

SO THIS IS FUNDAMENTALISM!

BY WILLIAM BURQUEST

IT is quite an interesting historical fact that orthodox Christianity, otherwise known as fundamentalism, has like other religions of the world, manifested a psychopathic character, often of sadistic nature—as shown in the misguided zeal of its early dictators to inflict pain on unbelievers.

During mediaevalism we find fanatical tyrants behaving like small boys, in their penchant for starting bonfires. Burnings for heresy were so many in those days, that it came to be a mooted point whether a man could be a Christian and die in bed.

This indeed, was the very antithesis of the humane and lovable character of the founder of Christianity, and the result of a frightful misinterpretation of his teachings.

In the light of modern psychopathology these deluded despots were, no doubt, victims of dementia praecox, homicidal religious complex, or kindred emotional disturbances which the alienist of today would diagnose as dangerous—in view of the zeal of these “well meaning” fanatics to interpret bible allegories literally—and then demonstrate by persecuting, torturing or burning anyone who challenged the interpretations—that is, were guilty of the sin of thinking for themselves.

Luther, Calvin and Wesley, who flourished at later periods, were also victims of these strange fundamentalist delusions regarding biblical interpretation, although to a lesser degree than their clerical predecessors of mediaevalism. They were men of leadership, possessing estimable traits of character, but they were orthodox to the core—even more so than that stormy petrel of literalism—Mr. Bryan. They believed, not only in infant damnation, but in witchcraft, basing their belief literally on the text: “Suffer not a witch to live.” Wesley entered in his journal in 1766: “The giving up of belief in witchcraft is in effect the giving up of the bible.”

And Luther, it is recorded, suffered more or less, from hallucinations. Among the latter the piece de resistance was his devil-delusion which became so acute that on one occasion he hurled an inkstand at His Satanic Majesty, whereupon Luther declared he heard him run downstairs. On another occasion he averred: "I was going to bed and I heard him walking outside, but as I knew it was the Devil, I paid no attention to him, but went to sleep."

Luther used to ascribe disease to "devil-spells," solemnly contending that: "Satan produces all diseases which afflict mankind, for he is the prince of earth's maladies and he poisons the air." This devil notion was somewhat like the classical myth of Pandora spreading disease and pestilence, etc., over the earth. Luther opposed the modernism of his day, insisting that the bible contained the sum and substance of all knowledge, and he was determined to banish philosophy from the church, holding that Aristotle was a devil, and that the schoolmen were frogs and lice. In his explanation of the account in Genesis of man's fall, Luther tells us that Adam and Eve entered the garden at noon; that Eve got the apple at that hour, and the fall came about two o'clock in the afternoon. Calvin, too, was no better equipped, as an interpreter of scripture than was Luther, for the former as a Presbyterian, saw in it a justification for burning Servetus.

The burning of heretics and witches, obviously grew out of the old fundamentalist misconception, utterly paganistic, that if Jehovah is going to consign certain persons to hell fire, why not proceed at once to emulate Him—which was done, as history records, in many thousands of instances.

No dispassionate student of the egregious annals of ecclesiastical terrorism, will ever palliate these unholy deeds perpetrated "in the name of Jehovah," by a professedly holy orthodoxy that brands other religions as pagan, and arrogates to itself divine origin, though its own foundations rest upon paganism—plus a barnacle growth of untenable dogmas.

Consider, for instance, the bizarre dogma anent the Trinity. The Council of Nice held A. D. 325 and made up of 318 bishops decided by majority vote that the said Trinity should consist of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Theologians say that this balloting was especially guided by divine inspiration, but nevertheless, had the same sober-browed bishops voted on the shape of the earth, they would all have voted it flat.

Religion, in all its multiform aspects, from fetichism, up through polytheism and monotheism, has been, not a fixed but a fluent thing, changing radically from century to century, with no substratum other than that of faith—often a synonym for credulity. This is the basis upon which our own anthropomorphic dogmas are erected, since theologians of both Christian and pagan creeds have always distained to build on the bed rock of reason.

Schopenhauer in the concluding paragraph of his brilliant essay on religion disposed of its claims to divine origin, as far as all reasonable men are concerned, in one fell blow, when he said:

“Whoever seriously thinks that superhuman beings have ever given our race information as to the aims of its existence and that of the world, is still in his childhood. There is no other revelation than the thoughts of the wise, even though these thoughts, liable to error as is the lot of everything human, are often clothed in strange allegories and myths under the name of religion. So far, then, it is a matter of indifference whether a man lives and dies in reliance on his own or another’s thoughts; for it is never more than human thought, human opinion, which he trusts. Still, instead of trusting what their own minds tell them, men have as a rule a weakness for trusting others who pretend to supernatural sources of knowledge. And in view of the enormous intellectual inequality between man and man, it is easy to see that the thoughts of one mind might appear as in some sense a revelation to another.”

It ought to be clear to the keen and unbiased observer, that religion had its inception in superstition, and therefore belongs essentially to the realm of mythology, though in its liberal or modernist aspect, to that of speculative philosophy. In its undiluted fundamentalist form, it is chiefly a collection of rites and dogmas which, as matters of archaeologic interest, rightly belong in museums beside other natural curiosities and fossilized relics of antiquity. Doubtless, in a future age, our orthodox dogmas will be studied with as much of a curious antiquarian interest as Roman and Grecian mythology is today.

However, in some of the sect-ridden southern states, the legislatures are being urged by such zanies as Mr. Bryan, to enact laws that these mummified dogmas of fundamentalism should usurp the prerogatives of scientific biology, and be approved as facts in public educational institutions. Such laws, prohibiting the teaching of organic evolution in schools supported by popular taxation, are now in force in Tennessee. This, indeed, is un-American—a departure

from the sound judgment that animated the founders of the Republic, and which was emphasized by George Washington when he wrote: "The Government of the United States is in no sense founded upon the Christian religion." (Treaty with Tripoli, *Foreign State Papers*, Vol. 2, p. 19.)

To enact legislation of this kind is reactionary, mediæval and puerile, and probably unconstitutional. It flies menacingly in the face of liberty and science; it prompts the query whether we will have a minor revival of the temper of ancient bigotry. Apparently, the militant fundamentalists are bent on mischief, crushing heterodoxy perhaps, and making America safe for orthodoxy. If this be the case, then fittingly we may say with Shakespeare:

"In religion What damned error,
But some sober brow will bless it,
And approve it with a text."

Contemplate the chronicles of the past when fundamentalism and feudalism reigned in Europe. Journey in retrospect down the vista of history—down to the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries. Witness the imbecilic folly of the holy crusades in which millions of lives were sacrificed—and for what? Behold Torquemada, arch prince of Spanish inquisitors, who tortured or burned upwards of 10,000 victims, and caused 800,000 Jews to flee from Spain! Then in the fifteenth century, behold the funeral pyres of fanaticism; hear the curses of zealots bereft of human pity; the terrifying moans of mother, wife or sweetheart, as her beloved is burned at the stake! Observe the populace, standing like dumb, frightened cattle, looking on with mute approval! Behold the noble John Huss being consigned to the flames; the spectacle of Joan of Arc suffering a like fate; the gentle-souled Savonarola on his cross amidst the encircling fire; the brave Servetus caged like a wild beast and burned by Calvinists! Journey where you will in that mad age and you see the hell fires burning! Cross over to America in the seventeenth century! See the wholesale persecution and hanging of witches in Salem! Ponder then, the far-flung frenzy, the mass lunacy of it all! Ask yourself how such things could be! Shelley has aptly expressed the poignant tragedy of them:

"Priests dare bable of a God of peace,
Even whilst their hands are red with guiltless blood,
Making the earth a slaughter house."

Despite the sinister conduct and the fatuity of orthodoxy in ancient times, we find its present-day apologists, are often wont to smilingly palliate the enormity of its appalling crimes against humanity and civilization. Before the court of reason they resort to technicalities, arguing that the Church itself was really not the culprit. They have, to put it tersely, a penchant for "passing the buck," saddling the blame upon the State, declaring that it was the law that heretics and witches, etc., should suffer torture or death. However, they fail to remember that virtually the Church was the State in those unhappy days when fundamentalist frenzy ran riot.

They use every species of theologic sophistry—plus the tricks of the criminal lawyer, for they would have the countless cases of orthodox villany categorically dismissed. In short, it would be like asking a judge to nolle prosequere an indictment of murder returned against a defendant caught *flagrante delicto*. This practically, is what these apologists want done in the case of Orthodoxy versus Heretics, Witches, et al.

It is axiomatic that when a man's reputation has been blackened by numerous malefactions, he cannot expect restoration to social esteem. Similarly this is applicable when we probe the past of a creed known today as fundamentalism. But such a simile, however, would not please Mr. Bryan and his brother fundamentalists, who doubtless would piously frown and pronounce it nonsense. Likewise, they would repudiate various of the major findings of science apropos of evolution. They would discourage or thwart inquiry into the crass conceptions of orthodox theology, and the false science with which it identified itself in the past, and to the remnants of which it still clings. These dogmatic gentlemen would deny that it is the duty of theology to keep pace with progress—to readjust itself to what science proves to be true, since science is partial only to truth and the facts which man has gained from experience. Of aught else, as Omar Khayyam sings:

"Myself when young did eagerly frequent
 Doctor and saint, and heard great argument
 About it and about, but evermore
 Came out by the same door wherein I went."

These mouthpieces of orthodoxy have influenced the passage of legislation crucifying on the cross of bigotry such geniuses as Darwin, Huxley, Spencer and Haeckel. They would rank Semitic fables above natural laws, thinking it quite logical to teach school children,

among other things, that "once upon a time," a snake tempted a woman, a jackass talked, and that ravens carried lunches to wandering prophets in the desert. In a sense they would demote the hierarchy of the sciences, to-wit, astronomy, physics, chemistry, geology, paleontology, biology, psychology and sociology—all of which have to do with the evolution of the cosmos, the earth and the life upon it—and which agree that organic evolution is a fact, save of course, in educational institutions where it is curbed by orthodox bias. With regard to this, Mr. Julian Huxley of Oxford, grandson of the famous Huxley, has recently said:

"The United States is the only country in the world where the attempt is being made to split up science into sects. Apparently there is Methodist biology, Baptist biology—in fact, a biology for every denomination. If a professor in a Methodist college teaches Baptist biology or just plain biology, he is dismissed."

No university professor of repute would disavow, even in part, his allegiance to the hierarchy of the sciences. Woodrow Wilson, after his retirement from the nation's highest office, writing as the former head of Princeton, addressed a letter to Professor U. C. Curtis of the University of Missouri, in reply to the latter's question whether Mr. Wilson as a Presbyterian, accepted the Darwinian theory of evolution. Mr. Wilson's answer was as follows:

"Washington, D. C., 29th August, 1922. My Dear Professor Curtis: May it not suffice for me to say, in reply to your letter of August 25th, that, of course, like every other man of intelligence and education, I do believe in organic evolution. It surprises me that at this late date such questions should be raised. Sincerely yours, Woodrow Wilson."

In the foregoing sentiments, Mr. Wilson, in effect, took the measure of the mentalities of Mr. Bryan and his fellow fundamentalists, for if as Mr. Wilson stated, every man of "intelligence and education" accepts evolution, the inference is that he did not consider Mr. Bryan belonged in that class.

Pray then in the name of Reason what have these orthodox gentlemen of Mr. Bryan's persuasion done with their intelligence? Do they not realize that they live in the meridian of the twentieth century; in an era of unprecedented scientific miracles, and of profound inquiry, when thinking men view dogma and theological metaphysics as a sort of "baby talk of the intellect?" Pray what is this view we find expressed so frequently, even in the daily press, as exemplified in an editorial from the *Chicago American*, of April 13,

1925? Under the caption, "Too Bad They Differ," churchmen are bantered for wasting time in stupid doctrinal quarrels:

"Fundamentalists who say every word of the bible is true, not a word must be changed, are still quarreling bitterly with the modernist, who would like to explain Jonah and the whale. It is rather hard for a clergyman to know just what to do. One reverend gentleman in New York, in charge of a very old church, preached for years to empty benches. So he got young ladies with bare feet and waving their arms modestly to interpret spiritual truths. And now he has to turn away crowds. His preaching is looked upon as irregular. But the crowds may come to watch the young ladies' twinkling toes and remain to repent their sins. It seems a pity that clergymen should be impelled by their conscience to quarrel. It is as though children, discussing Santa Claus, should quarrel, one saying "Santa has a long with beard and reindeer," and another "Santa has a clean shaven face and an airplane." Why not say, "We all love Santa Claus," and not quarrel about definitions? One reverend gentlemen preaches about Col. Ingersoll, long in his grave and attacks him. A cowboy when offered oxtail soup said it was "going a long way back for soup." To attack Ingersoll is like going a long way back to find an infidel. You might as well go back to Volney and his "Ruins of Empire"—an extremely well written book, by the way. Why cannot all think as they please on religion? The Lord permits it, and our Constitution permits it. Isn't that enough?"

Orthodox creeds, considered archaeologically, have in the course of their evolution, from the simple fetich to the complex ritual, exhibited destructive modes, compelling conformity to its dogmas by rack, fire, sword and gallows, retarding for generations, the free development of the natural sciences. Thus they frequently have been breeders of hate and persecution, instead of love and good will.

Slowly and inevitably, however, they will purge themselves of their hereditary elements of myth and miracle. Posterity, ultimately, will no longer accept fable for truth. The religion of the future will generate in men no childish credulities, no pernicious or psychopathic tendencies—such emotional disturbances as typified in fanatical shouting, holy rolling, jumping and other antics—and observable in some sects when the faithful "get religion."

Jesus, Buddha, Confucius and kindred great teachers, will be duly venerated as the moral and spiritual mountain peaks of humanity, the highest of which, as Renan says, is doubtless Jesus, of whom he wrote:

"He remains an inexhaustible principle of moral regeneration for mankind; he infused into the world a new spirit. He was the first to proclaim the royalty of mind. All confessions of faith are travesties of the idea of Jesus, just as the scholasticism of the Middle Ages, in proclaiming Aristotle the sole master of a completed science, perverted the thought of Aristotle."

Chas. W. Eliot, president emeritus of Harvard, and "the grand old man" of higher learning in America, has stressed the rational features of the future religion in his scholarly essay on the subject, as quoted in the following excerpts:

"In the religion of the future there will be nothing 'supernatural.' This does not mean that life will be stripped of mystery or wonder, or that the range of natural law has been finally determined; but that religion, like all else must conform to natural law so far as the range of law has been determined. In this sense the religion of the future will be a natural religion. In its theory and all its practices it will be completely natural. It will place no reliance on any sort of magic, or miracle, or other violation of, or exception to, the laws of nature. It will believe in no malignant powers—neither in Satan nor in witches, neither in the evil eye nor in the malign suggestion.

"The surgeon is one of the ministers of the future religion. When dwellers in a slum suffer the familiar evils caused by overcrowding, impure food, and cheerless labor, the modern true believers contend against the sources of such misery by providing public baths, playgrounds, wider and cleaner streets, better dwellings, and more effective schools—that is they attack the sources of physical and moral evil. The new religion cannot supply the old sort of consolation, but it can diminish the need of consolation, or reduce the number of occasions for consolation.

"The future religion will not undertake to describe, or even imagine, the justice of God. We are today so profoundly dissatisfied with human justice, although it is the result of centuries of experience of social good and ill in this world, that we may well distrust human capacity to conceive of the justice of a morally perfect, infinite being. The prevailing conceptions of heaven and hell have hardly any more influence with educated people in these days than Olympus and Hades have.

"Finally, this twentieth century religion is not only to be in harmony with the great secular movements of modern society—democ-

racy, individualism, social idealism, the zeal for education, the spirit of research, the modern tendency to welcome the new, the fresh powers of preventive medicine, and the recent advance in business and industrial ethics—but also in essential agreement with the direct, personal teachings of Jesus, as they are reported in the Gospels. The revelation he gave to mankind thus becomes more wonderful than ever.”