

The “Roaring” Twenties

- The “Liberal vs. Fundamentalist” controversy continued
 - “Shall the Fundamentalists Win?” was a sermon preached by a “liberal” Baptist minister, Harry Emerson Fosdick, at the First Presbyterian Church in New York City in 1922.

“This morning we are to think of the fundamentalist controversy which threatens to divide the American churches as though already they were not sufficiently split and riven. . .

“Already all of us must have heard about the people who call themselves the Fundamentalists. Their apparent intention is to drive out of the evangelical churches men and women of liberal opinions. I speak of them the more freely because there are no two denominations more affected by them than the Baptist and the Presbyterian. We should not identify the Fundamentalists with the conservatives. All Fundamentalists are conservatives, but not all conservatives are Fundamentalists. The best conservatives can often give lessons to the liberals in true liberality of spirit, but the Fundamentalist program is essentially illiberal and intolerant.

“The Fundamentalists see, and they see truly, that in this last generation there have been strange new movements in Christian thought. A great mass of new knowledge has come into man’s possession—new knowledge about the physical universe, its origin, its forces, its laws; new knowledge about human history and in particular about the ways in which the ancient peoples used to think in matters of religion and the methods by which they phrased and explained their spiritual experiences; and new knowledge, also, about other religions and the strangely similar ways in which men’s faiths and religious practices have developed everywhere. . . .

“Now, there are multitudes of reverent Christians who have been unable to keep this new knowledge in one compartment of their minds and the Christian faith in another. They have been sure that all truth comes from the one God and is His revelation. Not, therefore, from irreverence or caprice or destructive zeal but for the sake of intellectual and spiritual integrity, that they might really love the Lord their God, not only with all their heart and soul and strength but with all their mind, they have been trying to see this new knowledge in terms of the Christian faith and to see the Christian faith in terms of this new knowledge.

- Fosdick specifically criticized the “Fundamentalists” for insisting on belief in the virgin birth of Christ, the inspiration of the Scriptures, the substitutionary atonement, and a literal Second Coming. “Liberals” had, in their own minds, outgrown these superstitious aspects of Christianity and had more appropriately embraced the “progressive” concept of the “social Gospel. ”
- In his conclusion, Fosdick clearly indicated that he didn’t think the “Fundamentalists” should win.

“The present world situation smells to heaven! And now, in the presence of colossal problems, which must be solved in Christ’s name and for Christ’s sake, the Fundamentalists propose to drive out from the Christian churches all the consecrated souls who do not agree with their theory of inspiration. What immeasurable folly!

“Well, they are not going to do it; certainly not in this vicinity. I do not even know in this congregation whether anybody has been tempted to be a Fundamentalist. Never in this church have I caught one accent of intolerance. God keep us always so and ever increasing areas of the Christian fellowship; intellectually hospitable, open-minded, liberty-loving, fair, tolerant, not with the tolerance of indifference, as though we did not care about the faith, but because always our major emphasis is upon the weightier matters of the law.”¹

- Although the Scopes Trial took place in Tennessee in 1925, it garnered national attention.² The continued “Liberal” Christian support for Evolution eventually resulted in the complete removal of Creationism from American public schools during the 1960’s.

¹ The full text of Fosdick’s sermon can be found at <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5070>.

² The full trial transcript can be downloaded for a nominal fee from <http://www.ebookmall.com/ebook/78295-ebook.htm>.

The “Roaring” Twenties

- The Prohibition Era (1920-1933)
 - “Liberal” Christians enthusiastically supported “progressive” government intervention, while “Fundamentalists” tended toward abstinence as a personal choice, regardless of government regulation.

In 1924, Amy Semple McPherson (a Pentecostal revivalist) said: “And in each city, they asked the same question: “Sister McPherson, what do you think of Prohibition?” It was rather difficult to answer the question in such a few words as one must use then, but I told them, that the case about Prohibition here in the United States, reminds me of the story of the lecturer who gave a marvelous address on prohibition. And he wound up in a blaze of glory that brought everyone to their feet enthusiastically. “Why is it my friends, if I had my way, do you know what I’d do? I’d take every barrel of liquor, every bottle of booze, every crate, and I’d empty it in the river. Yes sir. ” Then he said, “Shall we now close our meeting by rising and singing, ‘Shall We Gather at The River?’” He’d spoiled it all. And that’s the way perhaps with us over here in America: we teach it, but so often those who profess to make the laws do not quite live up to them, and back them themselves.”³

After repeal, Bill Sunday (a famous baseball star turned revivalist) said: “I don’t give a hoot for the regulation of the sale of liquor. If we must have booze, well let’s sell it in a saloon where it belongs. That’s where it belongs. Government regulation of booze has always been worse than when it was in the sale of private hands. For when it was in the sale of private hands, it kept it in the saloon where it belongs. What difference does it make whether a man guzzles beer standing at a bar or sitting down at a table? Booze sold to a preacher, or a high school girl, has the same effect as when it’s sold to an automobile thief or a horse thief. Congress has passed a law putting two dollars of tax on whiskey, and they expect to realize 300 million dollars. That means that the American people have got to buy and drink 150 million gallons a year. They have put five dollars of federal tax on beer. That means the people have got to buy and drink 32 million barrels of beer a year. It doesn’t take a lawyer to figure out that if you do that you keep that much money out of legitimate channels you create, you spend that much less for food and clothes and boots and shoes and education and automobiles. Oh, America didn’t need repeal, she needed repentance! She didn’t need wrong, she needed righteousness! We don’t need Jags, we need Jesus! We don’t need more grog, we need more God!”⁴

- Some of the unintended consequences of the Prohibition Era:
 - Organized Crime
 - The acceptance of “public” (within the “speakeasies” & “blind pigs” during Prohibition & pretty much anywhere after the repeal) drinking among women.
 - Worsening of alcoholism, since support groups dried up during Prohibition.

³ An audio file of McPherson’s comments can be found at <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5071>.

⁴ An audio file of Sunday’s comments can be found at <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5072>.

The “Roaring” Twenties

- Impact of Modern Tech
 - First, with the development of steam trains & steam ships in the 1800’s; then later, by the rise of mass-produced automobiles & commercial air travel following World War I, Americans were becoming more and more mobile, as well as more industrialized and urbanized.
 - By 1930, 2/3 of American homes had electricity. Labor saving appliances were growing in demand.
 - By 1930, 1/2 of American homes had telephones. It was easier to “stay in touch” with those far away.
 - Chain stores, advertising campaigns & the explosion of spectator sports are all traced back to this era.
 - Radio, originally envisioned as a means for government, education & business to communicate with the American people with a view to imparting “Progressive” ideals, was soon being used to promote Christianity. Not everyone was happy about this development.⁵ Government regulation eventually produced the F. C. C. in 1934.
 - Rising complaints from the American Christian community caused Hollywood to begin worrying that Federal regulation of the movie industry might soon take place. In 1922 they hired a Presbyterian Church elder named William H. Hays to help them “clean up” their image as the first president of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA). In 1927 he recommended the following “Don’ts and Be Carefuls” to help studios deal with the individual state censor boards that determined which films would be permitted to play in their state.

“Resolved, That those things which are included in the following list shall not appear in pictures produced by the members of this Association, irrespective of the manner in which they are treated:

1. Pointed profanity-by either title or lip-this includes the words "God," "Lord," "Jesus" "Christ" (unless they be used reverently in connection with proper religious ceremonies), "hell," "damn," "Gawd," and every other profane and vulgar expression however it may be spelled;
2. Any licentious or suggestive nudity-in fact or in silhouette; and any lecherous or licentious notice thereof by other characters in the picture;
3. The illegal traffic in drugs;
4. Any inference of sex perversion;
5. White slavery;
6. Miscegenation (sex relationship between the white and black races);
7. Sex hygiene and venereal diseases;
8. Scenes of actual childbirth-in fact or in silhouette;
9. Children's sex organs;
10. Ridicule of the clergy;
11. Willful offence to any nation, race or creed;

⁵ From “Religion’s Raid on Radio” *Current Opinion*, March 1925: “It is bad enough to have different religious denominations preaching against each other and working against each other, all in the name of the same God, within the walls of their own meeting-houses. In that case we do not have to listen to them unless we choose to. But if they get to competing in the air, we broadcast listeners will be out of luck. Already the Fundamentalists and their opponents have had their fling in the ether and a large part of listening America had a bad attack of spiritual nausea. So long as power is limited so that the propagandizing station can be tuned out, the situation is tolerable. The radio manufacturer and dealer especially are not adverse to a condition that requires a high degree of selectivity in receiving sets. But when a broadcaster acquires a right to radiate an amount of power that will force oscillations in all receivers within five, ten or fifty miles, for any number of hours he may choose to monopolize the ether, he will have reached the ideal of the religious fanatic and the point where the average listener will junk his receiving set.”

“And it be further *resolved*, That special care be exercised in the manner in which the following subjects are treated, to the end that vulgarity and suggestiveness may be eliminated and that good taste may be emphasized:

1. The use of the flag;
2. International relations (avoiding picturizing in an unfavourable light another country's religion, history, institutions, prominent people and citizenry);
3. Arson;
4. The use of firearms;
5. Theft, robbery, safe-cracking, and dynamiting of trains, mines, buildings, etc. (having in mind the effect which a too-detailed description of these may have upon the moron);
6. Brutality and possible gruesomeness;
7. Technique of committing murder by whatever method;
8. Methods of smuggling;
9. Third-degree methods
10. Actual hangings or electrocutions as legal punishment for crime;
11. Sympathy for criminals;
12. Attitude toward public characters and institutions;
13. Sedition;
14. Apparent cruelty to children and animals;
15. Branding of people or animals;
16. The sale of women, or of a woman selling her virtue;
17. Rape or attempted rape;
18. First-night scenes;
19. Man and woman in bed together;
20. Deliberate seduction of girls;
21. The institution of marriage;
22. Surgical operations;
23. The use of drugs;
24. Titles or scenes having to do with law enforcement or law-enforcing officers;
25. Excessive or lustful kissing, particularly when one character or the other is a "heavy".

- In 1930, the Association adopted a Motion Picture Code with the following “General Principles” followed by a list of “Particular Applications” much more extensive than Hays’ 1927 list.

1. No picture shall be produced that will lower the moral standards of those who see it. Hence the sympathy of the audience should never be thrown to the side of crime, wrongdoing, evil or sin.
2. Correct standards of life, subject only to the requirements of drama and entertainment, shall be presented.
3. Law, natural or human, shall not be ridiculed, nor shall sympathy be created for its violation. ”

The “Roaring Twenties” Gave Way To “The Great Depression” of the Thirties

- Financial exuberance throughout the 20’s ended with the “Great Crash of ’29. ”
- “Progressives,” responding to the “Great Depression” & led by the “high-handedness”⁶ of President Roosevelt, expanded the Federal government even further into the lives of the American people.
- Biblical Christianity was marginalized even more by an increasingly secular & “liberal Christian” society.

⁶ In my personal opinion.

A HUMANIST MANIFESTO (1933)

The time has come for widespread recognition of the radical changes in religious beliefs throughout the modern world. The time is past for mere revision of traditional attitudes. Science and economic change have disrupted the old beliefs. Religions the world over are under the necessity of coming to terms with new conditions created by a vastly increased knowledge and experience. In every field of human activity, the vital movement is now in the direction of a candid and explicit humanism. In order that religious humanism may be better understood we, the undersigned, desire to make certain affirmations which we believe the facts of our contemporary life demonstrate.

There is great danger of a final, and we believe fatal, identification of the word religion with doctrines and methods which have lost their significance and which are powerless to solve the problem of human living in the Twentieth Century. Religions have always been means for realizing the highest values of life. Their end has been accomplished through the interpretation of the total environing situation (theology or world view), the sense of values resulting therefrom (goal or ideal), and the technique (cult), established for realizing the satisfactory life. A change in any of these factors results in alteration of the outward forms of religion. This fact explains the changefulness of religions through the centuries. But through all changes religion itself remains constant in its quest for abiding values, an inseparable feature of human life.

Today man's larger understanding of the universe, his scientific achievements, and deeper appreciation of brotherhood, have created a situation which requires a new statement of the means and purposes of religion. Such a vital, fearless, and frank religion capable of furnishing adequate social goals and personal satisfactions may appear to many people as a complete break with the past. While this age does owe a vast debt to the traditional religions, it is none the less obvious that any religion that can hope to be a synthesizing and dynamic force for today must be shaped for the needs of this age. To establish such a religion is a major necessity of the present. It is a responsibility which rests upon this generation. We therefore affirm the following:

FIRST: Religious humanists regard the universe as self-existing and not created.

SECOND: Humanism believes that man is a part of nature and that he has emerged as a result of a continuous process.

THIRD: Holding an organic view of life, humanists find that the traditional dualism of mind and body must be rejected.

FOURTH: Humanism recognizes that man's religious culture and civilization, as clearly depicted by anthropology and history, are the product of a gradual development due to his interaction with his natural environment and with his social heritage. The individual born into a particular culture is largely molded by that culture.

FIFTH: Humanism asserts that the nature of the universe depicted by modern science makes unacceptable any supernatural or cosmic guarantees of human values. Obviously humanism does not deny the possibility of realities as yet undiscovered, but it does insist that the way to determine the existence and value of any and all realities is by means of intelligent inquiry and by the assessment of their relations to human needs. Religion must formulate its hopes and plans in the light of the scientific spirit and method.

SIXTH: We are convinced that the time has passed for theism, deism, modernism, and the several varieties of "new thought".

SEVENTH: Religion consists of those actions, purposes, and experiences which are humanly significant. Nothing human is alien to the religious. It includes labor, art, science, philosophy, love, friendship, recreation--all that is in its degree expressive of intelligently satisfying human living. The distinction between the sacred and the secular can no longer be maintained.

EIGHTH: Religious Humanism considers the complete realization of human personality to be the end of man's life and seeks its development and fulfillment in the here and now. This is the explanation of the humanist's social passion.

NINTH: In the place of the old attitudes involved in worship and prayer the humanist finds his religious emotions expressed in a heightened sense of personal life and in a cooperative effort to promote social well-being.

TENTH: It follows that there will be no uniquely religious emotions and attitudes of the kind hitherto associated with belief in the supernatural.

ELEVENTH: Man will learn to face the crises of life in terms of his knowledge of their naturalness and probability. Reasonable and manly attitudes will be fostered by education and supported by custom. We assume that humanism will take the path of social and mental hygiene and discourage sentimental and unreal hopes and wishful thinking.

TWELFTH: Believing that religion must work increasingly for joy in living, religious humanists aim to foster the creative in man and to encourage achievements that add to the satisfactions of life.

THIRTEENTH: Religious humanism maintains that all associations and institutions exist for the fulfillment of human life. The intelligent evaluation, transformation, control, and direction of such associations and institutions with a view to the enhancement of human life is the purpose and program of humanism. Certainly religious institutions, their ritualistic forms, ecclesiastical methods, and communal activities must be reconstituted as rapidly as experience allows, in order to function effectively in the modern world.

FOURTEENTH: The humanists are firmly convinced that existing acquisitive and profit-motivated society has shown itself to be inadequate and that a radical change in methods, controls, and motives must be instituted. A socialized and cooperative economic order must be established to the end that the equitable distribution of the means of life be possible. The goal of humanism is a free and universal society in which people voluntarily and intelligently cooperate for the common good. Humanists demand a shared life in a shared world.

FIFTEENTH AND LAST: We assert that humanism will: (a) affirm life rather than deny it; (b) seek to elicit the possibilities of life, not flee from them; and (c) endeavor to establish the conditions of a satisfactory life for all, not merely for the few. By this positive morale and intention humanism will be guided, and from this perspective and alignment the techniques and efforts of humanism will flow.

So stand the theses of religious humanism. Though we consider the religious forms and ideas of our fathers no longer adequate, the quest for the good life is still the central task for mankind. Man is at last becoming aware that he alone is responsible for the realization of the world of his dreams, that he has within himself the power for its achievement. He must set intelligence and will to the task.

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