

## A. C. DIXON, CHICAGO LIBERALS, AND *THE FUNDAMENTALS*

by  
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Amzi Clarence Dixon (1854–1925), Baptist leader, pastor, writer, and Bible conference speaker, was an outstanding promoter of the fundamentalist movement during its early periods of conception (1875–1910) and denominational conflict (1910–1930).<sup>1</sup> Something of a microcosm of fundamentalism,<sup>2</sup> Dixon embodied the qualities of personal piety, evangelistic zeal (intensified by his association with Dwight L. Moody and Charles H. Spurgeon), and a fervent disdain for what he

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<sup>1</sup>Historians have used various dates for early fundamentalism but are in general agreement that the last quarter of the nineteenth century, beginning with the Swampscott, Massachusetts Bible conference (1876), provided the theological backdrop for the subsequent period of denominational struggles over modernism. The second period culminated in the departure of fundamentalists from mainline denominations to form their own associations, such as the Independent Fundamental Churches of America in 1930, the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches in 1932, and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1936. Indeed, the 1930s marked a major transition in fundamentalist history from a stance of militant nonconformity to ecclesiastical separatism. The intervening date of 1910 saw the inauguration of *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, which clearly identified fundamentalism as an intellectual and theological, not merely a social, movement.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. David O. Beale, *In Pursuit of Purity: American Fundamentalism Since 1850* (Greenville, SC: Unusual Publications, 1986), pp. 222–25. Beale portrays Dixon as a contending fundamentalist until “the midnight hour of his life, then virtually gave up the militant stance” (p. 225). This is an understandable assumption in view of Dixon’s resignation from the Baptist Bible Union in 1925. However, evidence indicates that, although Dixon abruptly left one of fundamentalism’s most militant organizations, he did not defect from the movement. George Dollar incorrectly states that Dixon “deserted [fundamentalism] because of the stigmas and battles of separatism” (Dollar, *A History of Fundamentalism in America* [Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1973], p. 317). On the contrary, Dixon maintained a strong defense of the faith until his death five months later. See my “Examination of the Apologetical Ministry of Amzi Clarence Dixon” (Ph.D. dissertation, Bob Jones University, 1988), pp. 409–29.

called the “vagaries of modernism.”<sup>3</sup> Although separated by two generations and immense cultural changes, the two fundamentalists, William R. Rice and A. C. Dixon, share many personal characteristics and the same deep-rooted conviction of contending for the historic Christian faith against all forms of apostasy.

Called to the ministry under his father’s preaching near his hometown of Shelby, North Carolina, Dixon was educated at Wake Forest College and Southern Seminary (located at the time in Greenville, South Carolina). Before assuming the senior pastorate of Moody Memorial Church in 1906, Dixon had served in several Baptist churches, North and South, and had established a national reputation for dynamic preaching and trenchant exposés of a diversity of evil men and influences. He attacked Roman Catholicism, liquor and licentiousness, gambling, Henry Ward Beecher’s liberalism, Robert Ingersoll’s agnosticism, Christian Science, Unitarianism, and higher criticism of the Bible. Later he would level his polemical gun at probably the most despised enemy of American fundamentalism in the early 1900s—Darwinian evolution. Dixon’s articles appeared in his own church publications and regional religious periodicals, such as the *Baltimore Baptist* and the *Religious Herald*. Beginning in 1908, he wrote syndicated columns appearing in a thousand newspapers across the country, including the *Baltimore Sun*, *Boston Daily Herald*, and the *Chicago Daily News*. Dixon’s influence extended internationally when he became pastor of the famous Metropolitan (Spurgeon’s) Tabernacle in London (1911–1919), and took over the editorship of the controversial *Sword and the Trowel*.<sup>4</sup> A. C. Dixon was well-qualified to produce what became a doctrinal landmark in fundamentalist apologetics—*The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*.<sup>5</sup> Dixon was responsible for the first five (of twelve) booklets, the contents of which express his concern to defend those doctrines coming under attack by liberal professors at the

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<sup>3</sup>A popular treatment of Dixon’s life and ministry may be found in Helen C. Dixon’s *A. C. Dixon: A Romance of Preaching* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1931). Dixon’s sermons and papers are found in the A. C. Dixon Collection, Southern Baptist Historical Commission, Nashville.

<sup>4</sup>Dixon has been the only American to serve as full-time pastor of this church. A. T. Pierson (1837–1911) was only an interim (1891–1893) during Spurgeon’s illness with Bright’s disease.

<sup>5</sup>According to Baptist historian Albert H. Newman, in his day Dixon was one of the leading premillennialist spokesmen for anti-higher critical views of the Bible. Newman stated that “the most eminent living Baptist representative of this type of religious thought and work in America is A. C. Dixon...who...has become widely known and highly influential throughout America and...Great Britain” (“Recent Changes in the Theology of Baptists,” *American Journal of Theology* 10 [October 1906]: 603).

University of Chicago Divinity School. The articles Dixon chose to include were an attempt to give scholarly credibility and doctrinal cohesion to the fundamentalist movement.

## THE CHICAGO LIBERALS

### Harper and Higher Criticism

In 1891 oil magnate John D. Rockefeller (1839–1937) assisted the American Baptist Education Society in founding the University of Chicago. At the insistence of Rockefeller the old Baptist seminary of Morgan Park was integrated into the University and became its divinity school. From its inception the divinity school was radically liberal and remains so to this day. Its first president was William Rainey Harper (1856–1906), liberal theologian and expert Hebraist. Harper wanted the new school to be second to none in modern learning and gathered about him other scholars committed to higher-critical theories of the Bible. Among these were Shailer Mathews (1863–1941), dean and professor of New Testament studies, and George Burman Foster (1858–1918), professor of systematic theology and philosophy of religion, and probably the most extreme liberal on the faculty.

While ministering at Brooklyn's Hanson Place Baptist Church,<sup>6</sup> Dixon began warning his congregation and readers against the Chicago higher critics. He declared that they were inimical to biblical Christianity.

The man who, under guise of learning or any other guise, weakens the faith of the people in the Bible as the Word of God, is an enemy to the Bible as the Word of God, [and] is an enemy to the Church...and, tho [sic] I may love his soul, I hate his false way and pray that his efforts may be, by the working of almighty God, brought to naught.<sup>7</sup>

Such critics were plentiful in the denominational schools and churches by the turn of the century. One liberal could write in the Baptist *Standard* that “professors of biblical study, as well as of secular subjects,...are now almost without exception men and women who accept the teachings of the newer biblical criticism and theology.”<sup>8</sup> Dixon

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<sup>6</sup>Dixon was pastor of this church from November 1890 until the spring of 1901.

<sup>7</sup>Dixon, “The Greatest Need of the Greater New York,” *Homiletical Review* 38 (December 1899): 520.

<sup>8</sup>Mitchell Bronk, “Changes in the Theology of Baptists,” *Standard* 54 (December 22, 1906): 7. Higher criticism was not limited to the Baptists. The controversy in the Presbyterian church surrounding the attack on the supernaturalness of Scripture by Charles Augustus Briggs (1841–1913) occurred at approximately the same time William R. Harper began propounding the same views in Chicago. Both men received Dixon's censure.

wrote in the summer of 1891 that with Harper at the University of Chicago there is no question that the school will be an exponent of higher criticism.<sup>9</sup> Dixon reflected on his experience with Crawford H. Toy (1836–1919), his former Old Testament professor at Southern Seminary, by saying that Harper “stands just where Professor... Toy did, when he was dismissed from the... seminary, with one or two modifications.”<sup>10</sup>

He [Professor Harper] believes that there are errors in the Bible, but thinks that such errors do not affect its infallibility. Prof. Toy said: “The Bible contains the word of God.” Prof. Harper says: “The Bible is the word of God, though it contains mistakes.”<sup>11</sup>

After hearing Dr. Harper claim that the book of Isaiah had errors in it, Dixon wrote him to ask what he meant. Harper replied, “The report you have read is a mistaken one. I did not mention Isaiah 10 as containing any errors... I must have said something like this—ten chapters of Isaiah.” When Dixon asked Harper to point out mistakes in any ten chapters of Isaiah, the latter was evasive:

I do not like to make an effort to prove the existence of errors. I have never taken that attitude. I only take the position that, when they are found, they must be acknowledged. I do not care to put myself in writing on this subject, for I have found to my cost, no matter how explicit I may be, it is easily misunderstood.<sup>12</sup>

Dixon admonished that it would be better for Harper to say nothing at all about “mistakes” in the Bible if he could not explain himself.<sup>13</sup>

Should men who hold views of Scripture, right or wrong, which they can-

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<sup>9</sup>Albert H. Newman stated that Harper’s liberalism had an incalculable influence on the Baptist denomination in America. Through scholarly journals (*American Journal of Theology* and *Biblical World* edited by the Chicago University Divinity School faculty), various personal publications and addresses, and the organization of interdenominational societies for biblical studies, Harper was “an elemental force of the first magnitude for the liberalizing [of] the [Baptists].” See Newman, “Recent Changes in the Theology of Baptists,” pp. 600–01.

<sup>10</sup>Toy was forced to resign his position at Southern Seminary in 1879 because of his persistence in teaching the Kuenen-Wellhausen theory of documentary criticism of the Pentateuch.

<sup>11</sup>Dixon, “Our Signal Station,” *Baltimore Baptist* 10 (July 2, 1891): 1.

<sup>12</sup>Quoted by Dixon in “Our Signal Station,” *Baltimore Baptist* 10 (November 11, 1891): 1.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*

not explain to a man of average intelligence, be teachers of young men in our colleges? The issue has been squarely made. Are Baptists ready to accept the view that the Bible contains errors? If so, let them rally to the support of Prof. Harper. If not, let them speak, but in no uncertain tones.<sup>14</sup>

A few years later (1904) the editor of the *Watchword and Truth* rebuked “Dr. Harper’s erratic ways and rash statements.” He reported that, because of Harper’s higher criticism of the Bible, the enrollment of the University had dropped fifty percent and that Harper’s severest critics were among the “rank and file” Baptists of the Northwest. He declared that many Baptists were speaking out “against the antagonism that Dr. Harper and his University maintained against the Bible, and...the historic faith of the Baptists.”<sup>15</sup>

In November 1891, Dixon preached a sermon entitled, “Higher Criticism and Professor Briggs.” Using Basil Manly, Jr.’s definition of higher criticism,<sup>16</sup> Dixon readily admitted that there is nothing wrong with biblical criticism of itself: “it is a legitimate method of Bible study.” The Bible can stand the test of criticism, for fire does not consume the truth, it only purifies it.<sup>17</sup> What Dixon objected to was the improper use of criticism, of which Briggs and Harper were the champions. Their method presupposed that the Bible is a human book with errors.

Dixon argued against this critical school with four reasons. The higher critics, he said, (1) prefer doubt to faith. No one that he knew claimed that the English Bible was inspired, but the original autographs were.<sup>18</sup> This the Christian accepts by faith. The originals do not exist,

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<sup>14</sup>Dixon, “Our Signal Station,” *Baltimore Baptist* 10 (July 2, 1891): 1.

<sup>15</sup>Editorial, *Watchword and Truth*, 26 (April 1904): 100. Unitarianism at the University of Chicago was a common complaint. For examples, see alumni letters to Dixon by William P. Lovett (May 10, 1905) and Morris Rabb (June 10, 1905) in Dixon Collection, Nashville.

<sup>16</sup>“It is the name given of late to inquiries depending on style, on the mode of thought, and expression of different writers, on the vocabulary and tone employed, and various internal peculiarities, by which the age and circumstances and method of composition may be discovered” (Dixon, “Higher Criticism and Professor Briggs,” *Baltimore Baptist* 10 [December 2, 1891]: 2). Manly (1825–1892), Princeton Seminary graduate and Baptist educator, taught Old Testament at Southern Seminary. See J. Barton Payne’s nearly identical definition in a scholarly paper delivered before the International Conference on Biblical Inerrancy in Chicago, October 1978: “Higher Criticism and Biblical Inerrancy,” in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), p. 86.

<sup>17</sup>Dixon, “Higher Criticism and Professor Briggs,” p. 2.

<sup>18</sup>Dixon insisted on what was a consensus among early fundamentalists: the King James Bible was not inspired. He wrote, “We believe that the inspired writers made no mistakes....But which Testament [is inspired]? The Greek or the English? Shall we claim that the 47 men who were ordered by King James to revise the Bishop’s Bible were inspired, so that they could not make a mistake?” He stated that several improvements on

but we do have reliable copies. And since a God of wisdom and love would not give man an imperfect revelation, the originals must have been inspired as they claim to be. The copies have errors but, said the higher critics, the errors must have been made by the original writers. Dixon countered, “It is simply the choice by them of the theory which honors doubt more than faith.”<sup>19</sup> He also contended that the higher critics (2) have not clearly proven a single error in the Bible. Many of their criticisms are merely quibblings which cannot be proved one way or the other. One example he cited was the “cud-chewing coney” in Leviticus 11:5. Briggs had said that coneys do not chew the cud, but Dixon replied that no one knows for sure just what animal is referred to in the Bible. Since there is uncertainty regarding its identity, the Bible should have the benefit of the doubt: a man of faith will assume that this animal chews the cud. Another objection was that (3) higher critics use words quite loosely. Here Dixon referred to the earlier correspondence with Harper over the “mistakes” in Isaiah, and challenged Harper and other critics to prove the mistakes or be quiet about them. Finally, Dixon submitted that (4) “this school of sceptical Higher Criticism had its birth in the brain of a German infidel.” He said the “culprit” was Albrecht Ritschl (1822–1889). Ritschl suggested that Moses and Isaiah did not write the books ascribed to them. Dixon responded:

[Julius] Wellhausen elaborated the theory of Ritschl, and they were the fathers of modern sceptical Higher Criticism. We do not like its parentage, and yet a good man is not to be blamed for having a bad father. If those who sympathize with them could establish their claim, we would accept the truth, no matter what had been our former prejudices, but the claim is not established, and we believe that the Bible can stand the test of any furnace into which it may be thrown, and come out the pure Word of God.<sup>20</sup>

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the KJV text were made between 1611 and 1701. “So we see the folly of those who cry out ‘sacrilege’ whenever an attempt is made to improve upon our English Bible....[However,] no improvement can ever be made by man or angel upon the Bible as the men, inspired of God, wrote it” (“Spare Moments with the New Version, No. 2,” *Biblical Recorder* 46 [August 31, 1881]: 1). Early fundamentalist creeds likewise limited inspiration to the autographa, e.g., inspiration extends to “the smallest word, and inflection of a word, provided such word is found in the original manuscripts” (Art. I, The Niagara Creed of 1878); “and inerrant in the original writings” (Art. 1, World’s Christian Fundamentals Association [WCFA] Creed of 1919); and “THE HOLY BIBLE...as originally written...IS the very Word of God” (Art. I:1, Baptist Bible Union [BBU] Confession of Faith, 1923).

<sup>19</sup>Dixon, “Higher Criticism and Professor Briggs,” p. 2.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

Dixon assailed the higher critical documentary hypothesis of the liberals in a popular sermon entitled “Myths and Moths of Criticism.”<sup>21</sup> The myths were the reasons the higher critics gave for “errors” in the Bible; the moths were the actual errors of the critics which were eating away at the fabric of belief in the Bible as the inerrant Word of God. Relying on the learned work of Princeton Seminary professor William Henry Green (1825–1900),<sup>22</sup> Dixon systematically refuted such notions derived from the supposition that an assumed difference in literary style necessitated multiple authors of Scripture, and that the Bible was the product of evolutionary development. He had no patience with “learned men [who] seriously claim that they can decide as to the authorship of chapters, paragraphs, sentences and words simply on the ground of literary style.”<sup>23</sup> Dixon’s most pronounced indictment against the Chicago higher critics was the charge of dishonesty. This “moth” was eating away at ethics. To say, he charged, that the so-called editors of the Pentateuch only placed the name of Moses above these books to make them “authoritative” is deceitful.

This reveals to us the ethics of the higher criticism....And to say that Almighty God has a part in this transaction, and that the book thus collected and foisted upon a deceived people is His Inspired Word, shifts the responsibility from man to God Himself, and is worse than blasphemy.<sup>24</sup>

Because of their predisposition to interpret the Bible as a natural or evolutionary product of human effort, the Chicago professors were critical of all miracles and the historical-literal method of hermeneutics.

The university professors think that the time has come for them to

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<sup>21</sup>Dixon, *Myths and Moths of Criticism: An Examination of the Moths and Their Doings, The Origin of the Myths* (Los Angeles: BIOLA Book Room, n.d.).

<sup>22</sup>Green wrote several scholarly works to discredit higher critical theories; two of his more important treatments are *Unity of the Book of Genesis* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1895) and *Higher Criticism of the Pentateuch* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1895). He carried on a prolonged debate with Harper in the pages of the *Hebraica* (1888 to 1890), which the latter edited. Green called the documentary hypothesis the *reductio ad absurdum*. See Norman H. Maring, “Baptists and Changing Views of the Bible, 1865–1918 (Part II),” *Foundations* 1 (October 1958): 31.

<sup>23</sup>Dixon, *Myths and Moths*, p. 4.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 11. The question of ethics entered into the very founding of the University of Chicago. Augustus H. Strong, who originally introduced Harper to John D. Rockefeller, bitterly denounced Harper for allegedly breaking his word. It seems that Harper had promised Strong that he would persuade Rockefeller to found the University in New York, not Chicago. When Harper began to support the Chicago site, Strong accused him of unfaithfulness. See Crerar Douglas, ed., *Autobiography of Augustus Hopkins Strong* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1981), p. 250.

cease to apologize for the historical method of Bible study; and no one feels like apologizing for the truly historical method of Bible study. It is the method which yields the best results. It is the unhistorical method which needs apology, the method which is based upon the Darwinian theory of evolution,...and upon the vagaries of unscientific men who imagine authors whom they call J. E. P., etc., not one of which has ever had any historical existence. To one who has read the history of infidelity from Celsus through Thomas Paine and Voltaire to Robert Ingersoll much of this is very stale, and has a very musty odor.<sup>25</sup>

### “Fosterism”

When Dixon came to Moody Memorial Church in 1906, he remained relentless in his attack on liberalism at the University of Chicago. The professor who received his strongest reprimand was George Burman Foster.<sup>26</sup> Dixon had been in Chicago only a few months when Foster’s *magnum opus* created a storm. *The Finality of the Christian Religion* (1906) described Christianity as a naturalistic religion, a system of ideals, rather than a divine revelation. Even the secular press denounced Foster’s radical denial of miracles, the resurrection, and the inspiration of Scripture.<sup>27</sup> Foster stressed the immanence of God to the point of teaching pantheism. He could write, “A God outside the cosmos is dead.”<sup>28</sup> The traditional theistic view of a transcendent God is obsolete. As with most liberals, Foster’s theology was fluid and existential, not fixed and absolute. His theology eventually became so subjective that he wondered if God could be an objective reality at all. His critics charged that to Foster God was “simply a magnificent ideational convenience.”<sup>29</sup> The Baptist Ministers’ Association of Chicago were so in-

<sup>25</sup>Dixon sermon, “Bible Ethics and University Professors,” n.d., Dixon Collection, Nashville.

<sup>26</sup>Cf. Alan Gragg, *George Burman Foster, Religious Humanist* (Danville, VA: Association of Baptist Professors of Religion, 1978).

<sup>27</sup>The Chicago *Tribune* complained that Foster “assails the canon of the Bible...declares miracles incredible and says proof of [the] resurrection [is] lacking.” Quoted in William R. Hutchison, *The Modern Impulse in American Protestantism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 217.

<sup>28</sup>Foster, *The Finality of the Christian Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1906), p. 177. Foster was enamored with German radical Friedrich Nietzsche, who applied the Darwinian biological corollary—“survival of the fittest”—to the human race. Many fundamentalists believed this distorted philosophy helped produce World War I. See George Burman Foster, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. Curtis W. Reese (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1931). This work is a subtle vindication of Nietzsche’s militarism. See especially pp. 94–103.

<sup>29</sup>Foster, *The Finality of the Christian Religion*, p. 218.



censed by Foster's book that they resolved 48 to 22 that "the views set forth in this book are contrary to the Scriptures and that its teachings and tendency are subversive of the vital and essential truths of the Christian faith."<sup>30</sup> The *Watchword and Truth* labeled Foster the worst enemy of Christ that ever undertook to destroy the faith of the saints. "He denies the virgin birth and the infallibility of Christ, derides the necessity of atonement, ridicules the resurrection of our Lord and...yet, he calls himself a Christian, and Chicago University keeps him as a professor."<sup>31</sup> Minneapolis pastor William Bell Riley (1861–1947) levelled a salvo against Foster with his *The Finality of Higher Criticism* (1909). The result of "Fosterism," he predicted, would be "an awful harvest of skepticism."<sup>32</sup> Pressure mounted to oust Foster. However, in the interests of "academic freedom," William Rainey Harper refused to dismiss him; he simply transferred him from the divinity school to the college of arts and sciences.

In the fall of 1909, Foster spoke before the Baptist Congress, and denied the supernatural Christ of the Bible. He virtually eliminated the vicarious atonement by making Christ only "an incentive to us that we ourselves in our place, and in our way, shall be as redemptive in our disposition and activity as he was in his degree, in his place and way."<sup>33</sup> That same year he produced a booklet entitled, *The Function of Religion in Man's Struggle for Existence*. In an address, preached before the Los Angeles YMCA (August 15, 1909), Dixon attacked the contents of this work and stated that Foster had no right to call himself a Christian because he denied the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith: a personal God, the deity of Christ, and the authority of the Bible.<sup>34</sup> To

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<sup>30</sup>Quoted in Norman H. Maring, "Baptists and Changing Views of the Bible, 1865–1918 (Part II)," *Foundations* 1 (October 1958): 52.

<sup>31</sup>Editorial, "Dr. Foster Again," *Watchword and Truth* 28 (February–March 1906): 37–38.

<sup>32</sup>William Bell Riley, *The Finality of the Higher Criticism; or, The Theory of Evolution and False Theology* (N.p. 1909), pp. 117–39, cited in William Vance Trollinger, Jr., *God's Empire: William Bell Riley and Midwestern Fundamentalism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), pp. 30–31.

<sup>33</sup>*Twenty-Seventh Annual Session of the Baptist Congress Held in The Madison Avenue Baptist Church New York City November 9, 10, and 11, 1909* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1909), p. 108.

<sup>34</sup>Dixon's address was printed as "Destructive Criticism vs. Christianity: An Exposé of Fosterism," *Bible Student and Teacher* 12 (June 1910): 447–51 and 13 (July 1910): 475–85, and in booklet form under the same title by the BIOLA Book Room in Los Angeles (n.d.). The booklet form, found in the Dixon Collection, is the source used for this article. The edition of Foster's book, from which Dixon frequently quotes, is *The Function of Religion in Man's Struggle for Existence* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1909).

Dixon, Foster was no more than an atheist, who considered God as “a symbol to designate the universe in its ideal-achieving capacity (Page 109).” By systematically retrieving and attacking quotes from Foster’s book, Dixon endeavored to show that Foster’s God was the product of man’s “God-making capacity....Religion, according to Foster, is self-achievement, self-bringing-things-to-pass. Man worships his own achievements, or the object of his worship is self in its achieving capacity.”<sup>35</sup> Dixon argued that Foster went beyond Unitarianism in his book. At least Unitarianism claimed to be theistic, with a belief in God as creator and ruler. Foster’s “theism,” Dixon exclaimed, was only materialistic atheism.<sup>36</sup>

Like the Unitarians, Foster rejected another essential of Christianity—the deity of Christ. Dixon accused Foster of double-talk for teaching a difference between the “ecclesiastical dogma” of Christ’s deity and the “real” Christ. Foster rejected the dogma and attempted a semantic subterfuge: Christ is divine, but only in the capacity as a human for expressing divinity. But other men are also divine, he said. “Human nature did not exhaust itself in growing one bright consummate flower; the earth is bursting with new bloom every day.” Dixon answered:

The intimation is that human nature with its man-making and god-making capacity can produce a better man and, therefore, a better God than Christ. In rejecting “the ecclesiastical dogma of the deity of Christ” Dr. Foster rejects the deity of Christ as defined by every creed of Christendom...and he rejects the Christ revealed in the Bible.<sup>37</sup>

The most incriminating admission by Foster was his opinion that, if Christ were alive today, He would be different from the Jesus portrayed in the Bible. “He [Christ] would not copy the Jesus of that time and place. To copy even him is to kill the soul.” “That last sentence,” said Dixon, “is the worst thing against Christ ever penned by human fingers....The blasphemy of it is equalled only by its falsity.”<sup>38</sup>

The third fundamental of historic Christianity which Foster denied, according to Dixon, was the authority of the Bible as God’s revelation. Foster had written that to require assent to the commandments of

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<sup>35</sup>Dixon, *Destructive Criticism vs. Christianity*, pp. 1–3.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 3–4.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 6–7.

Scripture “is to lead into sin; and such [a] requirement is itself sinful.”<sup>39</sup> When Foster asserted that “the Bible has lost its authoritative force,” Dixon was indignant. He asked, “With whom has the Bible lost all its [authority]”?

Not with the millions who love and revere its pages....Only with a comparatively small coterie of men and women whose poetical fancies have absorbed their logical faculties; who have been so hypnotized by scientific vagaries, seen dimly through the misty millions of geological eras, that they refuse to be influenced by scientific facts within their reach....Dr. Foster is mistaken. The Bible is still authoritative, while the criticism he represents is losing all authority with people who dare to use their own brains and refuse to accept as authoritative the unsupported dictum of scholars.<sup>40</sup>

All that is needed, said Dixon, is for students in the colleges to be truly liberated from the shackles that bind their reasoning to the false interpretations of liberal professors. When these students learn a few more facts, “they will perceive that their professors are not so much the interpreters of the Bible as the Bible is of [them].”<sup>41</sup>

For Foster, the Bible teaches several faiths, depending on when and with what the Bible is addressing. “Strictly speaking,” he wrote, “there is not a single Bible-believer today.” Dixon charged Foster with naiveté in making such an absurd statement.

I have spent more than thirty years studying the Bible, and I hereby declare that I believe the Bible to be the Word of God. Thousands of honest men who have taken almost infinite pains to investigate arguments against that proposition have been led by their studies to the same conclusion. The more they study the Bible the deeper grows their conviction that it is the word of God.<sup>42</sup>

Furthermore, asserted Dixon, to say that the Bible teaches one faith in one place and a different faith in another place simply is terribly misguided. To support his point, he cited Henry G. Weston (1820–1909), Crozer Seminary’s first president. Weston had read the New Testament through in Greek, once a month, for over thirty years, and was also a diligent student of the Old Testament. The result of his studies was that the Bible was thoroughly consistent in its teaching of one true faith.<sup>43</sup>

What is the reason, asked Dixon, for the change in Foster’s theol-

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

ogy? He once had taught the personality of God, the deity of Christ, and the authority of Scripture. Now he denied these cardinal truths. Dixon quoted three sentences on page 82 of *The Function of Religion* to reveal the cause of Foster's apostasy:

It should suffice to say that if we take the idea of evolution seriously, we must apply it thoroughly and consistently. Doing so, papal authority and biblical authority and innerlight authority and *a priori* authority must be an effect of experience before they in turn become [the] cause of experience. Thus entrenched, supernaturalism is routed from its final citadel.<sup>44</sup>

Evolution, coupled with inductive empiricism, produced Foster's new theology. And so was the case with Henry C. Vedder, Cornelius F. Woelfkin, and an increasing number of other Baptist pastors and theologians trained in modernist classrooms infiltrated by this new "science." They had allowed beclouded reason to become a new authority over Biblical revelation. Dixon and other fundamentalists constantly reiterated the necessity of approaching the Bible and theology rationally. The problem with liberalism was that it separated rationality from a faith anchored to divinely revealed propositional truth. In rejecting the supernatural, or at best casting doubt upon it, the liberals redefined faith by naturalism.<sup>45</sup> The result was a totally distorted view of New Testament Christianity. The Chicago liberals claimed to have a new form of the old faith,<sup>46</sup> but in reality it was simply the old apostasy in a new suit labelled "the social gospel."<sup>47</sup>

Dixon believed Foster was foolish in accepting a biological theory which had been disproved.<sup>48</sup> Since Foster rejected so-called theistic in favor of naturalistic evolution, Dixon placed him outside the pale of

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>45</sup>Cf. J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1923), pp. 2–7 and Kenneth Cauthen, *The Impact of American Religious Liberalism*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983), chs. 8, 10 and especially p. 180.

<sup>46</sup>Shailer Mathews endeavored to recast orthodox Christianity in a new mold of the social gospel in order for it to meet the needs of modern man. See his *The Gospel and Modern Man* (Macmillan Co., 1910) and *The Faith of Modernism* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1924). For an overview of this kind of theology taught at the University of Chicago Divinity School, see Gerald Birney Smith, *A Guide to the Study of the Christian Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1916).

<sup>47</sup>Modernists called this "evangelical liberalism," but it was a gospel alien to the New Testament. Cf. Robert G. Torbet, *A History of the Baptists*, 3rd ed. (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1963), pp. 424–27.

<sup>48</sup>At this point Dixon cited several authorities, whose findings discredited evolution. Among these were creation scientist George Paulin and physician Lionel S. Beale.

Christianity altogether.<sup>49</sup> Dixon then moved from attacking Foster's evolutionary views to his teaching of higher criticism. Here again the fundamentalist preacher outlined the "myths" of the critical views of Scripture (see above for these) and recalled Dr. William Henry Green of Princeton in his favor. Dixon wrote:

The Higher Criticism has been of late so associated with extravagant theorizing, and with insidious attacks upon the genuineness and credibility of the books of the Bible, that the very term has become an offense to serious minds. It has come to be considered one of the most dangerous forms of infidelity, and in itself very hostile to revealed truth. And it must be confessed in the hands of those who are unfriendly to supernatural religion it has proved a potent weapon in the interest of unbelief.<sup>50</sup>

Finally, in summarizing his critique of *The Function of Religion*, Dixon listed several contradictions between Foster's atheism and historic biblical Christianity to prove that "Fosterism" cannot possibly be identified with true Christianity.<sup>51</sup> To the contrary, it attempts to destroy Christianity by denying its fundamentals. Dixon wanted nothing to do with a God "evolved from the brain of man," or a system which has dethroned God and exalted man as the object of worship. Dixon would grant Foster the freedom to preach and teach whatever he wished, but not to call something he taught by a name which does not belong to it. Atheism cannot be Christianity no matter how it is dressed up in the rags of modernism. Nor would Dixon condone a man, receiving a "Baptist salary," teaching in a Baptist school, but refusing to teach Baptist doctrine.<sup>52</sup>

While Dixon delivered his critique of "Fosterism" in Los Angeles, a Christian businessman listened intently to the words. Following the address, he approached the Moody Memorial pastor and asked him to consider a proposition that would have tremendous bearing on the fundamentalist movement.

## *THE FUNDAMENTALS*

### **The Stewart Contribution**

Christian businessman Milton Stewart (1838–1923), along with his

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<sup>49</sup>Dixon rejected all forms of evolution but did believe that one holding to theistic evolution, while in error, could still be a Christian.

<sup>50</sup>Dixon, *Destructive Criticism vs. Christianity*, p. 18.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>Dixon, "Professor Foster's Defense," newsprint, n.d., Dixon Collection, Nashville.

generous brother Lyman (1840–1923), owned the Union Oil Company in California. The Stewarts were Presbyterians but gave freely of their wealth to other church and interdenominational ministries.<sup>53</sup> Lyman Stewart was himself quite active in Christian work throughout his life. He served as president of the Los Angeles YMCA for three years, helped organize the Immanuel Presbyterian Church and the Pacific Gospel Union Mission, gave thousands to mission work in China, and helped in the founding of the Bible Institute of Los Angeles (BIOLA).<sup>54</sup> Lyman Stewart also contributed toward the publication of major fundamentalist works. He financed the most popular premillennial monograph of its day, *Jesus Is Coming* (1908) by William E. Blackstone, and gave one thousand dollars toward the printing of the *Scotfield Reference Bible* (1909), the “textbook” of fundamentalism.<sup>55</sup> Stewart was one of the most devoted and self-sacrificing fundamentalist laymen in the history of the movement.

Lyman Stewart had attended the 1894 Niagara Bible Conference and heard some of the distinguished Bible teachers of early fundamentalism. Among these was James H. Brookes (1830–1897), editor of *The Truth*, a highly influential journal advancing fundamentalist views. Stewart later recalled:

This magazine had providentially fallen into my hands, and I found it exceedingly instructive, and particularly helpful because of its...warning in reference to the great apostasy, by calling attention to the teachings of men who had been strong in [the] pulpit, but who were then teaching error.<sup>56</sup>

Stewart considered sending this periodical to ministers throughout America, in order to expose them to the dangers of modernism, but was financially unable at the time. Fifteen years later (1909), after hearing Dixon’s indictment of George Foster’s liberalism, Stewart shared with Dixon his burden to produce a series of booklets on the fundamental doctrines of the Bible. His goal was to send copies “to every pastor, evangelist, missionary, theological professor, theological student, Sunday school superintendent, YMCA and YWCA secretary in the English

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<sup>53</sup>“The Stewarts as Christian Stewards: A Sketch of Milton and Lyman Stewart of California,” *Missionary Review of the World* 47 (August 1924): 597.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 599.

<sup>55</sup>Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism 1800–1930* (1970; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), p. 191. Sandeen has the best treatment to date on the history and importance of the *Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*; see *ibid.*, pp. 188–207.

<sup>56</sup>Lyman Stewart, personal testimony, n.d., typescript in Stewart Papers, BIOLA University, La Mirada, CA.

speaking world,” so far as he could obtain addresses.<sup>57</sup> The Stewart brothers would finance the project. After carefully considering the matter, Dixon agreed to become editor-in-chief and returned to Chicago to organize the Testimony Publishing Company. The editorial committee met initially on November 5, 1909, and produced the first volume in February 1910. Thomas E. Stephens, editor of the *Moody Church Herald* and business manager of the company, recalled that the first issue went to about 175,000 addresses.<sup>58</sup> Five years later, the company had distributed freely twelve booklets—a total of three million volumes, at a cost of approximately two hundred thousand dollars.<sup>59</sup> According to Ernest Sandeen, most of the financing fell to Lyman Stewart. Milton Stewart offered about a third to the project, but took little interest otherwise.<sup>60</sup> Approximately sixty-four authors contributed ninety articles.<sup>61</sup> Of these, Dixon chose twenty-six men who wrote thirty-one essays on subjects ranging from higher criticism of the Bible to the person and work of Christ.<sup>62</sup>

Lyman Stewart seldom interfered, allowing Dixon full control over selection and editing of the material. Stewart wrote Dixon toward the end of the project in 1915 acknowledging his leadership role.

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<sup>57</sup>Foreword in *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, 12 vols. (Chicago: Testimony Publishing Co., 1910), 1:3. Because of popular demand, the twelve original paperback volumes, completed by 1915, were republished by BIOLA as a four-volume set in 1917, under the direction of Bible teacher and evangelist Reuben A. Torrey (1856–1928). Baker Book House reissued these four volumes in 1988. With Charles L. Feinberg overseeing the project, faculty from Talbot Theological Seminary selected what they believed were “theologically and culturally relevant articles from the original” volumes and updated them. Kregel Publications produced them in 1958, and again in 1990 in a one-volume edition with added biographical sketches by Warren Wiersbe. Such interest testifies to the continuing significance of the *Fundamentals*.

<sup>58</sup>Thomas E. Stephens, “Issue of the ‘Fundamentals,’” typescript copy sent to Mrs. Dixon, c. 1925, Dixon Collection, Nashville. It appears from the content of this article that it was a personal recollection addressed to Mrs. Dixon.

<sup>59</sup>After editing the first five volumes, Dixon accepted the pastorate of the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London in 1911. The two editors who succeeded him were evangelists Louis Meyer (editor of volumes 6 through 10) and Reuben A. Torrey (editor of volumes 11 and 12). These two men were on the original committee forming the Testimony Publishing Company.

<sup>60</sup>Sandeen, *Roots of Fundamentalism*, pp. 195–96.

<sup>61</sup>There is a question as to the exact number of authors because some of the articles were written anonymously.

<sup>62</sup>This number includes Dixon himself, who wrote one article. For a complete list of the contributors and their articles, see Beale, *In Pursuit of Purity*, pp. 41–45.

Now I want to thank you for your part in this work, and to congratulate you on your generalship in organizing and leading this enterprise. The whole work has not only been admirably handled, but in some respects has exceeded our expectations. The success of the work, humanly speaking, is due mainly to you.<sup>63</sup>

### The *Fundamentals* Contribution

Several historians have examined the contents of the twelve booklets and drawn different conclusions. Nearly all admit that the *Fundamentals* were a landmark in the fundamentalist movement, but they disagree as to their impact on Christianity. Stewart Cole wrote that their influence could scarcely be measured; the *Fundamentals* accomplished a leavening work which prepared the way for the great controversy with modernism after World War I.<sup>64</sup> Sandeen reported that the religious press hardly reacted to the publication, but then cited the favorable reviews of four prominent journals representing as many denominations!<sup>65</sup> George Marsden perhaps best described the importance of the *Fundamentals* in their long-term effect. The work

became a symbolic point of reference for identifying a “fundamentalist” movement. When in 1920 the term “fundamentalist” was coined, it called to mind the broad united front of the kind of opposition to modernism that characterized these widely known, if little studied, volumes. In retrospect, the volumes retain some usefulness in tracing the outlines of the emerging movement. They represent the movement at a moderate and transitional stage before it was reshaped and pushed to extremes by the intense heat of controversy.<sup>66</sup>

Why Marsden would refer to the volumes as “little studied” is difficult to understand in view of the fact that the Testimony Publishing Company gratefully received over two hundred thousand mostly favorable letters!<sup>67</sup> Surely someone was studying these volumes.

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<sup>63</sup>Lyman Stewart letter to Dixon, July 29, 1915, Dixon Collection, Nashville.

<sup>64</sup>Stewart Cole, *The History of Fundamentalism* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1931), p. 61.

<sup>65</sup>Sandeen, *Roots of Fundamentalism*, pp. 198–99.

<sup>66</sup>George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870–1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 119. See also, p. 158, where Marsden states that the *Fundamentals* had “produced little perceptible effect.”

<sup>67</sup>See Sandeen, *Roots of Fundamentalism*, p. 198. This enormous figure is substantiated by Thomas Stephens, who, as business manager of the enterprise, proofread all the articles and kept track of the mail. See his letter to Mrs. Dixon (cited above) in Dixon Collection. After the publication of the first two volumes, ten thousand letters were received; after volume three, twenty-five thousand. Dixon wrote in the foreword to volume five, “The favor with which ‘The Fundamentals’ has been received all over the



David Beale correctly accepted Sandeen's conclusion that the *Fundamentals* failed in halting modernism, but stated that the work did constitute the earliest major text for educating fundamentalists in a broad range of specialized subjects. In that regard, the set helped to prepare the movement for the controversies and battles of the 1920s.<sup>68</sup> Writing in 1973, historian George Dollar interpreted the *Fundamentals* as having more value for the orthodox "allies" of fundamentalism (especially the conservative Princeton and Southern Baptist scholars) than for the fundamentalists. "Fundamentalist fellowships never used this as a complete statement of their faith, since literalism in prophecy, imminency of the Lord's Coming, and a premillennial stand are not found in them. These booklets should be hailed as the Fundamentals of Orthodoxy."<sup>69</sup> Dollar fails to point out, however, that the doctrines he cites as being absent from the *Fundamentals* were not crucial issues in the apostasy.<sup>70</sup> Dixon and most other fundamentalists were premillennialists, but the editorial committee did not consider premillennialism a fundamental of the faith, that is, an *essential* doctrine for salvation. It should also be added that within the fundamentalist camp itself there

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world is a great gratification to those who are engaged in the work; and the opposition, bordering sometimes on bitterness, which it has provoked, has been also very gratifying" (*The Fundamentals*, 5:4).

<sup>68</sup>Beale, *Pursuit of Purity*, p. 41. John Fea's argument that *The Fundamentals* represent a period (1893–1919) of irenic fundamentalism is somewhat misleading (cf. "Understanding the Changing Facade of Twentieth-Century American Protestant Fundamentalism: Toward a Historical Definition," *Trinity Journal* 15 [Fall 1994]: 185). While it is true that the articles were not polemical in tone, they were apologetical. Dixon and the other editors chose subjects designed principally to combat modernism. It may be that this period of fundamentalism Fea discusses was not "overwhelmingly" militant as compared to the subsequent period of all-out confrontation (1919–1940), but it nevertheless reflected a combative spirit in defending the fundamentals against what Dixon and other conservatives called the "vagaries" of liberalism (cf. *ibid.*, note 18). The huge response both negative and positive to *The Fundamentals* attests to the fact that their *effect* was polemical (see note 67 above). "Irenic" is not an apt term to describe the fundamentalist reaction to modernist denials even at this early stage in its history.

<sup>69</sup>Dollar, *History of Fundamentalism in America*, p. 175. Dollar lists among the orthodox Southern Baptists the names of A. T. Robertson, L. R. Scarborough, and B. H. Carroll. He also includes Northern Baptists Nathan R. Wood and R. H. Conwell. The Presbyterian orthodox, often labeled fundamentalist but not owning the name, are B. B. Warfield and J. Gresham Machen (*ibid.*, pp. 174–75).

<sup>70</sup>It is true that prophecy does not receive a prominent place in the *Fundamentals*, but Arno C. Gaebelin does stress the literal fulfillment of prophecy as proof for the inspiration of Scripture. See his "Fulfilled Prophecy a Potent Argument for the Bible" (vol. 11).

was a pronounced difference of opinion regarding premillennial interpretation. Dixon and the other editors focused on those crucial doctrines that were under attack by the modernists: the deity and vicarious atonement of Christ and the absolute authority of Scripture.<sup>71</sup> Certainly, premillennialism was important to Dixon but not as a final determiner of belief.<sup>72</sup> What was important to him and other fundamentalists was the personal bodily return of Christ; this, they insisted, was a fundamental of the faith.

### Dixon's Contribution

Undoubtedly, the *Fundamentals* contributed immeasurably to the fundamentalist movement in articulating its doctrinal position. And whatever success the project enjoyed was due largely to the efforts of A. C. Dixon. The first five volumes are the most enduring memorial to his apologetical ministry. The exact procedure Dixon used in selecting authors is not clear. However, what is truly significant is Dixon's choice of included topics. It stands to reason that Dixon would choose subjects which prompted Lyman Stewart to contact him in the first place. Stewart was attracted to Dixon "as the man for the job" because of the latter's contempt for certain teachings of George B. Foster and the Chicago liberals. These were, namely, the rejection or perversion of the doctrines of the personality of God, the deity of Christ, and the authority of Scripture. Whatever else Dixon would include in the volumes of the *Fundamentals* he edited, it is reasonable to conclude that he would choose competent witnesses who would address these issues.<sup>73</sup> A study

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<sup>71</sup>Stewart Cole, for example, stated that the person of Christ was central in the *Fundamentals* (*History of Fundamentalism*, p. 59); Sandeen, however, argues convincingly that "the Bible surpassed any other doctrinal issue" (*Roots of Fundamentalism*, pp. 203–04). There is a sense in which both are correct; the two doctrines are obviously inseparable in the thinking of the authors. Most of the articles were apologies for biblical inerrancy against higher criticism but, within them, Christ is indeed the central figure.

<sup>72</sup>Marsden observes, "Dispensationalism and premillennialism, which were controversial, were almost entirely absent. Clearly an effort was being made to build and maintain alliances....In order to establish a respectable and self-consciously conservative coalition against modernism, premillennial teachings were best kept in the background" (*Fundamentalism and American Culture*, p. 119). However, a few years later (1919), fundamentalist spokesman W. B. Riley believed he could build an interdenominational league of fundamentalists by including premillennialism as a test of orthodoxy in the nine-point creed of the WCFA (cf. art. 7), but approved an innocuous substitute for it in the BBU confession when it posed an obstacle to the unification of Northern with Southern and Canadian Baptist fundamentalists. Cf. William Bell Riley, "The Faith of the Fundamentalists," *Current History* 26 (June 1927): 434–36; Trollinger, *God's Empire*, pp. 25, 29, 163; and Robert George Delnay, "A History of the Baptist Bible Union" (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1963), pp. 51–52, 285–86.

<sup>73</sup>Proof of this is found in Dixon's request of Edgar Young Mullins in a letter dated September 21, 1909 (Mullins Papers, Southern Baptist Seminary, Louisville). Dixon

of the contents of the first five volumes reveals that this is exactly what he did. Of the seven articles appearing in volume one, the first three deal with Christ's virgin birth, His deity, and incarnation respectively. The next two defend the personality of the Holy Spirit and the proof of the living God. The sixth article is a refutation of higher criticism and claim for the absolute authority of Scripture. The last is a practical testimony, something Dixon included in each of his five volumes, for special appeal to the layman. In the next four volumes there were a total of twenty-four articles. Of these, eleven were devoted to the defense of the Bible (eight dealing specifically with higher criticism). Five defended the person and work of Christ, and six testified to the personality of God and the reality of salvation. The remaining essays treated modern thought and the Old Testament tabernacle.

A second inference also involves the criteria for selection. Doctrinal concerns provided the format of the *Fundamentals*, but what governed Dixon's selection of authors? His involvement with the American Bible League (organized in 1903) undoubtedly influenced his choices.<sup>74</sup> It was on the platform of ABL-sponsored Bible conferences in the East that Dixon heard the denunciations of higher criticism by Princeton conservatives and other seminary scholars. While at Moody Memorial, Dixon was a member of the ABL's Chicago branch and helped conduct Bible conferences with fundamentalists James M. Gray and John Roach Straton. ABL periodical, the *Bible Student and Teacher*, provided a forum for airing apologies by Dixon and other conservative spokesmen. Several of the articles Dixon used in the *Fundamentals* were first presented in this ABL organ.<sup>75</sup> Daniel Gregory, of the *Bible Student and*

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asked Mullins to furnish an article on one of the following themes: the personality of God, the deity of Christ, the personality and ministry of the Holy Spirit, the inspiration and authority of the Scriptures, sin, salvation, the new birth, the atonement, heaven, hell, the testimony of history to Christ and the Bible, the testimony of Christian experience to the truth of Christianity [the one Mullins eventually decided upon], the testimony of the monuments to the accuracy of the biblical records, the testimony of real science to real Christianity, the testimony of missions to Christ and the Bible, the testimony of the Christian home to the value of Christianity, the testimony of the Jews to the truth of prophecy, the testimony of history to the fulfillment of prophecy, the second coming of Christ the hope of the church, modern apostasies like Theosophy, Spiritualism, Christian Science, and New Thought in the light of Scriptures, the personality of the Devil. This lengthy list reveals Dixon's doctrinal priorities as well as the confidence he placed in Mullins to speak cogently on any of them.

<sup>74</sup>Cf. Sandeen, *Roots of Fundamentalism*, p. 201.

<sup>75</sup>In reviewing the first volume of the *Fundamentals*, editor Daniel Gregory noted that each of the seven chapters had either appeared earlier in the pages of the *Bible Student and Teacher*, or their authors had contributed similar articles to this periodical. Gregory concluded, "It will thus appear that we [the American Bible League and the *Bible Student and Teacher*] have been anticipating 'The Testimony Publishing Company' in this line of work, and apparently preparing the way for the great enterprise they are

*Teacher*, accused the Dixon editorial staff of plagiarism, but later apologized when Dixon assured him that the *Fundamentals* committee had been in direct touch with the authors of their material. “If the matter was reproduced,” Dixon responded, “it was done by the authors, and not by the editor.”<sup>76</sup> Dixon’s request of Southern Seminary president Edgar Y. Mullins (1860–1928) for an article verifies this explanation, yet Dixon did encourage Mullins to send something which had already been printed.

My dear Dr. Mullins:

Dr. Franklin Johnson, of Chicago University, tells me that you published an article some time ago in the Richmond *Religious Herald* on the “Authority of Christ,” which he thinks would be just the thing for our series. An article already published in book or periodical will serve our purpose almost as well as an original article. Can you send me the article referred to, altered as you may see fit, within a few days, and I will see that you receive at least ten dollars for your trouble [Dixon sent him fifty], if, in your judgement, it is the kind of article you would like to have published and sent to all the ministers of the English speaking world?

Perhaps you can find a still better one in one of your books. If so, send that to me with the bill for stenographic or copying work.

Cordially yours,  
A. C. Dixon [signed]<sup>77</sup>

A third inference is that the content, emphasis, and style of the Dixon volumes are practically an extension of A. C. Dixon’s own. The articles were scholarly yet practical; apologetical but not vindictive; informative but not pedantic.<sup>78</sup> All of these qualities applied to Dixon and, what is more, these features are characteristic of this period of fundamentalism. The *Fundamentals* prove that A. C. Dixon is one of the best theological representatives of early fundamentalist history. Dixon’s

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undertaking” (“Some Helpful Books for Bible Study,” *Bible Student and Teacher* 12 [May 1910]: 348).

<sup>76</sup>Cited in Sandeen, *Roots of Fundamentalism*, pp. 201–03.

<sup>77</sup>Dixon letter to E. Y. Mullins, September 28, 1909, Mullins Papers, Southern Baptist Seminary, Louisville. Mullins accepted Dixon’s second suggestion by sending him what appeared to be a book chapter. This proved unacceptable to Dixon. “Will you not work it into shape so as to make it more complete in itself? I wish that in this first volume we may give to the world the very best that you can do, not only in the way of thinking and truth, but also in the matter of style” (Dixon letter to Mullins, October 25, 1909, Mullins Papers, Southern Baptist Seminary, Louisville).

<sup>78</sup>Cf. Sandeen, *Roots of Fundamentalism*, p. 206.

own article in the fifth volume further illustrates this last point. He contributed his sermon, "The Scriptures," shortly after he assumed the pastorate of the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London. His arguments were clearly and logically stated. After deducing from such passages as Deuteronomy 31:9, 24; Joshua 1:8; and 2 Kings 22:8, that the Word of God was a written book, he drew three conclusions: (1) The Bible is literature written by the command of God, (2) under the guidance of God, and (3) preserved by the providential care of God. Dixon noted that the best definition of the Bible is the Scripture's own: "all Scripture is God-breathed" (2 Tim 3:16). Dixon insisted that the Bible itself, as well as the writers of it, were divinely inspired.<sup>79</sup> "God, who 'breathed into man the breath of life and he became a living soul,' has also breathed into His Book the breath of life, so that it is "the Word of God which liveth and abideth forever."<sup>80</sup>

Dixon advised: the responsibility of the Christian is to teach the Word, not his opinion about it. The Bible may then "show us wherein we are wrong [reproof]," and "it can right us [correction]." It is also profitable for instruction. Other books may train in music, speech, or grammar, but the specialty of the Bible is training in righteousness.<sup>81</sup> The best method of Bible study, according to Dixon, is implied by the

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<sup>79</sup>Craig Skinner makes a serious error in using A. C. Dixon as an example of what he considers a moderate view of the "process" of inspiration by early fundamentalists. Skinner states that they held a variety of interpretations regarding the doctrine, and did not use inerrancy as a test of orthodoxy. According to him, Dixon was moderate in not utilizing "inerrancy and infallibility as rallying points essential for belief in inspiration." See his *Lamplighter and Son* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1984), pp. 206–07. His analysis reveals a misconception of early fundamentalist hermeneutics, which recognized a verbal-plenary, non-mechanical mode of inspiration, and which automatically inferred inerrant autographs. Early (and current) fundamentalists insisted that inspiration demands inerrancy and infallibility. Dixon often used the three terms together and considered them theologically inseparable. Skinner reveals that he has either not read, or has read into, Dixon's writings when he says that Dixon "studiously avoided" the term inerrancy (*ibid.*, p. 210). Moderating views of inspiration may be in vogue among current new evangelicals, but they are not the theological heirs of the fundamentalists, as Skinner and Richard Quebedeaux (whom he quotes) would have us believe (*ibid.*, pp. 205, 207). Regarding the matter of an originally-inspired, inerrant text, true fundamentalists of all ages have been in agreement. See Sandeen, *Roots of Fundamentalism*, p. 103; Martin E. Marty, *The Irony of It All: 1893–1919*, vol. 1, in *Modern American Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 237; Norman Furniss, *The Fundamentalist Controversy, 1918–1931* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), p. 15; Louis Gasper, *The Fundamentalist Movement, 1930–1956* (reprint of 1963 ed., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), p. 13; and Morris Ashcraft, "The Theology of Fundamentalism," *Review and Expositor* 79 (Winter 1982): 39.

<sup>80</sup>Dixon, "The Scriptures," *The Fundamentals*, 5:75.

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 76.

words “search” (John 5:39) and “profitable” (2 Tim 3:16). He provides a most suggestive analogy, using the word “search,” which means to “look through and through.” As the Spirit of God searches the deep things of God, even the heart of man, so man should examine the things of God (the Bible) in the same manner. All the Christian needs for such a study is the guidance of the Holy Spirit. “Commentaries are good, but not good as substitutes for independent search.”<sup>82</sup> Dixon submitted several methods of Bible study, but recommended the entire book approach. “If you have not read the Scriptures, a book at a sitting, you may take it for granted that you do not know your Bible.”<sup>83</sup> The scriptural motive for Bible study is twofold: to provide assurance of eternal life (1 John 5:13) and to learn of Jesus Christ (John 5:39).<sup>84</sup>

In his sermon Dixon convincingly draws key words from several Scripture passages and integrates them into one basic theme: the Bible is the Word of God that any Christian may read and understand. His remarks were articulate and direct. The strength of his arguments is not to be found in mere rhetoric, but in straightforward, simple logic, which is both compelling and reassuring. It is interesting that he does not personally attack higher criticism, which he had been used to doing against the Chicago liberals. Since he had chosen other writers of the *Fundamentals* to do this, he took this occasion to use a more pastoral approach. His tone was confident and optimistic. He allowed his assertions to stand alone as self-evident truths. Surely the impression he wished to leave his readers is “how could anyone possibly doubt that the Bible is the Word of God; examine for yourself and see how profitable it is!”

For these first five volumes of *The Fundamentals*, A. C. Dixon selected and wrote articles designed to combat rationalistic liberalism as expounded by the Chicago Divinity School liberals. In doing so, he not only courageously contended for the faith against modernism, but provided a sure theological base upon which succeeding fundamentalists would build their separatistic ecclesiastical superstructures. The articles’ apologetical content and style remain an instructive model for the fundamentalist movement. They collectively contribute a doctrinal framework within which current fundamentalists may intelligently and militantly defend against apostasy in a day of theological fuzziness and compromise.

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<sup>82</sup>Ibid., pp. 76–77.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 79–80.