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BOOK REVIEW

Andrew Atherstone and David Ceri Jones, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Christian Fundamentalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023. Hbk. 720 pp. ISBN 9780198844594. \$155.00.

Defining a contested term is never an easy task—and “fundamentalism” is perhaps among the most debated and misunderstood terms in the modern Christian lexicon. While it was once a badge of honor for many conservative Christians, it is more likely to be used today as a pejorative label to describe one’s theological sparring partner or a past someone left behind. With *The Oxford Handbook of Christian Fundamentalism*, the editors, Andrew Atherstone and David Ceri Jones, have assembled a collection of articles that seek to ground readers in the theological and historical origins and character of the Christian fundamentalist movement.

The scope of this volume is massive and covers a dizzying number of themes. The book contains a total of thirty-eight chapters, which the editors have divided into five sections: historical developments, fundamentalist convictions, fundamentalism and personal morality, fundamentalism and the “world,” and fundamentalist futures. The list of contributors is impressive, ranging from established scholars to early-career researchers.

As one might expect, the first section revisits many events familiar to those who study fundamentalism. Beginning with a chapter on *The Fundamentals* (the series of pamphlets published between 1910 and 1915 that eventually gave its name to the movement), it then explores other early influences and formative moments, such as revivalism, the downgrade controversy, the Scopes-Monkey Trial, and the Princeton Theology. This section also looks at contemporary coreligionists and later heirs of the

fundamentalist movement, including Pentecostalism and Neo-Evangelicalism. A final chapter in this section traces the key place publishing played in the fundamentalist world.

The second and third sections pick up on themes alluded to in the first section by unpacking the theological and ethical convictions that have guided and typified the fundamentalist cause from its earliest days to the present. Some chapters cover familiar themes in fresh ways, such as those on creationism and eschatology, while others explore important but often overlooked topics such as devotional life, music, and sport.

Next, the fourth section widens the discussion on fundamentalism by examining how fundamentalists have interacted with the world through ministries and social concerns. The section begins with a chapter on global missions initiated by fundamentalists and those with “fundamentalist tendencies,” followed by a series of chapters that explore sociocultural topics and shifts and how fundamentalists have responded to them. In the past, some interpreters characterized fundamentalists as somewhat recluse or otherwise socially detached during the years between the Scopes Monkey Trial (1925) and the rise of the Religious Right (ca. 1979); however, as this section helps illustrate, that was not always the case. Indeed, they were active in domestic and foreign ministries and were concerned with political and social changes at home.

The final section of the book deals with the future of fundamentalism. It opens with a chapter on an increasingly popular literary genre: memoirs and tales of “leaving” fundamentalism. In the same way conversion narratives were popular among Puritans in the eighteenth century, so too have these so-called de-conversion narratives become popular in post-Christendom. This section (and the book as a whole) ends appropriately with a chapter on fundamentalism as a global phenomenon, which considers the different ways the term has been interpreted and employed in various contexts.

The chapters in each section are both informative and probing. While some authors are content to retread the dominant themes in the historiography, many challenge or add to the existing interpretations. The result is a book that functions not only as

a capable starting point for curious newcomers interested in Christian fundamentalism but also for academics hoping to check the pulse on some of the latest scholarly trends.

One recurring theme that emerges in many of these chapters is that Christian fundamentalism was and is not monochrome. For example, within the historical section, the chapters continually highlight the nondenominational and multifaceted character of fundamentalism. While fundamentalists have generally agreed broadly on many issues, there have also been differences of opinion, ranging from one's theology to one's approach to ministry. These perspectives have not remained static over the previous century. There are a few places where these differences and nuances could have been better integrated into the narrative (e.g., the range of opinions on women in various forms of ministry in early fundamentalism and the contributions of assertive women), but in general, the chapters capture the diversity well.

Many of the chapters focus primarily on fundamentalism as it developed in the United States. In some ways, this is to be expected since fundamentalism has long been viewed as something of an American phenomenon; however, it does mean there are places to expand the research further. For example, I would have liked to see a little more engagement with Canadian contributions to fundamentalism (e.g., Perry F. Rockwood's radio ministry). That said, several chapters do include some consideration of the international scene, which is to be commended.

As a minor point, some of the chapter arrangements are a little curious. There is a certain logic to beginning the "historical developments" section with *The Fundamentals*—since the work of Stewart Cole in the 1930s, historians have noted the significance of the publication of this series—but, to this reader, it felt a little like skipping past the first few chapters of a novel. These pamphlets did not originate in a vacuum, and an earlier discussion on those whom we might identify as "proto fundamentalists" might benefit those hoping to better understand the grand scope of the movement. Authors do address this theme in successive chapters, but their placement may have been better suited if tackled chronologically. As noted, though, this is a very minor editorial grievance to what is, overall, a strong collection of es-

says.

Such an expansive overview of the subject might also provide a good opportunity to more deeply consider just how useful the term “fundamentalism” actually is today. It remains a helpful term for historians, but some might argue that it has so many competing interpretations today that it shares no DNA with the original meaning. For example, few individuals in contemporary society actually use the term to describe themselves, and, more often than not, observers use it to describe a dangerous “other.” This is David Harrington Watt’s point in *Anti-Fundamentalism in Modern America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017). The final chapter in the volume touches on this argument with an excellent discussion on the multifaceted ways the term has been employed on a global scale but stops just shy of fully engaging with it. Whether one agrees with this assertion or not, it is an interesting historiographical conversation that could use more attention in what is otherwise an extensive and impressive survey.

As one might surmise from this review, my criticism of this volume is minor (and, in some cases, superfluous indeed). The publication of a book like this one was overdue, and fortunately, the editors have provided us with something that was worth the wait.

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