

First Tuesday Class Series

Trends Towards Modernistic Concepts: Past, Present & Future

What Is Modernism?

- Movement in late 19th & 20th centuries trying to reconcile historical Christianity with modern science and philosophy
- Applied modern critical methods to study of Bible
- Movement influenced by:
 - ◆ Pragmatism of William James
 - ◆ Intuitionism of Henri Bergson
 - ◆ Philosophy of action of Maurice Blondel
 - ◆ Technically espoused by Schleiermacher & Ritschl
 - ◆ Popularized by Harry Emerson Fosdick, American Bapt.
- Modernist ideas accepted by most denominations
- “Fundamentalism” was reaction against modernism
- Majority in America professing to be “Christians” are modernists (denominations consumed by theory)

Modernism & Confusion

- Modernists use the Bible & its terminology
- Modernists use traditional theological words
- However, they use the same terminology we use, but with entirely different meanings
 - ◆ They will speak of the divinity of Jesus
 - ◆ They will speak of the resurrection
 - ◆ They will speak of sin and salvation
 - ◆ They will speak of faith in the message of the Bible
 - ◆ But they will not mean the same by those terms as the New Testament plainly and obviously teaches

Important Dates in Development

- **1730** First published questioning of literal Bible interp.
- **1839** Charles Lyell, *Elements of Geology*
 - ◆ Rejected literal interpretation of Genesis
 - ◆ Taught world developed by “Uniformitarianism”
- **1859** Charles Darwin, *Origin of Species*
 - ◆ Lyell’s principles applied to biological evolution
- **1878** Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*
 - ◆ “Documentary Hypothesis” (J-E-D-P theory)
- **1985** Jesus Seminar began meeting
 - ◆ "no evidence that the Easter resurrection was a physical reality"
 - ◆ "historical Jesus ended with his death on the cross & decay of his body"

Affirmed by Rudolf Bultmann

- “We can no longer look for the return of the Son of Man on the clouds of Heaven or hope that the faithful will meet him in the air”
- “Jesus Christ is certainly presented as the Son of God, a pre-existent divine being, and therefore to that extent a mythical figure”

- Called the bodily resurrection of Christ, “the definitely non-historical event of the resurrection”
- Called the virgin birth of Jesus a “legend”

[from *Kerygma and Myth* by Rudolf Bultmann, 1961]

Sample of Full Modernism (John S. Spong, Episcopal bishop)

Am I suggesting that these stories of the virgin birth are not literally true? The answer is a simple and direct “Yes.” Of course these narratives are not literally true. Stars do not wander, angels do not sing, virgins do not give birth, magi do not travel to a distant land to present gifts to a baby, and shepherds do not go in search of a newborn savior...The virgin birth tradition of the New Testament is not literally true. It should not be literally believed (*Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism*, 215).

Incipient Modernism & Past Brethren

Modernistic Concepts & Patterns

- Modernistic concepts in one form or another (incipient or advanced) have accompanied more general divisions among brethren historically
 - ◆ College of the Bible controversy
 - ◆ Problems with modernism in late 50's & early 60's
 - ◆ Do present controversies suggest the same?
- Colleges are often major focus of such issues
 - ◆ College of the Bible
 - ◆ Abilene Christian University
 - ◆ Florida College

Modernism in 50's & 60's

William Wallace, “Modernism in Indianapolis,” *Truth Magazine* (Sept. 65)

- Article dealt with David H. Bobo, preacher at Fountain Square church in Indianapolis
 - ◆ Arose from Bobo's 1960 lecture at Abilene Christian College & his thesis, *John William McGarvey-- A Biographical and Theological Study*
- Bobo rejected dual fulfillment interp. of Isa. 7:14
 - ◆ Reference to child of that time
 - ◆ Ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ (*Matt. 1:22-23*)
 - ◆ Bobo suggested no reconciliation is plausible
- Bobo affirmed Bible has “discrepancies” in it
- Of J.W. McGarvey's work in refuting "destructive criticism," Bobo said, "In summary it may be said that he was not prepared, either educationally or temperamentally to enter into the field of objective criticism, and could hardly be properly called a critic. It would be more correct to say that the effect of his later life at least was to oppose all forms of enlightened criticism, and that with a bitterness that did him more discredit than honor."

Leslie Diestelkamp, “Some Results of Modernism,” *Truth Magazine* (Nov. 1956)

" But modernism, in some of its many forms and devices, is finding a place, among members of the body of Christ, also. If not directly, then **in its results**, it is touching the very tap-root of Christianity. Many, many are departing from the faith. A dozen or more preachers have already left the church in the Chicago area, to go to denominations.

Still others hold the same views as those who left, or at least very similar views. From all over the nation come reports of others who have joined the liberal wing of the Christian Church, or the Congregational Church, or

some other denomination. **Before they leave**, those preachers have left their mark upon the body of Christ. Many souls are deeply influenced by them."

William Wallace, "Modernism in Indianapolis," *Truth Magazine* (Sept. 65)

"There is a phase of modernism, or maybe it's a kind or type, which is manifested in softness toward religious error. Distinguishing characteristics of old time gospel preachers, who carried to our generation the New Testament church included militancy and diligence against the innovations of the digressive wing of the Restoration Movement. Modernism among us includes a passiveness toward digression, or innovation, in place of militancy, and friendliness with modern liberal criticism of the Bible rather than a diligence against liberalism's destructive influence.

Modernism appears in varying degrees. There are different kinds. Only the extreme modernists are really winning to accept and wear the label. I doubt that any preacher associated with churches of Christ would appreciate being labeled a modernist, yet there are preachers among us who are definitely modernists" (William Wallace, "Modernism in Indianapolis," *Truth Magazine* [Sept. 1965], pp. 7-11).

Modernism & Softness

Leslie Diestelkamp, "Some Results of Modernism," *Truth Magazine* (Nov. 1956)

"A result of modernism is to soften up supposed gospel preaching. Sweet, soothing messages, profound, pious speeches and philosophical sermonettes are too common today. Too many supposed gospel sermons would fit in any denominational pulpit. This preaching may contain no error **except the grievous error of failing to declare the whole counsel of God**. Modernism saps the strength out of religion like socialism saps the initiative out of labor. To be much influenced by modernism is to lose zeal and courage to 'fight the good fight of faith.'"

Leslie Diestelkamp, "The Spirit of Non-Controversy," *Truth Magazine* (Nov. 57)

"To be positive is fine and is in harmony with truth. To be altogether positive (or altogether negative either) is to be wrong and unscriptural. A proper balance in preaching and teaching (and in our attitude) will enable us to attain that which God expects and to avoid that which he condemns. Let us beware if our own attitude is one that causes us to be displeased with negative teaching. Even a casual reading of the New Testament will enable us to see that, though its message for us is primarily a positive one, much of its instruction for us is couched in negative language. Let us also be aware that a denial of the proper value of negative teaching is an almost certain indication of the influence of modernism in our religion."

Richard E. Donley, "Modernism," *Truth Magazine* (June 1960)

"The spirit of modernism is manifested by the desire for soft, inoffensive, preaching. Some say, we should just "Preach the gospel and leave others alone." That sounds pretty good, from the viewpoint of human philosophy, but its weakness is that the truth just will not let error alone. If the truth is preached about the Deity of Christ it offends those who regard Him as only a man. If the truth is preached about the purpose of baptism it offends those who practice sect baptism. If the truth is preached about the action of baptism it offends those who sprinkle. If the truth is preached on the reality of eternal punishment it offends those who are unwilling to follow the Lord. If the truth is preached on worldliness it offends those who love the world" (Richard E. Donley, "Modernism," *Truth Magazine* [June 1960], pp. 8-10).

Modernism & Social Gospel

Charles Holt, "The March Continues," *Florence Contender* (June 1959)

The evidences that the social gospel of modernism has all but taken over many churches of Christ continue to come in. Along with institutionalism and a watered-down preaching, the social and recreation craze is taking the day - and these things all go hand in hand! Here are some quotations from CHURCH bulletins to further prove this change.

"YOUTH AND RECREATION Circle Saturday, May 9, 1959 date for attending the youth meeting at Burkburnett, Texas. They plan to have the biggest and best youth meeting ever. The theme 'Youth and Recreation' is a topic we all are concerned with. In general they plan to have lessons, songs, prayers, refreshments, entertainment, fun, and fellowship. Plan now to attend" (Bulletin, 28th & Cornell church, Lawton, Oklahoma).

The following three quotations are taken from the bulletin of the Northwest church in Lawton, Oklahoma. These churches are real gone, man, real gone!

"ANNUAL YOUTH BANQUET APRIL 18: Young people! (9th grade and up). You will not want to miss this year's banquet! Look what is in store for you. At 8:15 p.m. you will be served a delicious meal in the oriental environment with BEAUTIFUL decorations at the Home Demonstration building. After the meal there will be a full hour of professional entertainment to be followed by a first-run movie selected by . . . A theater will be reserved especially for you. All of this for only \$2! Make your plans now and turn in your name and \$2 to . . . by Monday . . ."

"CITY-WIDE FELLOWSHIP DINNER -APRIL 19: It has been a long time since all of the churches met together for a fellowship dinner. Immediately after the Sunday a.m. services. Let's all meet with the other churches at the Home Demonstration building. The banquet room will still be beautifully decorated from the youth banquet. So let's bring plenty of food and enjoy a wonderful time of Christian fellowship."

"WILL YOU HELP finance the Youth Banquet? The expense will be \$2 per person more than will be charged, so we as parents and friends will need to help. Hand your \$2 to the elders Sunday if possible."

Now all the above appeared in just one issue of this church bulletin! More and more the bulletins are being filled with such stuff. They are getting to be more and more of a social calendar-listing all the banquets, so-called "Fellowship Dinners," skating parties, so-called Bible camps, refreshment periods, and other plans for fun, frolic and foolishness! While these events in this instance were not to be held in the recreational or rumpus room provided by the church, in many other cases they are. Just give these brethren time and they will have all such events in a place provided by church funds and pay for such out of the church treasury. They are well on their way toward rearing a generation with whom there will be no stopping place. The "signs of the times" which point up another digression are in abundance but too many people are caught up in the whirl of the "on the march" progressive and digressive spirit to really be concerned about where they are headed!

Incipient Modernism & Present Brethren

Several Examples Present Now

- Attempts to interpret the creation account of Genesis 1 & 2 as non-literal
- Attempts to interpret the temptation account of Genesis 3 as non-literal
- Doubts raised about authenticity of 2nd Peter & Jude

Incipient Modernism & Creation Account

Modernistic Trends on Creation

- Hill Roberts & "Lord I Believe" workshop
 - ◆ Affirmed revelatory day theory & support of Hugh Ross
 - ◆ One day to command, billions of years to happen
 - ◆ "Big Bang theory is the Bible believer's friend"
 - ◆ Error distributed on CD at Florida College lectures (99)
- Shane Scott: "the days *cannot* be literal" & "the days *must* be ages"
 - ◆ Presented several views as "possible" & acceptable in Florida College classes

- Ferrell Jenkins & Colly Caldwell supported position that differences on issue are not issue of substance

Ferrell Jenkins on “Days”

Now, I think we run into a problem when we say “must,” one of these views *must* be correct. And I’ve got a good brother friend who said one place that these *must* be long ages, and I can’t say that. But on the other hand, I can’t say they *must* be 24 hour ages. There were some arguments made for that like Exodus 20 and some arguments I didn’t have time to deal with that I did have them in my notes here. And you can argue, you know, you can make a good case either way for that, all of those things like that.

Marty Pickup & “Possibilities” on Serpent in Genesis 3

"It is also worth considering that *the account* of these events may be, to some degree, accommodative and symbolic. Genesis may use the serpent motif because it is borrowing imagery from the mythological culture of that day regarding a cosmological foe of Deity. Old Testament writers commonly take features of well-known pagan myths and rework them in order to present the truth of Israelite monotheism. Psalms 29 and 74, for example, recast poetic images about Baal, the storm god, into depictions of Yahweh as the Lord of nature (Craigie 147-151). Isaiah 27 and Psalm 74 transform stories about Baal’s primeval defeat of Leviathan, the god of chaos, into accounts of Yahweh’s defeat of this creature when He brought order to creation (Emerton 327-328; Hugenberger 109). Many scholars suggest that this kind of reshaping of pagan themes into a presentation of monotheistic truth is, to some degree, what Genesis is doing in its creation account (Boyd 84-85)."

" It is possible, therefore, that Genesis recounted man’s primeval fall using the language and symbology that was best suited for its original audience. Since ancient creation myths gave a serpentine form to the being who opposed the order of creation, it was fitting that the tempter in the garden be depicted in this way (Boyd 156). Such a literary device may have been quite obvious to the original audience of Genesis.

It seems likely that later Jews and Christians recognized the various factors discussed above when they identified the serpent of Genesis 3 with Satan. There was no other reasonable conclusion to draw than that which the apostle John expressed: "The serpent of old . . . is the devil and Satan" (Rev. 20:2). What we see here is a "translation" of the antique theological images of Genesis into the cosmic language that had become commonplace by the Greco-Roman period. Yet the essence of what Genesis relates is unaltered (pp. 60-62)."

Bible Affirms Literal Serpent as Fact

- “Beast of the field” (Gen. 3:1)
- “Cursed art thou above all cattle, and above every beast of the field” (Gen. 3:14)
- “Upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life” (Gen. 3:14)
- “...as the serpent beguiled Eve...” (2 Cor. 11:3)
- These facts do not suggest merely the “possibility” that a literal serpent was in the garden
- Facts demand that a literal, beast-of-the-field serpent was in the garden with Eve

Symbolic, Non-Literal Trees?

Regarding the two trees specifically mentioned in Genesis 3, Hill said the following in his class material on Genesis 1-3 (Lesson #14):

"Do you suppose that there was (or is) some literal 'magic' fruit which, if Adam could just get his hands on it to eat it once, would inoculate him against God’s sovereign will concerning justice for his sins? Point: by the time we get to the end of chapter 3, the trees seem more symbolic than literal. What is more important: 1) to understand the exact physical appearance of these two trees as experienced by Adam and Eve, or 2) to understand what the trees meant to them, to the Israelites, and to us?"

"The tree image is highly apocalyptic: they show up not only here, but also in Ezekiel and Revelation. That something is symbolic does not mean it isn’t real. Symbols are often based on

reality. The trees were and *are* very real. They may not always be made of literal cellulose and chlorophyll, but the objective imagery clearly conveys their reality."

"Again, do you suppose there is literally some 'magic' fruit one can eat that will transform a human into God? It *must* be understood symbolically."

Mythical or Allegorical Creatures?

In the second lesson of brother Roberts' series, he quotes from J.M. Houston to set forth his basic presumption that much of the creation and temptation accounts are not literal, but must be interpreted as a symbolic "polemical against the false cosmogonies and cosmologies of the ancient world" (*The New International Bible Commentary with the New International Version*, ed. F.F. Bruce, 50). This basic premise leads to this claim:

At times, the mention of mythical sea-monsters suggest deliberate denial of their existence as deities, but more usually they are mentioned allegorically as being no more than God's creatures (*Lesson #2*).

What Other "Possibilities" Would These Brethren Introduce?

Marty Pickup on 2nd Peter & Jude

"I think that the weight of the evidence tips the scale in favor of the authenticity of 2 Peter and Jude. That's, that's my conclusion. Now I will be very frank with you here. A fellow says, "Now, Marty, are you just totally certain about that?" No. Have to be honest. In fact, my Lord Jesus demands that I be intellectually honest. I can't be a follower of Jesus and not be. And I think the evidence tips the scales in favor of their authenticity. And that's what I would argue, that's what I've tried to argue here. But I would have to say, I can't just be dogmatic about that, I'm not a hundred percent certain about that" (*The Canonicity of the General Epistles*, Florida College Annual Lectures, [8 Feb. 2000]).

How Do We Resist Modernistic Thinking?

Uphold Bible Doctrine of Inspiration

- All Scripture is inspired & able to make us complete (*2 Tim. 3:16-17*)
- Men spake as moved by the Spirit (*2 Pet. 1:20-21*)
- Prophets guided to speak things which they did not understand (*1 Pet. 1:10-12*)
- Words of message chosen by Spirit, not man (*1 Cor. 2:11-13*)
 - ◆ See case of Balaam in Numbers 22-24
- We can have the same understand of the message revealed as the original writers (*Eph 3:3-4; 5:17*)

Next First Tuesday Class -- Tuesday, November 4, 2003

Material Prepared & Presented by Harry Osborne