

Fundamentalism and the Church of God Mountain Assembly

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Historians are divided on what factors most greatly influenced the origins of fundamentalism in America, yet they tend to generalize about the beliefs all fundamentalist groups held, particularly in regard to: dispensationalism, evangelism, Calvinism, the literal interpretation of the Bible, and godly living. However, as revealed in the inner workings of such a specific fundamentalist group as the Church of God Mountain Assembly, historians appear to have incorrectly identified the origins of fundamentalism and overgeneralized fundamentalist beliefs.

As the 1920s roared through United States' history, the impact of the decade forever changed American culture. At the least, one force rose to withstand the flood of change to preserve the identity and values of a previous generation. This deterrent was fundamentalism. Historians are divided on what factors most greatly influenced the origins of fundamentalism in America, yet they tend to generalize about the beliefs all fundamentalist groups held, particularly in regard to: dispensationalism, evangelism, Calvinism, the literal interpretation of the Bible, and godly living. However, as revealed in the inner workings of such a specific fundamentalist group as the Church of God Mountain Assembly, historians appear to have inconclusively identified the origins of fundamentalism and overgeneralized fundamentalist beliefs.

Scholarship on the fundamentalist phenomenon is somewhat limited but widely varied. Religious historians have not attempted to define a birth date or birth place of fundamentalism. Instead, they have viewed the movement as the growing product of factors within the religious organizations. Where they have disagreed is in which influences most significantly contributed to the rise of fundamentalism. Stewart Cole, a contemporary of the movement, wrote the first significant history of fundamentalism in 1931. Cole faced the difficult task of defining and describing a movement without the benefit of historical perspective. Cole's work examined five large Christian groups, Northern Baptists, Presbyterians, Disciples of Christ, Methodist Episcopalians and Protestant Episcopalians, but failed mention the smaller holiness and Pentecostal groups and their significant impact.¹ Norman Furniss followed Cole with the publication of his work in 1954. Furniss limited his treatment of fundamentalist history to merely twelve years, 1918-1931, giving little attention to the origin or lasting impact of the movement. Furniss viewed the fundamentalist movement as a threat to the intellectual emancipation during the repressive

¹ Stewart G. Cole, *The History of Fundamentalism* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1931), 1-24.

1920s.² Both of these early works viewed fundamentalism as a negative political force inside various denominations.³ In 1970, Ernest Sandeen provided a more historical and theological definition of the movement when he attested that fundamentalism had its origins in millenarianism, the belief that society will soon be positively transformed.⁴ Three years later, George Dollar published his work relying heavily on the historical research of Sandeen, but also included biographical sketches on some of the heroes of the fundamentalist movement. He concluded his work by highlighting the modern dangers to fundamentalism.⁵

George Marsden acknowledged the millennialist influence in the roots of fundamentalist, but insisted there was more to it than that. Marsden argued that fundamentalism's base was much wider and included the evangelical and holiness movements of the late nineteenth century that previous works seemed not to notice.⁶ One of the more recent contributions to the study was a work edited by Jerry Falwell in 1981. Falwell pointed out the difficulty of trying to define a vast movement with restrictive language and argued that fundamentalism's roots could actually be traced through religious nonconformists throughout history beginning in the early church.⁷

² Norman F. Furniss, *The Fundamentalist Controversy, 1918-1931* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), 1-12.

³ Ernest R. Sandeen, "Toward a Historical Interpretation of the Origins of Fundamentalism," *Church History* 36, no. 1 (March 1967): 66.

⁴ Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), xv-xix.

⁵ George W. Dollar, *A History of Fundamentalism in America* (Greenville, South Carolina: Bob Jones University Press, 1973).

⁶ George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 5.

⁷ Jerry Falwell, ed., *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1981), 2, 27-28.

Historian J.C. Furnas overwhelmingly labeled fundamentalists as Southerners⁸ and Lynn Dumenil agreed that after the Scopes' Trial they had commonly been regarded "as backward-thinking hicks."⁹ Marsden, however, disagreed with this generalization by pointing out the two urban hubs of fundamentalist literature: the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago and the Bible Institute of Los Angeles.¹⁰ Marsden's thesis seems to best describe the background of the fundamentalism observed within the Church of God Mountain Assembly with the exception that this group remained almost exclusively rural.

The Church of God Mountain Assembly was organized in 1907 in what is now McCreary County, Kentucky by a group of ministers mostly affiliated with the United Baptist Church. As the holiness revival swept through rural Appalachia shortly after the turn of the twentieth century, several members of the South Union Baptist Association of United Baptists in Southeast Kentucky accepted the doctrine of sanctification as a second work of grace.¹¹ To these ministers, sanctification occurred when the Holy Spirit defeated the power of inborn sin, cleansed the soul, and enabled the believer to live a life of holiness. As the leadership of the Baptist association became aware of the increasing numbers of "heretical" members, it advised its ministers to beware of those teaching doctrines contrary to its articles of faith, and in 1905 expelled and revoked the ministerial credentials of as many as seven preachers.¹² Expelled ministers John H.

⁸ J.C. Furnas, *Great Times: An Informal Social History of the United States, 1914-1929* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1974), 98.

⁹ Lynn Dumenil, *The Modern Temper: American Culture and Society in the 1920s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 189.

¹⁰ Marsden, 118-119.

¹¹ Luther Gibson, *History of the Church of God Mountain Assembly* (Trenton, Michigan: by the author, 1970), 5.

¹² Janus Jones, ed., *1990 Annual of South Union Baptist Association: 175th Anniversary* (Williamsburg, Kentucky: South Union Baptist Association, 1990), 114-115.

Parks, Stephen N. Bryant and others, continued their fellowship as *holy* Baptists and eventually met at Jellico Creek, Kentucky on August 24, 1907 to appoint organizational committees for an initial association of ten congregations. When the association met again in October for its first General Assembly, it adopted eight resolutions, six articles of faith and a new name, the Church of God.¹³ By 1911, the association added “Mountain Assembly” to its name in order to distinguish it from other groups known as Churches of God.¹⁴ The Church of God Mountain Assembly took from its roots in the United Baptist Church many traditions including its sacramental ordinances, church covenant, and preference for untrained (professionally) and unsalaried ministers. However, as the group began to develop its own identity over the next two decades, its fundamentalist characteristics became more pronounced in its articles of faith and teachings.

Religious historian Ernest Sandeen argued in 1970 that fundamentalism had its roots in millenarianism and most historians agree that a millennialist eschatology is one of the defining characteristics of fundamentalists. In the 1840s, John Nelson Darby began teaching his dispensationalist theology in England. Dispensationalism held that during different periods (dispensations) of human history, God has dealt with mankind according to a covenant particular to that era. Since the time of Jesus, man has lived in the dispensation of grace whereby he must trust the atoning work of Christ’s crucifixion for salvation. In the millenarian tradition, Darby taught that imminent end of the wicked world would usher in a new dispensation in which Christ would reign for one thousand years on an earthly throne. Cyrus Ingerson Scofield advanced

¹³ Church of God Mountain Assembly, *Minutes of the Church of God [Mountain Assembly]* (Jellico, Tennessee: Church of God Mountain Assembly, 1907), 2-3.

¹⁴ Gibson, 8.

Darby's dispensationalism in the publication of his reference Bible in 1909 and fundamentalists widely accepted this view.¹⁵

The doctrine of the pre-millennial and imminent physical return of Jesus Christ became a cornerstone in the Church of God Mountain Assembly. Six months after the United States entered World War I, then viewed as the war to end all wars, the Church of God Mountain Assembly adopted two new articles of faith, one condemning war and another confirming the millennial reign of Christ.¹⁶ Soon thereafter, Charles T. Pratt claimed to see a vision of Satan in chains and began teaching in that the millennial reign had already begun. Intending to keep their doctrine pure, the Church of God Mountain Assembly excluded him. Pratt subsequently founded the Church of God of the Union Assembly in Bartow County, Georgia in November 1919.¹⁷

One minister of the Church of God Mountain Assembly seemed to dedicate a great deal of his life to the study of the events leading to the second coming of Christ and the eschatological era. John H. Parks, one of the movements leading founders, kept a ministerial journal for over twenty years. In addition to numerous baptismal records, Parks recorded his personal insights into many current events that he believed fulfilled biblical predictions concerning the rapidly approaching Second Advent. From his home in Jellico, Tennessee on March 7, 1918, Parks presumably witnessed an occurrence of the aurora borealis. Now approaching sixty years of age, the minister felt that the "great lights in the heavens" which appeared as if the sun was "rising in the north" was what Jesus meant when he said that "great signs shall there be from heaven"

¹⁵ Sandeen, *Roots of Fundamentalism*, 59-61.

¹⁶ Church of God Mountain Assembly, *Minutes of the Eleventh Annual Session of the Mountain Assembly of the Churches of God* (Jellico, Tennessee: Church of God Mountain Assembly, 1917), 7-8.

¹⁷ Harold Sowder, "History of the Church of God of the Union Assembly," <<http://www.thechurchofgodua.org/index_files/History.html>> (8 April 2007).

(Luke 21:11). A second sighting the following February seemed to confirm to him that Christ was soon coming.¹⁸ Amid the influenza pandemic of 1918, Parks wrote on November 17 that the “worldwide deaths of many thousands” he was reading about fulfilled the prophecy of Amos 8:3, “there shall be many dead bodies in every place,” and described the “pestilences” predicted by Jesus in Matthew 24:7.¹⁹ In April 1930, Parks read of a four-month long drought that threatened to bring on a famine in the Mid-west and pointed to the “famines” that Jesus predicted would precede his coming.²⁰ In February 1933, Parks recollected his birth and infancy during the American Civil War and remarked that the present poverty could not be compared to these humble days. To Parks, the Great Depression he witnessed seemed to vividly reveal the difficult days Jesus described in Luke 21.²¹ To most who were associated with fundamentalism in the decade following World War I, the dawning of a new dispensation characterized their doctrine; but to many in the Church of God Mountain Assembly, it dominated their daily lives.

A second characteristic that historians often used to describe American fundamentalism was its emphasis on evangelism. With the end of the dispensation of grace at hand, sinners had better get prepared to meet Christ before He poured out His eschatological judgment upon the unprepared. Fundamentalists directed their passion for saving lost souls primarily in two main arenas: urban centers within the United States and foreign mission fields.²² The Methodist and Holiness revivals of the Nineteenth Century were predominately rural. Countryside meetings,

¹⁸ John Hansford Parks, *Diary of John Parks, 1936*, 224, personal collection of Roger H. Lands, Taylor, Michigan.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 232.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 228.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 211.

²² Joel A. Carpenter, “Fundamentalist Institutions and the Rise of Evangelical Protestantism, 1929-1942,” *Church History* 49, no. 1 (March 1980): 74.

often held outside or in a tent, saw many conversions and built up numerous small community churches. However, the evangelistic strategy of holiness's offspring, fundamentalism, would be predominately urban and would pave the way for city-wide revivals with evangelicals like Billy Sunday and later Billy Graham. Foreign mission work was also vital to fundamentalist organizations and was therefore the subject of much debate among Baptists, Presbyterians, and Pentecostals.²³

The attempt to categorize the evangelistic methods of all fundamentalists into the same mold fails when comparing the Church of God Mountain Assembly's evangelistic operations with the modes commonly attributed to other fundamentalists. The association began with ten small congregations in very rural communities, and that feature would be slow to change. When John Thomas moved to Knoxville, Tennessee in 1912 and pioneered a new Church of God Mountain Assembly congregation there, he joined the list of affiliated churches along with new congregations in Emlyn, Yamacraw, Seed Tick and Goldbug, Kentucky.²⁴ As jobs in Appalachia grew scarce and church members migrated to Northern cities to find work, members established new churches in Cincinnati,²⁵ Cleveland²⁶ and Detroit.²⁷ Although the founding of these took place within much more urban locales, it seems these places of worship were founded in the

²³ Marsden, 167.

²⁴ Church of God Mountain Assembly, *Minutes of the Sixth Annual Session of the Churches of God* (Jellico, Tennessee: Church of God Mountain Assembly, 1912).

²⁵ Church of God Mountain Assembly, *Minutes of the Churches of God (Incorporated): The Twenty-Third Annual Assembly of the Mountain Assembly of the Churches of God* (Jellico, Tennessee: Church of God Mountain Assembly, 1929), 12.

²⁶ Church of God Mountain Assembly, *Minutes of the Churches of God (Incorporated): The Thirty-Second Annual Assembly of the Churches of God* (Jellico, Tennessee: Church of God Mountain Assembly, 1938), 31.

²⁷ Church of God Mountain Assembly, *Minutes of the Mountain Assembly of the Churches of God (Incorporated): The Thirtieth Annual Assembly of the Churches of God* (Jellico, Tennessee: Church of God Mountain Assembly, 1936), 29.

interest of serving members who had migrated to the urban area rather than for evangelistic pursuits. This is not to imply that these congregations experienced no conversions. On the contrary, as expected, each saw significant growth. While other fundamentalist groups went to large cities out of evangelistic zeal, the primary motive for the establishment of a few urban congregations within the Church of God Mountain Assembly seemed to have been to fulfill the need of relocated Christians. Moreover, the vast majority of new congregations founded by the Church of God Mountain Assembly were in small cities and rural communities, most of which were in Appalachia. For example, of the thirty-eight churches represented at the thirtieth annual assembly, twenty-eight were located in small communities in Southeastern Kentucky (Harlan, Bell, Whitley, Laurel and McCreary Counties) and Northeastern Tennessee (Scott, Campbell and Claiborne Counties).²⁸

The second area of evangelistic passion among fundamentalists was foreign missions. The Church of God Mountain Assembly appears to have been isolated from this worldview until it became involved with the Pentecostal Fellowship of North America in the early 1950s. Upon learning what other Pentecostal organizations were doing around the globe, the Church of God Mountain Assembly began to take steps toward globalization by creating a Foreign Missions Board in 1951.²⁹ It would be another sixteen years, however, before the organization sent its first missionary, Arnold Amos, and his family to Itumbiara, Brazil.³⁰ While the Church of God Mountain Assembly did eventually establish some foreign missions and churches in metropolitan America, it fell considerably short in comparison with other fundamentalist groups of the same

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Church of God Mountain Assembly, *Minutes of the Church of God, Inc.* (Jellico, Tennessee: Church of God Mountain Assembly, 1951), 9.

³⁰ Gibson, 87-89.

era. It would be unfair to characterize the Church of God Mountain Assembly as non-evangelistic. On the contrary, the group possessed a fervor for saving souls as passionate as any fundamentalist group. In fact in 1917, the Church of God Mountain Assembly appointed two ministers to serve as evangelists for the association by conducting revivals throughout the region.³¹ However, the Church of God Mountain Assembly conducted revivals as its preferred mode of evangelism, and continued to utilize them in primarily rural settings.

Religious historian George Marsden concluded that the emphasis on revivals tended to generate controversy among fundamentalists. Two of the largest groups of fundamentalists, Northern Baptists and Northern Presbyterians, possessed “a confessional Calvinist tradition.” The emphasis of human free will in revivalist theology seemed to detract from Calvinist views on the sovereignty of God, election and predestination. Marsden argued that, among many Presbyterians, much controversy centered on the *Confession of Faith*. While members of the Scotch-Irish party remained loyal to its doctrines, those associated with American revivalism sought a “more flexible version of Calvinism.” In the end, Northern Presbyterians redirected their passion toward defending inerrancy of the Bible, but the controversy continued for some time.³²

Within the Church of God Mountain Assembly, no such controversy existed. While other fundamentalists sprang from groups with Calvinist traditions, the founders of this denomination seem never to have been identified with such doctrine. Of the five points of Calvinism, the only tenet with which Church of God Mountain Assembly founders would have agreed was in the total depravity of man. In a sermon published in the association’s first official newsletter, John Parks described the dark condition of a soul held in the grasp of sin. The “old

³¹ Ibid., 13.

³² Marsden, 94, 98-101, 109-118.

man” must become “dead” to his sinful nature if he is to find the “hope of glory.”³³ Conducting revivals and giving altar invitations to any who would come, these church leaders disagreed with Calvin’s views on unconditional election and limited atonement. When it adopted its first Articles of Faith, the Church of God Mountain Assembly endorsed the idea that “man must repent or perish.”³⁴ This phrasing seems to particularly emphasize the effort of an individual and contradict the Calvinist point of irresistible grace. Calvin’s outlook on the perseverance of the saints also contradicted Church of God Mountain Assembly preachers’ warnings from the beginning concerning the danger of apostasy and falling away.³⁵

The most commonly accepted feature of fundamentalism by scholars is the belief in the literal interpretation of the Bible. Three major factors contributed to building the theology of biblical reliability as the fundamentalists accepted it – The Princeton Theology, Prophecy and Bible Conferences, and the founding of Bible Institutes. Archibald Alexander put forth what became known as the Princeton Theology as the first professor in the Princeton Seminary in 1812. Alexander and those who followed him scientifically studied the Scripture and rationally concluded that God inspired every word of the Bible and that the Bible was inerrant in its original form.³⁶

A second contributing factor to the literal acceptance of the Bible was the rise of Christian conferences. Church leaders concerned with the fulfillment of Bible prophecy initiated several gatherings in large cities to gain collectively a better understanding of prophetic issues. One conference in Philadelphia in 1887 was dedicated exclusively to the subject of biblical

³³ John Hansford Parks, “A Dead Old Man,” *The Old Paths* 1, no. 4 (February 1917): 1, reprinted in *The Gospel Herald* 42, no. 7 (July 1984): 7.

³⁴ Church of God Mountain Assembly, *Eleventh Annual Session*, 7.

³⁵ Gibson, 5.

³⁶ Sandeen, “Origins”: 73-74.

inspiration. In 1890, men gathered in Baltimore to focus on the Holy Spirit. Princeton Seminary professors presented papers on Psalms and the Pentateuch in Asbury Park, New Jersey in 1893. Dwight L. Moody organized the Northfield Conference and conducted a series of meetings from 1880 to 1902.³⁷ The Niagara Bible Conference, perhaps the most significant of these, convened in Ontario from 1883 to 1897. The conference produced a fourteen point creed that in many ways served as a basis for fundamentalist theology. Of that creed, five points became “touchstones” of the movement: literally accepting the entire Bible, Christ’s divinity, his virgin birth, his vicarious and atoning death, and his physical return to bring judgment upon humanity.³⁸ The literal acceptance of the Bible by the fundamentalists put the creation account in the book of Genesis at odds with Darwin’s theories and contemporary science. This conflict provided an arena for fundamentalists to battle evolutionists later in Dayton, Tennessee during the summer of 1925.³⁹

By founding institutes, fundamentalists laid a third cornerstone upon which to build their literal interpretation of the Bible. Fundamentalists founded Bible institutes to prepare laymen for Christian service, as opposed to seminaries to train clergy. The overwhelming response of this open door had a profound effect on the movement. Dwight L. Moody opened his training center in Chicago in 1886.⁴⁰ Within 35 years, the school’s correspondence program had 10,000 students.⁴¹ In 1908, Lyman Stewart, millionaire co-owner of Union Oil Company of California, used his own money to found the Bible Institute of Los Angeles, and brought Moody Church

³⁷ Ibid., 76-77.

³⁸ Furnas, 96.

³⁹ Dumenil, 186-187.

⁴⁰ Carpenter, 66.

⁴¹ Furnas, 95.

Pastor A.C. Dixon to California to work with him. Together with his brother, Milton, Stewart sponsored the publication of a series of essays defending the authority of the Bible. This series, known as *The Fundamentals*, was printed and freely distributed to pastors, missionaries, professors and students. It also provided a name for the Biblicist group they represented.⁴²

Although it never established Bible conferences or institutes, the Church of God Mountain Assembly unquestionably embraced the fundamentalist view of biblical authority, and in some ways, rose to the extreme. On October 3, 1914 at Saxton, Kentucky, they adopted their own “five point” creed that included the doctrines of justification, sanctification, the baptism of the Holy Ghost, physical healing and the power of Christ to destroy Satan’s work. The delegates to this General Assembly attached five to six Scripture references to each statement of faith.⁴³ This simple framework for identifying biblical doctrine would be expanded over the next decades. Three years later, in 1917, the Church of God Mountain Assembly added an article of faith on the validity of the New Testament: “The New Testament is our faith and our creed, therefore we stand for its teachings both to the good and the bad.”⁴⁴

Biblical higher criticism of the nineteenth century and modern Bible translations seemed threatening to the ministers in the Church of God Mountain Assembly who lacked any formal educational training to defend their doctrine against such liberals. When the Revised Version and American Standard Version of the Bible gained popularity in some religious groups, the Church of God Mountain Assembly, as one would expect from fundamentalists, adopted a pro-King James Version position. They “ordered” that all of their “ministers use the King James Version

⁴² Marsden, 118-119.

⁴³ Church of God Mountain Assembly, *Minutes of the Seventh Annual Session of the Churches of God* (Jellico, Tennessee: Church of God Mountain Assembly, 1913), 5.

⁴⁴ Church of God Mountain Assembly, *Eleventh Annual Session*, 7.

and not the Revised.”⁴⁵ Their ministers seemed to be concerned that the only source on which they could reasonably rely was the King James Bible. So in 1925, uncharacteristic of most fundamentalists, they advised each church to avoid using any Sunday School curriculum and use only the Bible for religious instruction.⁴⁶

Like so many fundamentalist groups, the Church of God Mountain Assembly valued the literal interpretation of the Genesis account of creation and thus watched the Scopes’ Trial with great interest. When the state of Tennessee prosecuted biology teacher John Scopes in 1925 for teaching evolution in a Dayton, Tennessee high school, science put fundamentalism itself on trial. Conservative Christians all over the United States anticipated the conclusion of the high profile case featuring Clarence Darrow of the American Civil Liberties Union and fundamentalist champion, William Jennings Bryan. When Bryan took the stand in defense of the Bible, Darrow threw question after question at him about the age of the universe, the nature of the flood, and Jonah’s whale. Historians have generally argued that Darrow thoroughly embarrassed his opponent on the stand. In spite of this, Scopes lost the trial and was fined \$100. Later that year, the Tennessee Court of Appeals overturned the verdict on a technicality, but the outcome of the trial itself was of less consequence than the events surrounding it. Bryan died a few days after the trial and fundamentalism lost one of its greatest advocates. Anti-evolutionists became somewhat of a laughing stock. Despite these setbacks, fundamentalism continued to thrive and although the United States’ Supreme Court eventually declared anti-evolution laws

⁴⁵ Church of God Mountain Assembly, *Minutes of the Fourteenth Annual Session of the Mountain Assembly of the Churches of God* (Jellico, Tennessee: Church of God Mountain Assembly, 1920), 8.

⁴⁶ Church of God Mountain Assembly, *Minutes of the Churches of God, Inc.: The Nineteenth Annual Session of the Churches of God* (Jellico, Tennessee: Church of God Mountain Assembly, 1925), 9.

unconstitutional, fifteen years later one-third of all high school teachers feared teaching evolution.⁴⁷

A year after the trial, the Church of God Mountain Assembly met in Jellico, Tennessee for its annual convention. On September 3, 1926, the subject of evolution and the literal interpretation of the Genesis creation account were discussed. The delegates to the convention adopted a position that would have made any fundamentalist proud: “We, the Church of God, denounce Darwin’s theory of evolution as an infidel doctrine and a heathen fancy.”⁴⁸

In some cases, the literal observance of scripture by the Church of God Mountain Assembly was stricter than scholars generally attribute to fundamentalists, especially in regard to their treatment of women. The “new woman” who emerged out of the decade would not be the model by which Church of God Mountain Assembly members raised their daughters. The Apostle Peter admonished women to focus their adorning not on the outward—clothes, hair styles, or gold jewelry—but inward meekness and peace (1 Pe. 3:3). So, in 1920, the Church of God Mountain Assembly began teaching against “wearing gold for decoration” including rings, necklaces and bracelets.⁴⁹ As the bob cut was becoming more popular among American women, the Church of God Mountain Assembly discussed the issue of women cutting their hair. Delegates to the 1924 Assembly passed a motion advising holiness women to discontinue the practice with “many amen’s” heard.⁵⁰ These ultra-fundamentalists understood Paul’s admonition to Corinthian women, that their hair was their glory, to mean that if their hair were cut at all, it

⁴⁷ Dumenil, 186-190.

⁴⁸ Church of God Mountain Assembly, *Minutes of the Twentieth Annual Assembly of the Church of God* (Jellico, Tennessee: Church of God Mountain Assembly, 1926), 9.

⁴⁹ Church of God Mountain Assembly, *Fourteenth Annual Session*, 8.

⁵⁰ Church of God Mountain Assembly, *Minutes of the Church of God, Inc.: Eighteenth Annual Session of the Mountain Assembly of the Church of God* (Jellico, Tennessee: Church of God Mountain Assembly, 1924), 10.

should be shaved completely (1 Cor. 11:5-15). Twenty years later, they strengthened their literalist approach to this passage and began teaching “against women members cutting their hair.”⁵¹ American fashion perhaps saw its most significant change of the 1920s in the rising hemlines made popular by the “flappers” who wore them. So, two years after the Church of God Mountain Assembly first addressed the length of a woman’s hair, it turned its attention to the length of a woman’s skirt. Ministers advised the “elder sisters to teach the younger sisters how to live, dress and behave themselves as becometh holiness.”⁵² Two years later, the Assembly better defined this with further Scriptural admonitions:

Be it resolved as touching the short skirt question that we advise each pastor and church to take in hand the situation and demand the sisters put on scriptural modesty; which will mean a reasonable modest length, and that the elder sisters be a guide and teacher on this question, and in case of rebellion of any said members then such steps may be as taken as will be best.⁵³

Historians attempt to describe fundamentalists as possessing a passion for a higher standard of clean Christian living. This description, however, does not do adherents of the Church of God Mountain Assembly justice. Members of the denomination endeavored to live as close to God as possible and resisted anything that was deemed unclean or worldly. At just its fifth annual assembly, the Church of God Mountain Assembly devoted a great deal of discussion to the subject of tobacco use among its ministers. The debate lasted late into the evening as emotionally charged ministers weighed in on both sides of the issue. Moderator Stephen Bryant ultimately brought the matter to vote, and tobacco use among ministers was restricted by a count

⁵¹ Church of God Mountain Assembly, *Minutes of the Churches of God [Mountain Assembly]* (Jellico, Tennessee: Church of God Mountain Assembly, 1944), 3.

⁵² Church of God Mountain Assembly, *Twentieth Annual Assembly*, 17.

⁵³ Church of God Mountain Assembly, *Minutes of Mountain Assembly of the Churches of God (Incorporated): The Twenty-Second Annual Assembly of the Mountain Assembly of the Churches of God* (Jellico, Tennessee: Church of God Mountain Assembly, 1928), 15.

of 18 to 15.⁵⁴ To be expected with so close a vote, the fledgling organization experienced its first setback when those ministers who continued to use tobacco were excluded in 1915 and formed the General Assembly Church of God. The presbytery of the Church of God Mountain Assembly interpreted the admonition to “lay apart all filthiness” in James 1:21 to include tobacco. Their campaign against uncleanness in the form of tobacco would not stop there. By 1926, all members were denied using tobacco in any form, and the General Assembly adopted a resolution prohibiting raising tobacco on their farms. Higher Christian living would mean freedom from all vices. Habits such as “opium, morphine” and “cocaine” use were also disallowed.⁵⁵

The crusade against worldliness in the Church of God Mountain Assembly, like other fundamentalist groups, also manifested itself in the prohibition of alcohol. The Covenant of the Church of God Mountain Assembly included total abstinence from strong drink, but prohibition gave fundamentalists a chance to help reform society. As opponents of the Eighteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution lobbied for its repeal, the Church of God Mountain Assembly rallied behind it. Delegates of the General Assembly in 1930 adopted a resolution of appreciation for Senator J.M. Robinson and other champions of prohibition expressing their desire to see it “made stronger if possible”. The Church of God Mountain Assembly thereby published its belief that “one of the greatest curses to our country is the use and sale of intoxicating liquors”.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Church of God Mountain Assembly, *Minutes of the Fifth Annual Mountain Assembly of the Churches of God* (Jellico, Tennessee: Church of God Mountain Assembly, 1911), 4.

⁵⁵ Church of God Mountain Assembly, *Twentieth Annual Assembly*, 9, 16.

⁵⁶ Church of God Mountain Assembly, *Minutes of the Mountain Assembly of the Churches of God (Incorporated): The Twenty-Fourth Annual Assembly of the Mountain Assembly of the Churches of God* (Jellico, Tennessee: Church of God Mountain Assembly, 1930), 18.

Dumenil described the conflict of the 1920s in terms of modernity challenging “the Victorian worldview that dominated nineteenth century white middle-class America.”⁵⁷ The fundamentalists joined in the struggle to keep things as they were as much as was possible. This factor combined with a desire to live as close to God by living as far from “the world” as possible might best explain the actions of the Church of God Mountain Assembly during the period. While it strove to follow every literal word of the Bible; in some cases, no scriptural basis for its actions existed. For example, when women gained the right to vote in federal elections with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, “holiness women” in the Church of God Mountain Assembly were advised not to do so five years later. Delegates no doubt understood Paul’s admonition in 1 Corinthians 14:34 literally when they decided women had no “right to speak in church business” that same week.⁵⁸ However there appeared no scriptural basis for disallowing women to vote in general elections. Because the Assembly advised its ministers and deacons not to take part in political elections in 1921, one can only infer that it felt church and politics could not be intermixed and holiness be maintained.⁵⁹ Or perhaps Dumenil was right and that to many during the era, change itself was the greatest evil and that all innovations should be met with skepticism. In 1912, the Church of God Mountain Assembly resolved that its members “abstain from all soft drinks and soft drink stands.”⁶⁰ No explanation has remained for the Church of God Mountain Assembly’s position on the avoidance of soft drinks. It can only be inferred that some ministers associated them with hard drinks, or that

⁵⁷ Dumenil, 145.

⁵⁸ Church of God Mountain Assembly, *Nineteenth Annual Session*, 12.

⁵⁹ Church of God Mountain Assembly, *Minutes of the Fifteenth Annual Session of the Mountain Assembly Churches of God* (Jellico, Tennessee: Church of God Mountain Assembly, 1921), 4.

⁶⁰ Church of God Mountain Assembly, *Sixth Annual Session*, 4.

perhaps the stands themselves provided a place of idleness and gossip. These examples of extremism were not replicated by other fundamentalist groups, and demonstrate how seriously the Church of God Mountain Assembly took the need to remain separate from the world.

If the fundamentalist elements within various denominations of the 1920s are to be understood by a set of common characteristics, it may be necessary for historians to narrow that definition in order to fit more groups within that label. While the Church of God Mountain Assembly demonstrated dispensationalist thinking that led to passionate evangelism, it was certainly not the model of evangelism displayed by most fundamentalists. When it fell desperately short of adhering to Calvinist thought, it exceeded many groups in extremist higher standards of Christian living. If these inconsistencies were demonstrated within one isolated fundamentalist group, namely the Church of God Mountain Assembly, perhaps other groups may have shown further variations. The literal interpretation of the bible may prove to be the only demonstrative characteristic common to all fundamentalists, but future research may identify a group that overwhelmingly displays the other four factors mentioned but fails to measure up on literal biblical interpretation. If there is a common influence behind all fundamentalist origins, it may be yet be discovered as well.

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