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BOOK REVIEW

David Beale. *Christian Fundamentalism in America: The Story of the Rest from 1857 to 2020*. Maitland, FL: Xulon, 2021. 621 pp. Pbk. ISBN 978-1-6628-2481-4. \$29.99.

Those familiar with the historiography of fundamentalism are likely familiar with David Beale. Now retired, Beale was a long-time professor of church history at Bob Jones University. His earlier volume *In Pursuit of Purity: American Fundamentalism since 1850* (Greenville, SC: Unusual, 1986) has found its way into the bibliographies of countless studies on the history of fundamentalism. In many ways, *Christian Fundamentalism* is an updated and expanded version of that earlier work and is meant to supplant its now-out-of-print forerunner. As such, he retains his earlier emphasis on the purity of doctrine and lifestyle as the key elements of fundamentalism.

As a survey that examines the period from 1857 to 2020, *Christian Fundamentalism* covers much ground. Beale begins by exploring the “proto-fundamentalist” era, which looks at the formative players and events in fundamentalism’s incubation stage during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Among the key characters in this section are several familiar faces, such as the Baptist pastors Charles H. Spurgeon and A. J. Gordon, whom fundamentalists routinely viewed as theological ancestors, and the Princeton theologians, who systematized the doctrine of biblical inerrancy. Similarly, Beale explores well-known pivotal events, such as the Niagara Bible Conferences, which helped lay a theological foundation for later fundamentalists. The remainder of the volume looks at “fundamentalism proper,” ranging from the early twentieth century to the present. Much of Beale’s narrative focuses on Baptists and Presbyterians, which one might expect due to the prominent place that fundamentalism occupied in

these denominations. He ably documents the formation of various new fundamentalist initiatives, such as the Bible Baptist Union and the Westminster Theological Seminary, and the controversies that both haunted and inspired fundamentalists, such as the debacle at Des Moines University and the conservative resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention. While there is little in these pages that will surprise those familiar with the history of fundamentalism, it does provide a fine overview of many of the key players and events that shaped the character of fundamentalism.

At times, *Christian Fundamentalism* is as much a theology of one form of contemporary fundamentalism as it is a history of the movement. For Beale, fundamentalism (both from a historical perspective and in modern application) is not just the militant defense of doctrinal orthodoxy but also the insistence on the “purity” of the church. As purging denominations and churches is rarely a realistic option today, he favors separatism. He claims that, without insisting on doctrinal purity (i.e., separating from the church, or removing potentially questionable elements from it), even the most conservative Christians “neutralize our Lord’s message” (583). “Ecclesiastical purity” is paramount and may even include separating oneself from those who associate with those perceived as doctrinally impure. Here, Beale reflects a particular branch of fundamentalism (and especially his connection to Bob Jones and others). While fundamentalists throughout their history have agreed that separation from heterodoxy was necessary, they have disagreed on the limits of that separation. John R. Rice, for instance, rejected what he called “secondary separation,” which was the idea that fundamentalists needed to separate not only from liberals but also from orthodox believers who remained cordial toward liberals.

Beale has an intimate knowledge of the topic and many key players involved. Indeed, in many places, the book is encyclopedic in its scope. Not only that, but it provides a unique insider’s perspective that readers will not find elsewhere. The result is a book that feels both narratively detailed and deeply personal. Beale has drawn from a wide set of sources and, when discussing more recent events, from his own experiences. He knows what

people think about fundamentalism and is prepared to engage with those ideas. Several of his chapters include lengthy primary documents as supporting evidence, which Beale has opted to reprint in full. While these are both helpful and interesting, they would be better served in an appendix rather than attached to the end (or sometimes middle) of a chapter. This highlights a minor criticism of the volume: when moving from one chapter to the next, the contents occasionally read like a string of separate excurses, missing some of the necessary ligaments to tie them together. Moreover, because some sections of the book are thematic rather than chronological, the chapters occasionally come across as individual studies rather than pieces of a larger whole. The chapter on apologetics is a case in point.

Perhaps more important than what is in this volume is what is not. For a survey that explores this topic up to the year 2020, there are several questionable omissions. The Scopes Monkey Trial and the rise of the Religious Right are the most notable examples. Even the absence of Ken Ham's Creation Ministries is odd, especially given that there is a lengthy chapter devoted to the topic of apologetics near the close of the book. In addition to these more pronounced oversights, there are also more subtle omissions. For example, Beale profiles prominent proto/fundamentalists such as A. J. Gordon, John Roach Straton, and Oliver Van Osdel without once mentioning that each of these individuals vocally supported some form of women in ministry (this is to say nothing of the fact that women are not well represented throughout the book). A look into this hotly contested topic would add a certain depth to our understanding of fundamentalism and emphasize that as a movement (if it can be called that), it was not monochrome. This is just a single example of an area where Beale could expand the narrative in meaningful and complicated ways rather than retread material so regularly trod in the historiography.

Finally, this book needs more scholarly nuance. It is clear whom the author favors and whom he does not, which, at times, strays into polemic. He routinely softens many fundamentalists' edges while emphasizing their rivals' shortcomings. When dealing with the Des Moines University fiasco, for example, he (cor-

rectly) criticizes H. C. Wayman for sowing seeds of discord within the student body, but he omits the scope of T. T. Shields's role in the institution's demise, including his stubborn leadership style and his occasionally antagonistic posture toward the faculty and staff. Similarly, provocative individuals, such as J. Frank Norris, are all but excused for some of their most egregious moral infractions.

Overall, Beale's work has some admirable qualities but also contains several notable drawbacks. Its tremendous breadth is commendable. However, its blind spots and lack of nuance are difficult to overlook. *Christian Fundamentalism in America* is perhaps most useful for its insight into a contemporary perspective on fundamentalism.

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