

The Evangelical Fellowship Of Canada (II)

Picture of Fundamentalism

I am well aware, Fundamentalism is something to be aware of. However, the reporters expressing their fear and their consequent desire for withdrawal had painted a caricature of the real situation. They described only the fundamentalists of the most extreme type. I have not read very often such a strongly coloured presentation of fundamentalism as in Acts of Synod of 1949. As I am working on a doctoral thesis entitled "The Historical Background of Fundamentalism", I have read naturally a host of opinions of what fundamentalism is supposed to be. The report of 1949 states in brief:

1. "Fundamentalism is at best Arminian, but in fact anti-theological. Fundamentalism lacks a controlling theological principle, such as the doctrine of the Sovereignty of God."⁽⁹⁾ This is certainly a sweeping statement as many fundamentalists believe in the sovereignty of God and the total depravity of man.

2. "Fundamentalism has no World and Life View or, if it has, it is a negative one. Fundamentalism is exclusively other-worldly. It has no conception of the Kingdom of God in its meaning for this life and this world. The world, it says, is not ours, but Satan's. Instead of the Scriptural demand for separation from worldliness, it substitutes isolation from the world. It has no use for science, except in terms of its practical benefits and its possible use in defense of Scripture."

3. "In the sphere of Christian life and worship too, the Fundamentalist is far removed from the Reformed believer. With its fallacious view of the Kingdom of God, Fundamentalism is deprived of the ability to make dependable Christian moral judgments on all social problems."

4. "Fundamentalism is sectarian. It has no conception of the task of the church as institute. It rejects the denominations as man-made organizations, and often comes close to denouncing them as part and parcel of the condemned world. To the sects, the denominations are legitimate fields for proselyting.. On this score the Fundamentalists, are in practice, as on other scores in theory, in complete isolation. from the main stream of Evangelical Protestantism. Lacking a sound doctrine of the Church, their notions regarding the problems and practices of ecclesiastical co-operation are hopelessly confused."⁽¹⁰⁾ Those interested in complete details of these charges and counter charges should read pages 288-322 of Acts of the Chr. Ref. Synod 1949.

End of Membership

The majority report did not immediately convince the Synod. It advised that the status quo should be maintained, while a committee would study the relationship with the N.A.E. In 1950, when the issue was discussed again, Synod advised to continue membership for another year. However, Synod expressed its emphatic disapproval of

activities such as revival meetings and mass evangelism. The following year, a majority vote decided to terminate the Christian Reformed Church's affiliation with the N.A.E. In that same year our ties were severed. Thus ended our ecumenical adventure with evangelical Christians. Why? The nightmare of a lone Christian Reformed denomination being drowned in a sea of fundamentalism was being played up by some. The extremists were set up as a model and judgments and evaluations were based upon this caricature. However, the fundamentalists, though they have their errors and misconceptions of God's Word, are still fellow Christians. As it was said in the minority report of 1949 "Without accepting their errors we recognize them as fellow Christians. That is not inconsistent with our Reformed convictions. We do not surrender one iota of our Reformed truth. And if some of our people be disturbed about evangelical meetings being held, supposedly under N.A.E. auspices, we make it plain that these meetings are not held under N.A.E., as explained above. In this way we may teach our people both to hold to our Reformed position and to recognize also the wider body of Christians, who are after all part of the fold of our Lord and therefore spiritually related to us." (11)

Membership Still Wanted

I wish that the Chr. Ref. Church as such were more concerned about the World Council of Churches as they were about the fundamentalists. Our decision to withdraw was deeply regretted 'by the N.A.E. It kept in contact with our denomination. In 1957, the Association invited our church to re-affiliate. The Synodical committee on this issue advised to accept this invitation. As one of the reasons for re-affiliation was given "Our church with its strong creedal position and committed Calvinistic leadership can and should fill much needed role in the N.A.E. Leaders of the N.A.E. have asked our church to help precisely by lending such a leadership to them." (12) Alas, the Synod did not act upon the advice of the committee and the Christian Reformed Church remained outside the N.A.E. Why did our relationship with other evangelical Christians have to go that way? We did not have to participate in activities we opposed. We are supposed to be noted for our careful and scholarly approach to the great issues of the day and the challenges facing us. But the ecumenical venture with the N.A.E. appeared to have been undertaken in a haphazard way. A thorough study of the N.A.E. should have taken place to our affiliation. Our entrance was hasty and ill prepared, and so was our departure.

Communion With True Believers

As the E.F.C. is nearly similar to the N.A.E., I believe that this brief history of our ecumenical experience with other evangelicals is necessary for our further discussion. What should we think now about the E.F.C.? Should we be concerned about it? We must be concerned as God has placed as Reformed Christians with a great heritage in this vast country. If we do believe in God's leading in life we cannot shirk our responsibilities and leave our fellow Canadian evangelicals alone. I am disturbed at times by all the time we spent on what is happening in the Netherlands. I am even more disturbed about how little our people know about the Canadian church situation. We do

not need to be afraid of losing our Reformed strength when we fellowship in a responsible way with other evangelicals. We have a unique message and we should not withhold the wealth of our theological heritage from others.

The very idea of an organization such as the E.F.C. is already very ambitious. We live in a very large country. Great distances make fellowship and co-operation on national level difficult. The men who envisioned E.F.C. were not afraid of these obstacles facing them. They saw the need for an evangelical fellowship and took action. Scanning the ecclesiastical field in Canada, the need for evangelical fellowship becomes quite clear. There are approximately 1,500,000 Christians who belong to churches not affiliated with either the Canadian Council of Churches or the World Council of Churches. Numerically speaking, the evangelicals form the third great force of our nation. Clearly, this is a great constituency which needs closer ties and from which the E.F.C. can draw its members.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

9. Ibid., 1949, p. 290.
10. Ibid., pp. 290f.
11. Ibid., p. 318.
12. Ibid., 1961, p. 476.