamentalism and Mass Culture, 1920–1940, by Douglas Carl Abrams. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2001. 168 pp. $35.

Strangers in Zion: Fundamentalists in the South, 1900–1950, by William R. Glass. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001. 309 pp. $39.95.

The study of fundamentalism has come into its own in the past twenty years with a number of helpful books on the rise and development of a significant theological force in American life. Added to the growing body of literature are two recent works that continue the process of clarifying the shape and nature of the fundamentalist movement in the twentieth century. Douglas Carl Abrams, *Selling the Old-Time Religion*, examines early fundamentalist's use of popular culture to promote their theological agenda while William R. Glass, *Strangers in Zion*, explores the impact of fundamentalism in the South during the first half of the last century. Both works offer helpful insights and make for fascinating reading to anyone with an interest in American church history generally and fundamentalist history specifically.

Abrams's thesis is that fundamentalism, while rejecting the message of modernity, embraced its methodology to promote its own narrower evangelical agenda. But by doing so, it often sent conflicting signals regarding its relationship to the modernity it so vocally opposed. Following Harry Stout's *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (1991), who suggested Whitefield aggressively embraced the modern methods in his day, Abrams argues that fundamentalists often took a pragmatic approach to their methodology, adopting an *ends justifies the means* mindset. In fact, "describing their efforts as 'selling the old-time religion' would be, to them [the fundamentalists], high praise" (p. xii).

What is most striking about Abrams's book is not so much the subject, as startling as the title may be, but that he is a professing fundamentalist. Abrams teaches history at Bob Jones University, and this work marks the first effort by a fundamentalist to reach a broad, scholarly audience signified by the fact that a secular press like the University of Georgia would publish a work by a fundamentalist about

fundamentalism. This, in itself, is remarkable, as so often fundamentalists have been accused of speaking only to themselves. Furthermore, Abrams addresses a topic that does the Church as a whole a great service. In reminding us, from a historical vantage point, of the allurement and dangers of embracing modern culture without carefully evaluating the potential negative implications, Abrams's work offers a helpful warning to the Church of the undue influence culture can have on its message. This problem of cultural capitulation has been evident across the theological spectrum, and certainly fundamentalists have had their share of difficulties in this regard.

To sustain his thesis, Abrams borrows arguments from much of the recent secondary literature on fundamentalism, especially Virginia Brereton's, *Training God's Army* (1990). Following Brereton, Abrams states that fundamentalism was "a spiritual movement, blinded in part by the business success of the decade, [that] swallowed materialist assumptions with ease" (p. 23). Fundamentalist leaders were all too eager to embrace modernity to promote their agenda. J. C. Massee knew "how to sell religion" and Paul Rader was the master fundamentalist promoter (p. 31).

Unfortunately, Abrams' conclusions often come, not from research in primary sources, but from the secondary literature. The Massee quote, cited above, is gleaned from C. Allyn Russell's *Voices of American Fundamentalism* (1976) rather than from primary sources by or about Massee. If the use of the often biased secondary literature were occasional, one might overlook an accidental dependence upon it for proof, but in the opinion of this reviewer, too often the argument is built from the secondary literature while the primary material is added for support. The heavy dependence on secondary literature results in some unsubstantiated assertions. For example, controversial fundamentalist J. Frank Norris was "unrepentant" after the shooting of D. E. Chipps (1926), and used the incident to bolster the circulation of his paper, *The Searchlight* (p. 34). The documentation offered for this harsh assessment is Norman Furniss, *The Fundamentalist Controversy, 1918–1931* (1954). An examination of Furniss indicates he is alluding to opinions, found in newspapers of the day, of Southern Baptist opponents of Norris. This disparaging evaluation of Norris is too severe a criticism to hang on the peg of a biased primary witness, much less sifted through two other more distant historians. Was Norris "unrepentant" and did he merely *use* the incident to bolster his own agenda? This is a strong indictment that ought to be supported by evidence from Norris himself, or at least by noting the opinions directly, rather than citing secondary literature. It is this over dependence on the secondary literature that occurs regularly in the text.

A second weakness noted is a confusing focus of the study itself.

While the book is ostensibly about fundamentalism, at times, broader terms like "conservative evangelical" (p. 110) and "evangelical" (pp. 114, 125) are used. Some individuals, not ordinarily identified by fundamentalists, as fundamentalist, are examined. Aimee Semple McPherson, a Pentecostal evangelist, is considered in her relationship with certain fundamentalists as proof of a "fundamentalist urgency about evangelism [that] often caused them to overlook gender concerns" (p. 114).[1] The question to be asked is whether occasionally fundamentalists overlook gender concerns or did fundamentalism as a whole adopt this pragmatic approach? From the evidence cited, it was more occasional than pandemic. Another example is the support for the use of films by Charles M. Sheldon, who was not a fundamentalist (p. 96). The case of Reverend Patty Horn, pastor of a Disciples of Christ Church in Iowa, is offered as evidence of the abundance of "prominent female fundamentalist ministries" (p. 110). Did fundamentalism support the idea of female evangelistic ministries? Were the Disciples of Christ self-conscious fundamentalists? Would not the examples of McPherson, Sheldon, and Horn better fall under the broader term evangelical? Abrams's working definition of fundamentalism is broader than fundamentalist historians have been willing to grant. Perhaps this is due to his early admission that he would not explore fundamentalist theology (p. xi). Unfortunately, a sociological model of fundamentalism is presented rather than a theological model. This allows for a certain ambiguity that might have been avoided by changing the subtitle from *American Fundamentalists and Mass Culture* to *American Evangelicals and Mass Culture.* Fundamentalism was a self-conscious, narrower subset of broader evangelicalism, but many of the illustrations presented transcend traditional, self-conscious fundamentalist boundaries. This kind of treatment by a non-fundamentalist might be understandable, but why would a fundamentalist historian, in sympathy with his own movement, not be more precise about defining fundamentalism theologically? Have self-avowed fundamentalists ever considered the Pentecostals or Church of Christ a part of mainstream fundamentalism?

This is not to say that Abrams failed to make his point. Clearly *some* fundamentalists adopted a pragmatic approach to mass culture. Unfortunately, as he demonstrated, some fundamentalists embraced

[1]Coincidently, Abrams in this section also draws heavily on the secondary literature to build his argument, especially Janette Hassey, *No Time for Silence: Evangelical Women in Public Ministry Around the Turn of the Century* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986) and Brereton's *Training God's Army* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1990).

modern methods as an expedient way to increase their own following. However, did fundamentalism do this as a whole and was their use of modern advertising and promotion a capitulation to modernity? Most fundamentalists sincerely believed they were obeying the voice of God found in the pages of the Scripture. The using of modern methods was merely a way to spread the Gospel to a wider audience (pp. 128–129). However, it is doubtful, in the mind of this reviewer, that fundamentalists would really consider the assessment that they were *selling the old-time religion* a "high praise."

William R. Glass, *Strangers in Zion*, is a helpful survey of the rise and progress of fundamentalism in the Southern states. Glass rightly notes that fundamentalism was largely a Northern phenomenon that did not find the same kind of fertile soil for growth in the South. The slow progress of Southern fundamentalism is attributed to "social and cultural ferment," "Southern race relations," and "the place of churches in Southern society" (xv–xvi). Because Southern fundamentalism developed much more gradually than it did in the North, historians of fundamentalism have either overlooked the Southern faction or simply treated it as a component of the national movement without much analysis offered.

Glass starts with a helpful survey of fundamentalism in an effort to define his terms. The rise of liberalism, the emphasis of Wesleyan holiness, and premillennialism were the three leading factors that precipitated fundamentalism. These issues help him to identify Southern fundamentalists, especially when some individuals were unwilling to identify themselves with the larger fundamentalist cause. This results in a broader use of the term fundamentalist than fundamentalist historians would appreciate. E. P. Alldredge, a Georgia Southern Baptist, did not openly claim to be a fundamentalist and resisted affiliation with J. Frank Norris, yet he was a fundamentalist because of his beliefs (p. 186), as were other Southern Baptists who were "fundamentalistic" (p. 192).

Glass surveys the various fundamentalist groups in the South along four lines—itinerant, interdenominational, denominational and separatist fundamentalists. There is some overlap with this approach, but it is a generally helpful method. Key individuals, among the denominations, with the fundamentalist mindset are considered. Unfortunately, important Southern Baptists who were openly affiliated with the Northern fundamentalist movement are missed. Southern Baptist John William Porter, long-time editor of the *Western Recorder*, for a time aligned himself with the Northern fundamentalists in the Baptist Bible Union, and the *Western Recorder* showed great affinity with the Northern fundamentalist concerns. Absent is any mention of Thomas T. Martin, a fiery Southern Baptist evangelist, who as a friend of

William Jennings Bryan attended the Scopes trial and who targeted noted Baptist liberal, William L. Poteat, president of Wake Forest College. Though an ardent fundamentalist, Martin remained loyal to the denomination and opposed Norris's attacks. Missing from Glass's otherwise helpful bibliography is James L. Thompson's *Tried as by Fire—Southern Baptists and the Religious Controversies of the 1920's* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1982), which would have helped identify Southern Baptist fundamentalists. In short, there were other Southern Baptists besides J. Frank Norris who deliberately affiliated with the Baptist Bible Union and Northern fundamentalist alliances who should have been considered. Also absent are examinations of later self-identified fundamentalists like John R. Rice, who is mentioned only once in the entire book. A greater effort given to examining self-conscious fundamentalists would have been beneficial.

Another problem with a broad use of the idea of fundamentalism is identifying individuals as fundamentalist who might better be described with another conservative group like Baptist landmarkism. Such is the case with I. W. Rogers, who confronted denominational issues "with a fundamentalist perspective" (p. 204). The two primary issues Rogers wrote about in his paper, *The Faith*, identified as fundamentalist were unionism—the cooperation with wider Protestantism—and support of the Cooperative Program. However, these issues were of equal concern to Southern Baptist landmarkers, so it would have been helpful for Glass to discuss why Rogers was identifying with fundamentalism and not landmarkism when he argued these particular positions. Fundamentalism and landmarkism are not coterminous.

In an effort to broaden the scope of his study, Glass is forced to look at many who were not self-consciously fundamentalist and minimize his examination of those who were. Bob Jones College, mistakenly considered *inter*denominational rather than their preferred term of *non*denominational, was a self-conscious fundamentalist institution. Though it receives periodic treatment throughout the book, it is not examined in detail for its contribution to Southern fundamentalism; nor is Tennessee Temple Schools, another self-conscious fundamentalist institution. The net effect is that individuals who resisted the label are given equal weight with those who readily embraced it for the sake of creating a larger study group.

Still, Glass presents an interesting glimpse into conservative Southern religious life in the wake of the cultural and religious developments of the twentieth century. He demonstrates effectively that fundamentalism did not impact Southern religion in the same way that it did in the North. Southern fundamentalists, it seems, were truly "strangers in Zion."

Despite the above noted concerns, both of these books make

valuable contributions to the historiography of the broad fundamentalist movement. By addressing issues not heretofore discussed in the literature of fundamentalism—fundamentalism's relationship to modernity and Southern fundamentalism—Abrams and Glass have identified areas of fundamentalist history that warrant further historical investigation.

Jeff Straub

The Armies of the Lamb: The Spirituality of Andrew Fuller, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin. Dundas, Ontario: Joshua Press, 2001. 302 pp. $9.99.

Here is the third installment in the Classics of Reformed Spirituality, edited by Michael Haykin. Two previous paperbacks treat Oliver Cromwell and George Whitefield respectively. Haykin, something of a Canadian Tom Nettles,[2] is making a significant contribution to Baptist historiography as professor of church history at Heritage Baptist College and Theological Seminary, Cambridge, Ontario, and as editorial director of Joshua Press. Not only has Haykin written numerous journal articles, but he has also edited an excellent two volume set on the British Particular Baptists, produced by Particular Baptist Press (1998). He has also penned what is his best original work to date, *One Heart and One Soul: John Sutcliff of Olney, His Friends and His Times* (Evangelical Press, 1994). Along with his other works, *One Heart and One Soul* establishes Haykin as the leading Baptist historian of Canada. His thorough research, superb organization of material, and an lucid writing style have earned him high marks both in Britain and America.

Andrew Fuller (1754–1815), as a leader of the evangelical Particular Baptists, helped save his denomination from the deadening effects of hyper-Calvinism with his promotion of an all-sufficient atonement. Indeed, it was this doctrine that helped launch the modern missions movement in 1792 from Kettering, England. The ethical impetus for the movement was "duty faith," the two-fold responsibility of every unbeliever to receive the gospel and of every minister to faithfully and indiscriminately offer it. Haykin provides us a profitable glimpse

[2]Haykin and Nettles have much in common. They are both leading evangelical Baptist "reformers" in their respective denominations, and they have a similar view of notable Baptists, like Fuller. In fact, Nettles has written the forward to *Armies of the Lamb*.