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James Barr on Fundamentalism

John Goldingay.

James Barr is one of the most penetrating minds at work in biblical study in Britain today. His gifts, style and stance will have encouraged many readers to look forward to *Fundamentalism* (SCM Press, 1977, 379 pp. £3.95) with anticipation and/or apprehension – according to whether or not they associate themselves with the position denoted by its title.

Professor Barr finds 'the core of fundamentalism . . . not in the Bible but in a particular kind of religion' (11). 'The true gospel as conservative evangelicals understand it' is 'a message, which in its simplest form announces salvation from sin through the blood of Christ and through personal faith in him' (25); Professor Barr elaborates the nature of this message quite fairly (25-38). The exposition is not uncritical, but in principle 'in the ecumenical community or the church the evangelical tradition is an honoured member . . . Its views of conversion, of personal salvation and so on constitute a source of riches' (339). The problem with fundamentalism, however, is that it takes an exclusivist attitude over against other Christian traditions, in particular 'liberalism', which is supposed to have silenced the voice of the biblical gospel in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It then uses a 'hard' doctrine of scripture to mark itself off from them (11-21). Thus

Fundamentalism is based on a particular kind of religious tradition, and uses the form, rather than the reality, of biblical authority to provide a shield for this tradition. (11)

The most pronounced characteristics (of fundamentalists) are the following:

- (a) a very strong emphasis on the inerrancy of the Bible, the absence from it of any sort of error;
- (b) a strong hostility to modern theology and to the methods, results and implications of modern critical study of the Bible;
- (c) an assurance that those who do not share their religious viewpoint are not really 'true Christians' at all. (1)

Not surprisingly, fundamentalism's 'doctrinal position . . . especially in regard to the place of the Bible, and its entire intellectual apologetic' are reckoned to be 'completely wrong' (8).

The clearest embodiment of the fundamentalist phenomenon in Britain is reckoned to be the Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship (UCCF, formerly known as Inter-Varsity Fellowship or IVF) (21-4), whose public-

ations formed the heart of Professor Barr's research (cf. 363-6). Thus the fundamentalist or conservative evangelical position (the two terms are treated as roughly equivalent, though the former is seen as more denoting a cast of mind, the latter as a classification related to ecclesiastical politics (3)) is analysed on the basis of the writings of names which will be familiar to many *Churchman* readers, such as J.N.D. Anderson, C. Brown, F.F. Bruce, H.F.R. Catherwood, E.M.B. Green, D. Guthrie, D. Kidner, J.I. Packer, J.W. Wenham, and (last but not least) the Editor, who is credited (in a discussion of Matthew 14.25 in *The New Bible Commentary Revised* (835b)) with 'perhaps the most monumental understatement ever to be made in a conservative evangelical commentary' (248)!

I found the book's exposition of its case diffuse; it offers not so much an unfolding argument as a series of essays on various aspects of the topic. After taking up some aspects of the opening sections, I plan to summarise the points it makes under headings suggested by the threefold description given above, hoping that this fairly sees the wood for the trees.

The Basic Approach.

First, Professor Barr does a favour to all who affirm the authority of scripture as the inspired and infallible word of God, when he notes how the Bible can be a mere 'symbol' or token (36-38). He explains:

[Fundamentalists] do not use the Bible to question and re-check [the fundamentalist religious] tradition, they just accept that this tradition is the true interpretation of the Bible . . . [In reality, for fundamentalism] the Bible is a form of poetry, a myth that coheres with, undergirds and harmonizes with the fundamentalist tradition of religion. It is a matter of course that preaching will use biblical texts . . . It is by no means, however, a matter of course that it will make a careful exegetical examination of the meaning of the passages . . . (37-8).

Professor Barr is indeed drawing attention to what is at least a real danger for those who place emphasis in their theoretical theology on the place of scripture; they thereby run the risk of being so satisfied with this affirmation that they become insulated from actually grappling with scripture itself. Evangelicals can be in a position quite analogous to that of those religious groups in the gospels who emphasise the scriptures but are indicted for their lack of scriptural understanding. Psychologically, those who believe that their faith is biblical, that they have responded to the Biblical message, can by that very conviction be hindered from hearing aspects of that message. What they have already grasped provides the framework of reference for understanding the Bible as a whole and also the means of gagging those parts of the Bible that do not fit with this framework. And their theological commitment to

scripture can make them assume that they would not do such a thing. One might note how the Bible's concern with social justice and its interest in the believing community (not merely the individual believer) are two of its aspects which have only recently begun to be grasped by evangelicals. There are presumably others not yet recognised. So we have to be open to the revision of our framework for approaching scripture in the light of what we actually find there. The 'hermeneutical circle' is at work here. As we study scripture, we do expect to learn things, to be confronted and challenged, and not merely to be confirmed in what we knew already.

So Professor Barr's reminder is a valuable one. Other aspects of his method of approach, announced here and evidenced consequently, provoke questions.

He tells us that the main goal of his work is *understanding* (8, his emphasis), not controversy. His purpose is 'to understand fundamentalism as a religious and intellectual system and to see why it functions as it does'; and to say something of value 'not only on the level of theology but also on that of the history of religions' (9). This aim is seriously compromised, however, by both the method and the spirit of his work. T.O. Beidelman, in his study of *W. Robertson Smith and the Sociological Study of Religion* (University of Chicago, 1974. 28), has commented on the fact that

While none of the Victorian anthropologists could be said to have done field-work in the proper modern sense, a few, like Morgan, Maine, and Smith, did have more than passing encounters with alien, exotic societies. In this, Smith contrasts with Durkheim, Mauss, Frazer, Tylor, Levy-Bruhl, Marett, and others who readily wrote about alien peoples but who were unable or uninterested in encountering them in the flesh.

Today, students who wish to understand a living society and its religion immerse themselves in that society and try to understand it empathetically from the inside. Professor Barr seems not to have tried to do this with fundamentalism. He knows something of it from his own experience as a student and as a teacher (and fundamentalist students can, no doubt, be very trying to their teachers). But his research for *Fundamentalism* apparently consisted essentially in reading conservative evangelical literature, and discussing the subject with various other non-evangelicals (cf. the Preface). This approach seems to have resulted in some factual misunderstandings as well as an overall picture of the religion being studied which at points does not seem quite right to one who is inside it. These cluster most in the section on 'Variations and conflicts' (187-213), where, for instance, millennialism and the Schofield Bible seems to be overestimated and the charismatic movement significantly underestimated. Here, and sometimes elsewhere, the 'feel' is wrong (whether or not the criticisms are deserved): as Africans will

sometimes say that European students do not get the feel of their religion, even though they may investigate its practices quite thoroughly. Again, at various points in this chapter and elsewhere Professor Barr speaks of what fundamentalists 'probably' think or what they 'possibly' believe. His uncertainty is strange: could he not get such points elucidated by his conservative evangelical colleagues at Manchester (where the bulk of the work was presumably done)? As it is, the probablys and the perhapses make the work sometimes reminiscent of a study of Israelite (or Ugaritic or Babylonian) religion, where such uncertainties have to remain unresolved because Cyrus or Zechariah are not available for comment.

The problem of method is related to the problem of style. There is a tension between the professed desire to understand and explain, and the vitriolic condemnation which characterises *Fundamentalism*. Expressions such as 'dishonest', 'grotesque', 'mountain of hypocrisy', 'philistinism', 'irresponsible' and 'nonsense' recur.

Now one should not make too much of the way Professor Barr expresses himself. He does not mince words elsewhere, for instance in his criticisms of G.E. Wright's approach to Old Testament theology.¹ And indeed straight, trenchant, criticism is an appropriate enough reaction to what are regarded as fundamentally misguided and misleading views. The problem to which I am drawing attention is that *Fundamentalism* is presented not as a tract but as a theological and religio-historical study. The atmosphere of the former can only compromise the effectiveness of the latter. Professor Barr justifiably deplores the tone of personal contempt which has often appeared in fundamentalist references to the work of critical scholars, but this is not the only point at which *Fundamentalism* seems to fall into the ways of the fundamentalists.

Little is likely to be gained by an exercise in *tu quoque*, however, not least because Professor Barr has pre-empted such criticism. First, he practises a kind of 'hermeneutic of suspicion'. This is Paul Ricoeur's description of the interpretative approaches adopted by Freud, for instance, who systematically questions whether statements are to be taken at their face value.² People must not be assumed to mean what they say. So Professor Barr notes, for instance, that *Evangelical Belief*, UCCF's own explanation of its doctrinal basis, 'does not make it fully explicit that negativity towards biblical criticism is an absolutely central principle of the movement concerned', and contains 'remarkably soft assertions' on what biblical infallibility in practice means. But, he comments, this does not mean that the movement really is a bit more open on these questions than we might have thought. The document 'understates the rigidity, the conservatism and the partisanship' of UCCF because fundamentalists do not see themselves in this kind of light, as an outsider

can (310-12); consequently, it is not surprising that 'any critical appraisal from without, however carefully researched and documented, will be branded as a distortion and a caricature' (325).

Now a hermeneutic of suspicion has its value, but one problem about it (as becomes evident when one talks with Freudians) is that of verification – or rather of falsification. There is no way that the one being interpreted can disprove what is said about him. Whatever he says will provide further evidence which the interpreter can incorporate in his framework. So Professor Barr has oddly pre-empted response by those who are the object of his study. And critical appraisal of his book from inside a conservative position, however carefully researched and documented, will be branded as 'the immediate defensive response of fundamentalists when faced with any sort of criticism' (325). *Tu quoque*. I have agreed to attempt such an appraisal, however, and must proceed!

The Inerrancy of the Bible³

Chapter 3 begins by noting that, whereas the 'plain man' identifies fundamentalists as essentially people who 'take the Bible literally', the starting point of the fundamentalist hermeneutic is actually the principle of treating the Bible as inerrant, which in turn is derived by inference from the doctrine of biblical inspiration. But the principle of inerrancy is the central thing; thus it takes priority over that of taking the Bible literally. If taking it literally would mean implying the presence of error (e.g. in Gen. 1), then fundamentalists switch to a non-literal interpretation. If two narratives refer to the same event, their accounts of that event will be perfectly harmonisable; if they are not so harmonisable, they must refer to two different events. It is events that are really important; the significance of the events often seems less so. If necessary, and it will save the point, the hypothesis of textual corruption may be appealed to rather than admit the presence of original error, despite the tension this establishes with the claim made elsewhere that the text is remarkably free from corruption (279-84).

The critique of inerrancy as a theological concept contains various elements, but I think three main aspects.

(a) As the previous paragraph has suggested, the principle of inerrancy makes it impossible to interpret the Bible in a natural, literal way. Professor Barr does not refer to Harold Lindsell's *The Battle for the Bible* (Zondervan, 1976), an important contribution by the editor of *Christianity Today* to the current American debate concerning inerrancy. I am not sure whether to be relieved that he could not utilise its evidence for the picture of narrow fundamentalism which he paints, or to be regretful that we thereby miss the hay he would have made of some of Dr Lindsell's material, such as Peter's

six denials of Christ (Professor Barr knows of this kind of approach in earlier centuries, but believes it 'goes beyond what can be found among modern fundamentalists' (57) !). Even without this material, Professor Barr has no difficulty in showing that, under the influence of a doctrine of inerrancy, conservative interpretation has often been unprincipled in its approach. He implies that this is inevitable. An interpreter who wishes to avoid it without abandoning the principle of inerrancy surely needs to be open to the possibility of non-literal treatment of narratives not merely on occasions when to do otherwise would suggest that they contained errors, but more generally (with more principle); and to an understanding of inerrancy which does not *a priori* exclude the possibility of a narrative being, or incorporating elements of, parable, saga, midrash (on this, see 285-6), and so on.

(b) Inerrancy is a rationalist notion. The accusation of rationalism runs through *Fundamentalism*; here is Professor Barr's own *tu quoque*, for fundamentalists have often levelled this charge against 'liberals'. It is rationalist to insist that God's promises be guaranteed by being enshrined in a wholly inerrant book (339-40), or that perfection implies the absence of fault or discrepancy: after all, the Biblical God 'can change his mind, he can regret what he has done, he can be argued out of positions he has already taken up, he operates in a narrative sequence and not out of a static perfection' (277). Fundamentalists are also rationalising in their approach to miracle (ch. 8). A related charge is one of yielding too much to a way of looking at truth which derives from (Newtonian) science (93).

(c) The positive reasons on whose basis the doctrine of inerrancy is commended are inadequate. Inerrancy does not logically follow from inspiration. The broader fundamentalist defence of the doctrine rests on the claim that this is the teaching of the Bible itself and of Christ. Professor Barr has some sharp points to make on fundamentalist preoccupation with what the Bible *teaches* or *claims*; he points out the logical and historical difficulty of proving from any book of the Bible the canonicity of the whole Bible; he dismisses the Christological argument with a reminder of John Huxtable's comment that the authority of a scholarly professor is not compromised by his getting the time of a train wrong; and he argues that in any case the real grounds of fundamentalist belief in inspiration do not lie in such considerations but in fundamentalists' religious experience — the arguments are simply supports for a belief reached on other grounds (72-85).

Much of the analysis here is valid enough; the point not taken seriously enough is the Christological one. If Jesus's religious views are normative for Christian faith (as I believe), then this must include his views on the Old Testament. I do not refer to his statements on questions of authorship, but to his attribution of religious authority to the Old Testament scriptures.

Professor Barr can accept a doctrine of verbal inspiration as long as it does not exclude the idea that the scriptures 'would be subject to the faults of human passions, defects and sins, and even taken as doctrine . . . would not be final and infallible but would have to be considered and evaluated, respectfully but also critically, by the community of the church' (288). Now I do not personally believe that Jesus's statements on the authorship of Old Testament books raise problems today, but I do think that his assumptions about the religious authority of the Old Testament (even when Matthew 5 has been read in the most critical way) are rather different from Professor Barr's here. Now, if Jesus fails to correct mistaken Jewish views on this question (and not merely fails to correct Jewish views on the authorship of Isaiah 40-66), this is a serious matter; it presupposes an error near the heart of his teaching on matters of religion. The professor of physics is not merely wrong about the timetable; he is wrong about the atom. Even the otherwise helpful notion of the 'functional character' of Jesus's teaching (171-2) does not help here.

In the light of Professor Barr's treatment of inspiration and inerrancy, however, one might sketch out some understanding of the doctrine of scripture such as this. My conviction about the inspiration of scripture derives experientially from the impression it has made and makes on me. This experience meshes with what I discover to be the attitude of Jesus to the Old Testament scriptures, which (because it is his) ought to commend itself also even to those who have not (yet) been grasped experientially by scripture in this way. At the same time, I also discover from the scriptures themselves that they were produced through a fully human process, apparently by similar means as other human works. I also find in them some recognition that their humanity and historicity meant that they were not at every point saying the highest thing that could ever be said. But nevertheless the Bible is exactly what its divine author willed it to be; and it is exactly what its human authors willed it to be. Because the scriptures came into existence through such a historical, human process I shall investigate their meaning by similar means to the ones I apply to other literature. But because they also came into existence by the providence of God, I shall do so listening with a special expectancy of and openness to hearing what God was saying in those historical situations — and therefore what he may be saying in mine. I shall prefer not to get into an argument over inerrancy, because the framework of thinking it may suggest can be inappropriate; but if someone insists that I declare whether I think scripture is inerrant or not, I will be willing to affirm that belief, reckoning this to be less misleading than to deny it.

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Fundamentalism, Theology, and Criticism

Professor Barr (e.g. ch. 5-6) has no trouble showing that many fundamentalists are quite unsympathetic to modern theology and biblical criticism, nor in pointing to inadequacies and contradictions in their work. They disapprove of modern study but quote scholars (rather out of context) when they happen to express a conservative opinion. They often avoid biblical study proper and take refuge in para-biblical disciplines from which they can sharpshoot. Their own creative contributions in such fields as dogmatics and ethics are negligible. Their assessment of theologians and critics (particularly as regards their presuppositions) often lacks insight or self criticism.

Exceptions to these judgments could be cited, but the criticisms are generally justified, and Professor Barr's analysis of why conservative biblical and theological study has been uncreative needs to be read, pondered, and acted on. One aspect of his analysis of the fundamentalist/conservative evangelical phenomenon seems particularly to need questioning, however. In works such as the *New Bible Dictionary* and the *New Bible Commentary Revised* he finds some material which expresses the thoroughgoing fundamentalist rejection of critical scholarship and emphasis on infallibility, while other material actually utilises critical study, though in a conservative way.⁴ There are conservative evangelicals who are basically unsympathetic to modern theology and modern critical study, and conservative evangelicals who are more open to being involved in these. Professor Barr believes that only the first of these is the genuine conservative evangelical view as enshrined in UCCF, but here I think he is under a misapprehension. While someone involved in UCCF (for instance, by being a member of the Tyndale Fellowship for Biblical Research) is expected to subscribe to its basis of faith, he is not required to eschew modern critical study, and most members of study groups, for instance, utilise its methods. A recent indication of this is the symposium by Tyndale Fellowship members, *New Testament Interpretation* (edited by I.H. Marshall, Paternoster, 1977),⁵ which was published just after *Fundamentalism*.

Even if UCCF publications generally reflect more conservative views, Professor Barr himself identifies many examples of 'soft' attitudes alongside 'hard' ones in these works. There is no real reason to regard only the latter as the truly conservative evangelical line. The conservative evangelical attitude to historical criticism is more diverse than Professor Barr allows. A recent evidence for this arises from *The Battle for the Bible*. Much of its material relates specifically to American institutions, but the tension it concerns itself with is the same one we have just described, between conservative evangelical scholars who utilise historical critical methods, and those who reject them. Dr Lindsell takes the latter position, which (it is my impression, contrary to Professor Barr's) is more common in America than it is here. The point to which I wish to draw attention in connection with this book, however, is that it was treated

somewhat critically, rather than enthused over, in a review article in the UCCF journal *Christian Graduate* (30-1, 1977: 16-19). Using some arguments parallel to Professor Barr's, Mr Tony Lane questions Dr Lindsell's 'preoccupation with inerrancy', his failure to take seriously the humanity of scripture, his rejection of the historical critical method, his naive concept of error, and his fanciful approach to harmonising. The fundamentalism Professor Barr is concerned about is here being criticised by an organ of the institution which he sees as fundamentalism's guardian. Perhaps *Evangelical Belief's* openness is not so illusory after all.

The question at issue here is the nature, status, and implications of the historical critical method. Neither Dr Lindsell nor Professor Barr develops such an analysis, but they agree that it is incompatible with anything like the evangelical doctrine of scripture. Therefore Dr Lindsell (81-2) briskly rejects it; while Professor Barr rejoices to accept it:

In so far as we have come to hold that the interpretation of the Bible is a matter of history, then the manifold vicissitudes and possibilities of history must be our destiny. (153)

– even though it may bring unpredictably and disturbingly far reaching revolutions (185-6).

But other positions than these two can be envisaged and are in fact held. From the 'liberal' side, Gerhard Ebeling, for instance, in his study of *Theology and Proclamation* (Collins, 1966: 18), declares that the historical critical revolution 'in no way alters the foundations of our faith' – though admittedly a fundamentalist might wonder about that after examining his theology! Among the conservatives, too, Professor Barr notes that 'the modern generation' also accepts that 'history must be our destiny' (153), though elsewhere he doubts whether they are sincerely committed to the historical approach (125-6, 326).

It may be helpful to note that the challenge presented to traditional beliefs by the historical critical method is one aspect of the general crisis brought about for theology by secularisation. In *A Rumour of Angels* (Penguin Books, 1971), Peter Berger notes that in this crisis 'the fundamental option is simple': sociologically, it is 'a choice between hanging on to or surrendering cognitive deviance⁶' (31). The variant responses to the crisis, which we have noted above, represent choices or compromises at this point. The problem with Dr Lindsell's position is life in a sectarian ghetto. The problem with Professor Barr's position is indicated by Dean Inge's warning that a man who marries the spirit of the age soon finds himself a widower (37). (Historical critical method is more than the short term spirit of the age, of course, but Berger's analysis of the incompleteness of secularisation's victory in our world [39-42] is still relevant here). The

problem with compromise positions is that they are compromise positions, and risk losing the advantages of either clear stance while gaining the disadvantages of both.

Nevertheless, for reasons outlined in the previous section, I believe we have to hold on to the doctrine of inspiration, but also to seek to treat scripture historically. The roots of both approaches lie in the Bible via the reformers, as Professor Barr notes — though he believes it is the more ‘creative’ strata that are taken up in historical criticism (180-6). Similarly an examination of the reformers (especially Luther, but Calvin too) reveals both tendencies that point towards pietism and fundamentalism, and others that are taken up in the development of historical criticism. Gerhard Ebeling, in particular, again has investigated the latter.⁷

Conservative evangelicals who want to practise historical criticism have hard work to do in working out a coherent understanding of both how the Bible can be God’s word if it is also a fully human book, and how they can use the historical method on a book they believe came about by God’s providence. Some of Professor Barr’s own material is suggestive for the former aspect of this task (e.g. 286-99); and Calvin’s notion of divine accommodation deserves taking up.⁸

For the latter aspect, critical historical method itself needs rigorous analysis. How far is it an absolute? Or rather, how far is our formulation of it culture relative? Is there a way in which it could be re-formulated which is less influenced by our particular culture and which gives better expression to its own essential nature? In what ways are its assumptions formed by philosophical views that we do not wish to assent to? Wolfhart Pannenberg, for instance, has demanded modification of its methodological exclusion of an event such as Jesus’s resurrection.⁹ Conservative evangelicals have naturally welcomed this, though Professor Barr would no doubt point out that it will not do merely to plunder non-evangelical scholars for ideas in isolation from contexts which as a whole are not in agreement with a conservative evangelical position.

Professor Barr’s own commitment to historical method seems to be unqualified. Is there a danger of ‘liberalism’ failing to be self critical? I put it this way because this is exactly the criticism Professor Barr makes of conservative evangelicals. They are at no point open to learning anything from outside their own framework (162-3). But is this not exactly the danger of ‘liberalism’ too? It is, of course, *internally* self critical in a rigorous way: within the critical framework it is thoroughgoing in its willingness to commit itself to historical investigation, to admitting that particular critical positions were wrong, to abandoning cherished answers and leaving questions open, and so on. But to be truly self critical would involve distancing oneself

from this stance and asking whether it is adequate. There are in fact more indications of such a willingness in Professor Ebeling's work. For instance, he does not place the main blame for the gulf between historical critical theology and the man in the pew solely on 'the clergy', as Professor Barr does (335); it is also 'the consequence . . . of the fact that although theology has taken seriously the problems raised by modern historical thought, it has as yet failed to deal with them in a manner which is really adequate, convincing and helpful' (*Theology and Proclamation*: 20). There are other indications of self-criticism in the work of some American scholars: I think of Walter Wink's *The Bible in Human Transformation* (Fortress Press, 1973) and of a cluster of articles in the journal *Theology Today* (33, 1976-7: 66-73, 219-22, 354-67). Here are *critical* scholars who speak of criticism reducing the Bible to a dead letter; they do not want to abandon critical method, but they do want to get beyond the point where it has 'got stuck' (Wink: 31).

One of the important challenges to theology in our day is to work at an integrated approach to scripture which is fully in the succession of the reformers, and avoids the splitting off into either pietism/fundamentalism, or into an unbalanced (because exclusive) stress on historical criticism.

Orthodoxy or Heresy?

The third mark of the fundamentalist, in Professor Barr's view, is his only half-articulated conviction that he alone is a 'true' Christian. The origin of this feature lies in fundamentalism's background in the evangelical revivals. The fundamentalist's forefathers were converted from nominal church membership to living faith; the explanation of the deadness of the churches was 'liberalism'; thus real faith, genuine spiritual experience, and evangelical doctrine go together, while 'liberal' doctrine suggests deadness and formalism. Further, it is evangelical doctrine which holds to the orthodoxy of the reformation, the fathers, and scripture itself. It is this complex of assumptions that is evidenced in the narrow and protectionist policies of an organisation such as UCCF (11-25).

Far from being the guardian of orthodoxy, Professor Barr doubts if fundamentalism is orthodox at all. First, where fundamentalists do affirm orthodox understandings of the Trinity or the virgin birth or sin, this is not because they are really interested in these beliefs or have any deep insight into them. It is because commitment to such beliefs features among the formal marks of correct conservatism. Professor Barr has telling analyses of this 'formalization' of doctrine (175-9), of the 'ritualistic' use of scripture and of argument (316), and of the danger of not concerning oneself with the interrelations between doctrinal elements affirmed (166-9).

Secondly, certain aspects of fundamentalist beliefs are not orthodox at

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all. The very requirement that a person accept a general package of beliefs and attitudes before being regarded as a true Christian is reminiscent of the attempt to add works of the law to faith (321). The stress on inerrancy, we have noted, is modern and rationalist. Millennialist tendencies always threaten to take fundamentalism outside historic Christianity (190-207: but the evidence for this is thin, especially as regards Britain). Further, 'the fundamentalist faith can probably be considered heretical or unorthodox' on 'the person of Jesus Christ' (169) because of its predominant emphasis on his deity. One might respond that, if it is open to that danger, it is at least thereby in the company of orthodoxy itself (according to Professor Ebeling¹⁰)! Certainly Dr J.I. Packer (who is criticised in this connection by Professor Barr (171)) emphasises the humanness of Christ in his NEAC essay.¹¹ *The Nottingham Statement*¹² itself devotes a paragraph to 'Taking Jesus's humanness seriously', while acknowledging that we have not always done so.

This may be the point to note a further aspect of Professor Barr's critique of evangelicalism. I cannot do better than quote from a review of *Fundamentalism* by the previous Editor of SCM Press, David Edwards, in the *Church Times* (15 July 1977).

A few words contain the substance of this attack on fundamentalism by the Oriel Professor of the Interpretation of Holy Scripture at Oxford. "They have the highest doctrine of Scripture of anybody in the Church. They must therefore acknowledge with deep shame that their treatment of Scripture seldom coincides with their view of it. They are much better at asserting its authority than they are at wrestling with its interpretation. They are sometimes slovenly, sometimes simplistic, sometimes highly selective and sometimes downright dishonest". Those strong words, however, do not occur in Professor Barr's polemic. They are quoted from the first chapter in "Obeying Christ in a Changing World," issued before the National Evangelical Anglican Congress at Nottingham this spring. Their author is the Rev. John Stott of All Souls', Langham Place (except that he wrote "we" and "our" instead of "they" and "their"). But, in this book of some 380 pages, Professor Barr never discusses the teaching of Mr Stott, the most influential Conservative Evangelical in the Church of England. He lists only two of Mr Stott's books, both on evangelism, one from 1949 and another from 1962. But more important: he does little to prepare his readers for the fact that Mr Stott has, like the rest of us, gradually changed his mind or at least his emphasis. There is at least some self criticism here. Canon Edwards comments that Professor Barr's 'research into what Evangelicals are actually saying has not been sufficiently comprehensive'.¹³

Professor Barr's conclusion is that, all in all, fundamentalism has the characteristics and attitudes of a sect (342).

Far from it being true that the fundamentalists, sure of holding the true and ancient Christian faith, can sit in judgment on the rest of Christianity, the question for the churches is how far they can recognize fundamentalist attitudes, doctrines and interpretations as coming within the range that is acceptable in the church. (343-4)

It is strange that it should be uncharitable for fundamentalists to unchurch 'liberals' (14) but apparently not vice versa; strange that it should be 'overweening' for fundamentalists to believe themselves right and others wrong (338), but not vice versa. I do not know whether conservative evangelicals generally regard non-evangelicals as not really Christian, though I doubt it, and I have heard the staff secretary of the Theological Students Fellowship of UCCF point out that those who do not hold to a doctrine of inerrancy should not therefore be suspected of not being Christians (though the fact that he had to make the point is striking).

Conservative evangelicals do believe that other Christians hold mistaken views, sometimes on important matters, but this is not the same as unchurching them, and it is not incompatible with accepting the likelihood that at other points they are themselves wrong and have things to learn as well as to teach. Professor Barr's book can help us to learn some of those things. It seems paradoxically the case at present, however, that 'liberals' who regret the 'conservative-liberal divide' are at the same time taking a more rather than a less confrontational stance over against 'conservatives' (at a time when the latter are probably less polemical in their attitude to other Christians than they have ever been), and I hope that the overall tone of Professor Barr's book does not do more to further than it does to heal the 'alienation' of fundamentalism from other streams of church life which he himself deplores (338).

In summary, then, Professor Barr's analysis and critique of the fundamentalist cast of mind is frequently compelling, though sometimes misled and often overstated, and over one particular theological issue (the doctrine of inspiration/infallibility itself) unsatisfactory. But he is mistaken in believing that this cast of mind, with its hostility to modern theology and biblical study and its exclusivism, is normative, or probably even dominant (though it is certainly present) among those who subscribe to the UCCF basis of faith, or specifically among theologians and biblical scholars who identify themselves with UCCF. The publications of those scholars indicate that the 'indigenisation' of historical criticism (286) within conservative evangelicalism has gone much further than Professor Barr thinks possible, though one could not prove that in the end the mix will not turn out too explosive!

Footnotes

1. Cf *JTS* 25.2 (1974): 266-8; *Journal of Religion* 56.1 (1976): 1-5.
2. E.g. *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics* (Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1974): 148-50.
3. Some of the points made in these paragraphs are amplified in my articles on 'Inspiration, infallibility and criticism' in *The Churchman* 90.1 (1976): 6-23, and on 'The authority of scripture in recent debate' in the *Christian Graduate* 28.3 (1975): 65-8.
4. Professor Barr himself divides this second type into two, some utilising critical study in as far as it comes to conservative conclusions, some by authors who may not themselves be conservative evangelicals but are fairly conservative in their critical views (126). In fact, I imagine that all the contributors were people who accepted the UCCF basis of faith (or were assumed to do so) and that this sub-division is therefore unnecessary.
5. I confess to being a contributor. Perhaps I should also mention my membership of the UCCF Publications Committee (though this postdates the publication of the works referred to in *Fundamentalism*).
6. The term refers to the situation of 'a witch doctor stranded among logical positivists – or, of course, a logical positivist stranded among witch doctors'; he looks at the world very differently from those around him, and huge psychological and sociological pressures drive him to abandon his way of looking at reality and conform to the one that is prevalent around him (see 18-21).
7. E.g. 'The significance of the critical historical method for church and theology in Protestantism', *Word and Faith* (SCM Press, 1963): 17-61; referred to in *Fundamentalism*: 354.
8. See F.L. Battles. 'God was accommodating himself to human capacity'. *Interpretation* 31.3 (1977): 19-38.
9. E.g. 'Redemptive event and history', *Basic Questions in Theology* Volume 1 (SCM Press, 1970): 15-80.
10. *Theology and Proclamation*: 35 and notes.
11. 'Jesus Christ the Lord' in *Obeying Christ in a Changing World* (three volumes written in preparation for NEAC, the second National Evangelical Anglican Congress, 1977), Volume 1 (edited by John Stott, Collins, 1977): 52-8.
12. The official statement of NEAC issued by its Executive Committee (Falcon, 1977). See paragraph B3.
13. Lest I should be open to one of Professor Barr's strictures, I note that Canon Edwards would doubtless disagree with many points in this paper (specifically the attempt to defend a notion of inerrancy), as would other authors quoted such as Gerhard Ebeling and Peter Berger. Canon Edwards seems to be under the impression that conservative evangelicals generally have abandoned the idea of inerrancy, which I think is not the case.