

Review of *Fundamentalism*. Japan Evangelical Association Theological Commission
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Dale W. Little

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This Japanese publication of six articles is a short study of religious fundamentalism. Its purpose should be understood in the context of criticism directed against evangelicals by opponents of the Iraq War. In this setting Japanese evangelicals are associated with American evangelicals who in general are seen to take a fundamentalist pro-war stance. To diffuse this situation the pamphlet aims not only to discuss the nature of religious fundamentalism itself, but also to distinguish between American and Japanese evangelicalism by identifying the perceived theological distinctives which give rise to their differences about the Iraq War. So when a Japanese person incredulously asks, "Why have American evangelicals supported the Iraq War?" one possible answer by the authors of the pamphlet would be: "The theology of American evangelicals is different than that of Japanese evangelicals. It is fundamentalist, whereas Japanese evangelicalism is not fundamentalist."

Kiyoshi Ishihara of Tokyo Biblical Seminary argues that beneath American extremist Christian fundamentalism exist the problems of ethnocentrism and a slanted Biblical hermeneutic which takes America's election and mission to be parallel to Israel's election and mission in the Bible. These problems of extremist Christian fundamentalism in America play a role in leading America toward wars of aggression.

Yuji Sekino of Covenant Seminary cautions against importing American Christian fundamentalist and evangelical perspectives regarding creation science (a young earth view and an anti-evolution stance), dispensationalism, a simplistic and dualistic worldview of good versus evil, and a literalistic interpretation of the Bible. At the base of these kinds of problematic theological positions lies the American Christian fundamentalist understanding of the inspiration and absolute inerrancy of the Bible. These kinds of interpretations inherent in American Christian fundamentalism are said to generate the "self-righteous, bellicose posture" of America since 9/11.

Mitsuru Fujimoto of Immanuel Bible Training College and Aoyama Gakuin University unpacks the idea that humanity in general has a tendency toward fundamentalism because in the shadows behind fundamentalism lies the controlling and natural inclination to exclude others by various means, such as constructing "us versus them" confrontational configurations. This exclusive mentality is a part of human identity formation and can lead to both fundamentalism and ethnocentrism. Fujimoto draws upon Miroslav Volf's *Exclusion and Embrace* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996) for his helpful study on theological anthropology.

Masanori Kurasawa of Tokyo Christian University critiques the idea that monotheism is considered to be intolerant, but polytheism tolerant. This idea has gained popularity in the wake of 9/11 and the Iraq War, because it is claimed that the war is a confrontation between two intolerant monotheistic religious factions, American evangelical Christianity and Islamic fundamentalism. Kurasawa surveys the polytheism of India, Japan, and the ancient Greco-Roman Empire to find that polytheism gave rise to violence because those polytheistic religions morphed into

homogeneous theology and nationalistic religion. Such violence shows the intolerance of polytheism. Kurasawa's interesting study argues that, in contrast to polytheism, our monotheistic Trinitarian theology provides the basis for living peacefully in a complex world.

Hideo Okayama of Japan Bible Seminary claims that because the New Testament asserts non-violence the early church was pacifist but that since the fourth century the Western church has held to the just war position. The problematic points of American Christian fundamentalism are identified as nationalism, a simplistic dualism between good and evil, and a secularized pretribulational premillennialism. Okayama seems to be arguing that these problems combined with his understanding of the negative historical influence of Puritan theology in America provide the theological reasons for what he sees as the historical violence of Western Christianity, especially that of American Christianity. "The design of white Christians to destroy the pagans of colored races amounts to the indiscriminate killing of three million people." His concluding recommendations are that the Japanese church should be pacifist, should cooperate with American pacifist churches such as those with Anabaptist roots, and should take seriously its responsibility to "point out the foolishness" of a nation that "is possessed by the wild idea of conquering the world through its military might."

Akira Watanabe of Tokyo Baptist Theological Seminary and Aoyama Gakuin University sympathetically describes the social context of America at the time of 9/11, reminding his Japanese readers that when society is shaken by a shock such as 9/11, and when people lose the stability of their daily lives as a result, fundamentalism gains ground. He concludes that at a time when both America and Japan are moving toward the right it is inadequate for Japanese to focus primarily on American fundamentalists. Japanese evangelical churches should focus (also) on the needs of their own country.

From the perspective of a non-American evangelical missionary in Japan, this pamphlet can be seen in both a positive and a negative light. The positive aspect is the pamphlet's contribution to understanding the nature of religious fundamentalism. However, the negative aspect is the pamphlet's attempt in places to sketch a Japanese interpretation of American evangelical history and theology which contrasts with the way many non-Japanese would understand American evangelicalism. It is possible this approach results in some misrepresentation of American evangelicals. Because a few of the articles at places employ an anti-American pejorative rhetoric, the probability of misrepresentation is increased. Such rhetoric and skewed interpretation might not be problematic for Japanese readers. But American evangelicals reading these portions of the pamphlet probably feel not only misrepresented, but also manipulated for the purpose of forging theological distinctions between American and Japanese evangelicals. For American readers, this negative aspect of the pamphlet might eclipse its positive aspect.

So perhaps the pamphlet has achieved too much. It has certainly emphasized perceived distinctives. But in places it seems to have done so at the expense of inflicting pain, however unintended, upon American evangelical missionaries in Japan who are in good faith trying to partner with Japanese evangelicals in reaching Japan for Christ.

If you are interested in making your own observations or drawing your own conclusions about this pamphlet and would like to read it for yourself in English, visit <http://www.jtheo.net>.