

Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism
Issues for Japanese evangelicalism: Looking at Fundamentalism in American Christianity
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SUMMARY

For we Japanese evangelicals who wish to preserve the certainty of the gospel, an essential topic is the surmounting of remarkably fundamentalist trends in contemporary American Christianity that incline toward a mistaken form of scriptural reliability. In order to deal with this, we must understand the history of American Christianity, and not swallow wholesale the direct U.S. imports of creation science or American eschatological understandings; we must avoid a simplistic and dualistic worldview of good versus evil, or of an extremely literal hermeneutic as well as of literal applications for biblical prophecies. We must establish a correct hermeneutical methodology at the church level, and promote dialogue and interchange with the sciences.

INTRODUCTION

Christian Fundamentalism was the undercurrent for the self-righteous, warlike posture that became remarkably apparent in the United States after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, (hereafter, “9/11”). Regarding the political support base that the American evangelical church has become for such posturing we, in the Japanese evangelical church, feel bewilderment and doubt. In view of the present state of affairs in the United States, with the provisions of faith and theology that we Japanese evangelicals maintain, the breadth of our hermeneutic, our societal stance, etc., we need to sort through our commonalities and points of differences and consider what kinds of issues are being thrown our way.

I. THE OUTLINE OF THE PROBLEM

Regarding the posture of the American evangelical church which supports him and since 9/11 when President George W. Bush – in his distinctive political beliefs, anxiously influenced by Christian Fundamentalism – bombed Afghanistan and then ventured into the war with Iraq, evangelical churches in Japan as well as from society in general have asked straightforward and serious questions as to “why the evangelical American church supports the Iraq war.”

The so-called roots of contemporary evangelicalism, the conservative version, were born out of a Fundamentalism in the United States which sought to stand against Protestant liberalism at the turn of the twentieth century (*NOTE: hereafter, “fundamentalism” with a lower case “f” will also later describe the trend in other religions; “Fundamentalism” with a capital “F” in this article describes Christian fundamentalism*). At the time it was a movement which made its theological stand solely on the pillars of biblical inspiration and inerrancy, parts of which were radicalized and politicized. In the 1970’s, the influence of the mainline church over the evangelical church was reversed with the latter even becoming the majority, exerting not a little influence on American politics. In the shadow of the re-election of President George W. Bush, the huge contribution of the Religious Right which includes evangelicals (religious conservatives, “a political and social branch of evangelicalism which

is focused on the defense and promotion of traditional values”), is a widely acknowledged fact.

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The main points of emphases in American Christian Fundamentalism are a literal interpretation of the Scriptures based in the inspiration and inerrancy (properly, “absolute inerrancy”) of the Bible, which is founded on dispensational doctrine (e.g., revelation history or “dispensations”, as they’re also called) and an emphasis on apocalyptic eschatology. “Just war” and the support of Israel have been teased out of and popularized by such an eschatology, as have attempts to rebuild morals in a fallen society by the standard of the Bible (e.g., by restoration of the authority of fathers, by protesting abortion, by protesting homosexual love, by working for the restoration of prayer in public education, etc.). Related to these are educational issues, such as the popularizing of anti-evolutionism and young earth theory which is based on creation science. In America today to have the label, “Christian Fundamentalist,” carries the meaning of “conservative Christians who are angry at the way things are in America today, and who try to demonstrate their faith in an aggressive manner at the government.”

In 2003, the American NAE (National Association of Evangelicals, similar to the JEA in Japan) wrote a letter in support of the Iraq war. For many Japanese evangelical churches, which were born after World War II from the mission work of these same American evangelical groups and denominations, this current fundamentalist and warlike position within the American evangelical church has made for strong feelings of doubt, discomfort and bewilderment in their Japanese sister churches. The Evangelical Fellowship of Asia (EFA) and the Japanese Evangelical Association (JEA) have already put out a protest letter against the war in Iraq. In the midst of this, the first volume of the apocalyptic “Left Behind” end times novel series, which have been best-sellers in America since 1995, was translated into Japanese and published in March 2002 by Word of Life Press. Deeply reflected in this book by a leading Fundamentalist author, Tim LaHaye, is a worldview and eschatology of American supremacy. This book has given rise to controversy within the Japanese evangelical church as well. Also, in the 1980’s the direct U.S. import of “creation science” (young earth theory) was introduced into Japanese evangelical churches as the only correct interpretation of Genesis. Many have become uncomfortable at this extreme exclusivistic stance.

In this paper, (even) as I survey the history of American Christian Fundamentalism and its peculiarities related to controversies over evolution and creation science in the American educational system, I affirm its commonalities as well as its points of difference with Japanese evangelicalism and, while taking note of my own walk as an evangelical Christian, I will sort through what I see as the issues that have been given to the evangelical churches of Japan.

II. THE HISTORY OF AMERICAN CHRISTIAN FUNDAMENTALISM

II.A. The Rise of Christian Fundamentalism (1920’s)

In the 1920’s seventy percent of all Christian denominations were of the majority “mainline” Protestant Christianity which had been predicated on a modernist, liberal German theology. This group waved the “social gospel” flag, and placed its emphasis on social movements and societal reform more than on saving souls or evangelism. Furthermore,

evolutionary theory was approved of and reading the Bible from an historical-critical research perspective was accepted wholesale. The inspiration of the Scriptures or its inerrancy were denied since the Bible was looked upon as a human document. Leanings of contempt and ridicule at these conservative Christian factions opposing them was strong, and they separated themselves by calling them “anti-intellectual” (there was a tendency with conservatives at the time toward a reductionism, which fearfully denied scientific data contradicting or opposed to the biblical accounts; they would glibly deal with unresolvable problems as “the work of God”). On the other hand, “conservative” Protestant Christianity was made up of minority factions with only twenty-five percent of all Christians at that time. This group rejected modernity and valued traditional Christianity. They took the view that all of the Bible in both the Old and New Testaments were the wholly inspired Word of God without error. And because they particularly valued the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith they were later disparagingly labeled as “fundamentalists.”

This label of “fundamentalist” has its origin in the twelve volume set of pamphlets called “The Fundamentals,” of which three million were distributed free of charge between 1910 – 1915 to counter liberal Christian theological doctrines. There were five foundational doctrines: the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures, the virgin birth of Christ, Christ’s substitutionary atonement and bodily resurrection, and His visible Second Coming (at the beginning of the movement the pamphlets were entitled, “The veracity of Christ’s miracles”). Also, in opposition to the social gospel of the liberal church, they made as its banner the salvation of the lost as its priority and interest in dealing with societal problems waned at this time. Instead, the calling was thought to be to save as many as possible from a society headed for destruction. Theologically, the influence of dispensationalism was strong.

Let’s touch upon the doctrine of dispensationalism (revelation history/“dispensations”). This was a view of the Bible originally put forward by the English missionary, John Darby. With the adoption of the “Scofield Reference Bible” which was published in 1909, this view spread widely among American Christians.

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Dispensational doctrine divides the Bible into seven periods/ages (“dispensations”) of history from the Creation to the End Times. Through a literal hermeneutic of the prophetic books of the Bible (Ezekiel, Daniel, Revelation, etc.), events throughout history are placed within these books which are then used for predicting the future. Eschatologically, dispensationalism accepts Christ’s return before His thousand year kingdom (pre-millennial), as well as a pre-tribulational rapture (the double Parousia theory). Christ will return first secretly for the saints who will be saved so they will not have to go through the time of tribulation but who will instead be taken up in the air by the rapture. After seven years of tribulation, Christ will return again with His saints to establish a thousand year kingdom. At the end of history, Israel will be restored as a nation and God will repeatedly intervene to save Israel. However, after the rapture, during the seven year tribulation the world-dominating anti-Christ will appear and a worldwide battle of good versus evil, the war to end all wars – Armageddon – will occur. Almost all the Jewish people will be destroyed but the remnant will believe in Christ. During that time, the temple of God will be rebuilt in Jerusalem, and the Jewish animal sacrifices will be reestablished. After the final battle, Jesus Christ will return to the earth as the King of the Jews and will rule eternally over the entire world from

the Jerusalem temple in a restored kingdom of David. In order to survive the battle of Armageddon, people must recognize God's special election of the Jews, and must approve of His divine plan to return Israel to the land of Judah and Samaria. If they do then, when Christ comes again, He will save those who approve as His righteous ones (Genesis 12:3). Those who criticized and attacked Israel will be thrown into the eternal lake of fire as anti-Christ.

From the position of dispensationalism as described above, the establishment of Israel as a nation becomes a portent that the end of history as we know it is drawing near. A pessimistic eschatology then becomes one's worldview. Since nothing can be done about evil in the world today, more than fulfilling our societal responsibilities, what we should do now in preparation for the end becomes only that we bring as many as we can to the feet of Christ to save them from this world engulfed in flames. The contrasting position to this sees the coming of the thousand year kingdom as a result of the world getting better through human effort and progress. This "post-millennialism" believed in an optimistic eschatology in which Christ would return *after* the thousand year kingdom. This doctrine was mainstream before the First World War. But in the anxious world that the American public anguished over during the First World War, dispensationalism became widely accepted.

Another symbolic event representative of the 1920's was the Scopes trial, also known as "the monkey trial." This was a case where John Scopes, a high school biology teacher in Dayton, Tennessee, was declared guilty of violating state law by his teaching of evolution. The trial became a showdown between prosecutor William Jennings Bryan, former Democratic presidential hopeful and former Secretary of State, who was a fundamentalist and anti-evolutionist, and the capable attorney, Clarence Darrow. This garnered the interest of the entire country as being a showdown between liberals and fundamentalists. Bryan won in court but the so-called anti-intellectualism of the fundamentalists and their obstinate narrow-mindedness caused the public to decide that fundamentalism was out of touch with the times. The "court of public opinion" overwhelmingly leaned toward the liberals, dealing the fundamentalists a fatal blow. This trial was a watershed. Fundamentalists went underground, became a sect, and vanished from the public stage until the 1970's. During that time, American society rapidly secularized but the fundamentalist camp, forced into silence, established their own churches and seminaries and universities, preserving their energy from within.

II.B. The Split between Christian Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism (1940's)

In the 1940's fundamentalist groups split into Fundamentalism, an exclusivist, militant, separationist group and a moderating evangelicalism (in the narrow/conservative sense of the word). The latter formed the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) in 1942. However, after this, "evangelicalism" in its broader sense came to be used in a derogatory manner as a label which included even Fundamentalists. One needs to take caution with the broad meaning of this term, "evangelicalism," in that way that the media makes use of it nowadays.

Broadly, evangelicalism can be classified into three groups: Christian Fundamentalism (radicalism); the narrow meaning of evangelicalism/neo-evangelicalism (moderates), and Pentecostals/charismatics. Four points can be raised as characteristics of Fundamentalism: spreading the gospel, absolute biblical inerrancy, dispensationalism, and separatism. Contrastively, moderate evangelicalism (in its narrow sense) is identical in its

content on the foundations of Christian faith with the fundamentalist group but without its exclusivist, militant, separationism or anti-intellectualism. Yet this (narrow sense for evangelicalism) does not side with the liberal theology or neo-orthodoxy that comes out of the WCC (World Council of Churches). This group is moderate even conservative in its faith and theology. Specifically, it is a conservative Protestantism which, in particular, has a high regard for and emphasizes the authority of the Bible and personal conversion, an evangelicalism which stands in the Reformation tradition. This evangelicalism opposes the anti-intellectualism of Christian fundamentalism and prizes intellectualism. They are made up of people passionate for world missions, who emphasize an individualized, personal faith and spiritual renewal together with a high regard for the Bible as the Word of God.

II.C. The Rise of Evangelicalism in its Broad Sense and its Involvement in Government (1970's-1980's)

With the advent of the 1970's, evangelicalism grew rapidly and began to spread, contending for power with mainline Christianity and eventually overtaking it with the most in American Protestant denominations. They overcame the old counter-cultural, anti-intellectual image of fundamentalism and promoted movements which truly attempted to bring about biblical and evangelical growth in its churches. This high regard for both the Bible and the intellect, and its emphasis on personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, lead to spiritual regeneration and true faith.

This sort of advance by evangelicalism was also the need of the age. "In the midst of a self-critical mood after the Vietnam War, where optimism in the progress and development of the American dream had broken down, many chose the conservative form of Christianity as a way of filling their spiritual vacuum. Its strong value system and unshakable faith possessed a great appeal not found in liberalism" (Kuribayashi 2004:171). The contribution of mass evangelism under Billy Graham and by television evangelists was also great. Billy Graham has his roots as a fundamentalist but became an evangelist who pushed for a more inclusive evangelicalism, and the success of his crusades propelled evangelicalism's rise to power. He became its representative figure. But because of his close friendships with successive American presidents, and because he wholly supported the Vietnam War, on another level, he bore the function of being a conduit as a public figure that caused evangelicals to become involved in politics. Also at this time evangelical television evangelists ("televangelists") were competing for religious broadcasting and developed their own large viewer base. Later, however, they also began to share political messages and played a part in evangelicalism's involvement in government. Moreover, two global congresses were convened, with evangelism as its topic and American evangelicalism at its center: The Berlin World Congress on Evangelism (1966) and the Lausanne World Congress on Evangelism or "LWCE" (1974). The "Lausanne Covenant" was adopted at the LWCE, which repented for past indifference of Christian responsibility toward society and clarified and set forth the social responsibility of evangelical Christians (for social concerns and participation in them).

A conspicuous characteristic of this age was the involvement of evangelicalism in politics. Until the 1970's, non-intervention in government was evangelicalism's creed but, after the 1960's, a counter-culture appeared on the scene, which criticized and denied the traditional culture. America became a permissive society which allowed divorce, immorality,

living together, out of wedlock births, abortion and homosexual love. Moreover, in the 1970's, feeling a sense of crisis with the liberal current of pluralism, religious tolerance, inclusivism, etc. covering the land, evangelicalism began to wave its flag, on a societal level, for "good old American" values, the traditional family, the restoration of paternal authority, opposition to homosexual love, opposition to abortion, and the return of prayer to public schools. "It is said that Fundamentalism became popular in an age where values were wavering. Through this one type of large-scale protest against upheaval in society and in protecting society against the same, Fundamentalism put gasoline on a fire... This is how Fundamentalists took on their battle against liberals or, in their own words, "modernists" or "humanists." As an absolutely unshakable creed, Fundamentalists protected the foundational doctrines (fundamentals) of Christianity and believed that they must be reintroduced (*lit.*, "recovered") into day-to-day life. The Bible is God's inerrant Word, the absolute and unique teaching. Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world; humans are saved only through faith in Christ. With this fundamentalist Christianity as its foundation, the Religious Right was a movement of neo-conservatives who actually tried to restore "law and order" to America by starting to be involved in politics" (Kuribayashi 2004:39). The first time evangelicalism was mobilized for this was when conservative Republican senator Barry Goldwater ran for president in 1964. In 1976, Jimmy Carter who has his roots in evangelicalism won the presidential election and then in 1980 Ronald Reagan, with his roots in evangelicalism, was elected.

Also during this period, new Religious Right groups progressively were established. The Moral Majority (founded in 1979 by its leader Jerry Falwell and disbanded in 1987) was called the "marriage" between secular conservatives and religious conservatives, where the secular (non-religious) New Right used television evangelists from the Religious Right to attempt to form the primary conservative influence in government. It was the opportunity that brought politics to the notice of formerly uninterested evangelical Christian conservatives. As a movement which was troubled at the decline in American social values after the 1970's and which sought the revival of healthy morals, the Moral Majority had as its goal the restoration of contemporary America to being a "nation under God" and that Americans, who were God's "chosen people," would spread liberty and democracy throughout the world. This claim was, first, a critique against secular humanism as well as a demand for the restoration of a time for prayer and for the teaching of "creation science" alongside evolution in the public school system.

Secondly, to protect the traditional family, they adopted stances against abortion, the Equal Rights Amendment, gay rights, governmental intervention of home-based education, drugs, rock and roll, and pornography.

Thirdly, with its doctrine of American supremacy and seeing things through a simplistic dualism free nations were understood as being in the Christian camp and the Communist bloc in the camp of the anti-Christ. The powers opposed to America were perceived as being the devil opposed to God so the claim was made for an arms build-up and of opposition to a reduction in nuclear arms. The victory of Ronald Reagan, whom they endorsed in the 1980 presidential race, might be called the turning point for the reappearance of conservatism in American society that continues to this day (the greatest turnaround since the 1925 Scopes trial). In the stead of their tenacious fundamentalist predecessors, The Moral Majority was anti-evolutionist. They fought for the defense of traditional family values (a

denial of feminism and homosexual love), were against abortion, and sought the build up of religious education in public schools.

“The ability of Fundamentalists to extend their societal influence was nothing more than altering their xenophobic and rigid stance and adjusting it to the age. By doing so they were able to once again respond to society’s needs through supplying values of certainty that were sought by the American public in a time of uncertainty. In the 1980’s the impetus of the fundamentalist doctrine which had long served them – that of the pre-millennial kingdom theory worldview which said: human beings were powerless and the significance of government or of social movements were not to be acknowledged – was changed in part. Now, they began to argue that ‘God’s judgment will certainly fall. Even so, the duty of Christ’s disciple is to try to share the gospel with those in this world AND to turn this present world into God’s kingdom. Because of this, they were diplomatically and completely set against the Evil Empire, the Soviet Union, and policies for easing tensions through compromise.’ On the domestic front they needed to overturn the social policies of secularists who weakened family values” (Ogawa 2003: 73-74). In the same conservative grouping was the Christian Coalition, formed in 1989, by Pat Robertson.

Also, in 1990, “Promise Keepers” was founded by Tony Evans, as a national organization of conservative fundamentalists who had the goal of reviving American morality. They waved the flag of the duty and responsibility for husbands to be the head of the home. They aimed for the revival of the traditional American family and held to a peculiar eschatological thought, “dominionism.” Moreover, the Christian Reconstruction Movement under Gary North, based upon its dominion theology, attempted to bring to reality a Christian nation based upon theonomy (God’s law) and, following movements from the 1970’s, had as its objectives the purifying of America from its present moral corruption and the rebuilding of a nation grounded in the Scriptures. This ran counter to dispensationalism in its eschatology and worldview.

II.D. Father and Son Bush and Christian Fundamentalism’s Support of these Presidents

The reason President George H.W. Bush (1988-1992) picked Dan Quayle to be his vice-president was to engage the New Religious Right, since Quayle’s wife was a devout evangelical/Christian fundamentalist. The younger president, George W. Bush’s, relationship with the Religious Right began at this time. During the first Gulf War (1991), father Bush invited Billy Graham to pray with him as he sought support for the war from the New Religious Right, which included evangelicalism. For president Bill Clinton’s tenure (1992-2000), the New Religious Right played the part of critic of that administration, and in 2000, son Bush’s presidency was born. This was an administration that came about because of its engagement with the New Religious Right, winning by a slim margin over candidate Gore.

With the outbreak of terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, America saw an unexpected and huge turnaround in the resurrection of patriotism and fundamentalism. At that time, those who could be said to have exerted the greatest influence upon determining policy in Bush’s administration were neo-conservatives. Neo-conservatives are a current of conservatism that has grown in strength since the 1980’s and the Reagan administration and is composed largely of Jewish-American elites from the Eastern United States. It could be said that they have joined forces with the Religious Right and fundamentalist powerbrokers (Southern anti-elitist) to exercise influence over the Bush administration (they share

commonalities with those who support Israel and with the Religious Right which opposes abortion and homosexual love). Characteristics of neo-conservatism include: (the belief in the need) to exercise unilateral military force; viewing the world through a dualistic confrontational framework of good versus evil; seeking for moral clarity in diplomatic relations; and a skepticism of international cooperation policies.

III. A PHENOMENON PARTICULAR TO THE UNITED STATES: THE DEBATE OVER EVOLUTION VERSUS CREATIONISM

As the confrontation between mainline and conservative Christianity increased in its intensity at the beginning of the 20th century, the high school science curriculum was changed and the subjects of botany, zoology, and geology were combined under “biology.” The authors of these textbooks, (students of) the new age that had received education since the publication of Darwin’s, *Origin of the Species* (1859), see for example G. W. Hunter’s 1914 text (which was later used by John Scopes) boldly introduced Darwin’s theory of biological evolution up through the evolution of human beings. It goes without saying that fundamentalists were repulsed by this. Between 1923-1929, as laws against the teaching of evolutionary theory were being passed in Oklahoma, Florida, Tennessee (the Butler law in Tennessee was one of these, which prohibited touching on the subject of the evolution of humans in the public educational system), Mississippi, and Arkansas, the Scopes trial came about in Tennessee in 1925 (see above).

At the end of the 1950’s, around the time of the 100th anniversary of the publication of *The Origin of the Species*, articles related to the theory of evolution began to appear again in textbooks. The confrontation between the theories of evolution and creationism took the stage and flared up once more in school boards and public schools. In the midst of that, *The Creation Flood: The Biblical Record and its Meaning* was published by John C. Whitcomb and Henry Morris in 1961. This book is called “The Origin of the Species” for the history of ideas on creationism. From the latter half of the 1970’s, the “creation science” movement was started by scientists with PhDs in the natural sciences. The Institute for Creation Research (ICR) was established as the research organ of Christian Heritage College in 1972, and became independent in 1981. “Creation science is the same kind of science as biological evolutionary theory. And biological evolutionary theory is the same kind of religion as creation science.” These are the words of ICR director, Henry Morris (see ____, p. 97).

The “Equal Classroom Time” law was passed in 1981 in Arkansas and Louisiana. This was a movement which attempted to include creationism in the public school curriculum as a scientific theory of equal standing to biological evolutionary theory. But The Equal Classroom Time law was eradicated by decision of the Supreme Court in 1987. A ruling that the teaching of creationism in science curriculum of the public school system was unconstitutional was handed down. However, after that since the 1990’s and to the present day, the location of strife has moved from the courts to local school boards and disputes related to how to handle creationism continues throughout America.

Let us check out four positions of evangelicalism regarding creationism and evolutionism:

The first position is the Six Day Creation or Young Earth theory which is called creation science. It interprets the “first day” in Genesis chapter one as a literal twenty-four hour period, that the heavens and the earth were created in one week approximately six

thousand years ago, just as it is recorded in Genesis. They propose a “flood geology” which says that the geologic strata and fossils discovered in our day were formed in an extremely short time period by the Noahic flood. They also propose a theory of “the appearance of age” concerning the observation of galaxies millions of light years away (that God created these celestial objects to appear to be far away). This is a theory that has been accepted not only by American Christian fundamentalists but broadly by evangelicals. This position has the drawback of not accepting anything of evolutionary biology or of astronomical data, and does not want to dialogue with science in general.

The second position is the “Intelligent Design” (ID) theory which has recently received much attention in the United States. This is a way of thinking that says, “in the background of the diversified and detailed birth of life there was some sort of intelligent design.” This movement made its appearance after the 1987 Supreme Court ruling (where the teaching of evolution in the public schools was prohibited) to introduce in this theory into American public schools where the theory of the creation of the heavens and the earth cannot be taught (because of the relationship to the separation of church and state). However, advocates of evolution strongly warned that this was “creationism without saying ‘God’” and became the kindling for renewed debates in states where there were many conservative Christians. In August 2005 President George W. Bush, who acknowledges himself as an evangelical Christian, expressed his opinion that ID should be taught alongside evolution in schools. On December 20, 2005, the U.S. District Court ruled that the teaching of ID in public schools violated the establishment clause of the First Amendment.

The third position is the Extended Creation or Old Earth creation theory represented by astronomer Hugh Ross. This position accepts the long period of time revealed in the nature record and sees the creation of the heavens and the earth as taking place over a long interval. It acknowledges the natural process played in the development of the earth and life but that present forms of life could not have occurred without God’s supernatural intervention. There are a number of variations on this, such as the day age theory or the framework theory. It denies creation science’s “appearance of age” theory where God makes us to see untruths in history as being inconsistent with His nature. The systematic theologian, Millard Erickson, supports this third position in his *Christian Theology*.

The fourth position is the theistic evolutionary theory proposed from within Japan by the evangelical Christian writer, ---hiko Otani, who is an economist. This view sees scientific knowledge as something given by God under common grace, accepts evolution as fact, and that He created what is now living using the process of evolution as he maintains and rules over the universe and nature. He assesses positively evolutionary biology among the sciences and has a way of thinking which pays attention to immanence. But he gives the impression that the weak points in present-day evolutionary biology should be accepted, as is. The drawback is that there are almost no discoveries of the middle fossil record. And there is naturally also the problem of how Genesis chapters one and two are interpreted.

IV. THEOLOGICAL DISPARITIES BETWEEN AMERICAN CHRISTIAN FUNDAMENTALISM AND JAPANESE EVANGELICALISM AND THE JAPANESE CONTEXT

IV.A. Foundational Doctrine (The Inerrancy of Scripture and Problems in Education)

In the foundational doctrines themselves, it can be said that there are virtually no disparities between American Christian fundamentalism and Japanese evangelicalism. This is natural as the great majority of Japanese evangelical denominations and churches were born out of the mission of American evangelicals after World War II. What became the problem was radicalized extremism and a literal hermeneutic for foundational doctrines was the view of the Bible and of the End Times. American Christian Fundamentalism took the position of “absolute inerrancy” concerning its view of the Bible. Coupled with dispensationalism it was characterized by an extremely literal hermeneutic which was applied to futuristic prophecies. But Japanese evangelicalism as a whole, based on the lessons of past controversies over Scripture, did not claim such a narrow position. Also, creation science which bases its scriptural hermeneutic on a view of absolute inerrancy of the Bible, is a serious concern for education in America and continues to be debated in local areas to this day but, in Japan, since Christian churches are a minority it has not become a radicalizing societal problem at the same level. Still, in order to avoid the evolutionistic educational system in Japan, Christian families and churches that practice Bible-based education through independent homeschooling or church schools have recently begun to appear.

The problem with creation science is the reality that it has been introduced and received uncritically, as it is, without fair debate as to whether to affirm or deny it, by the Japanese church as “a worldview and interpretation of Genesis that is faithful to the Bible.” The result that occurs when the evangelical church here is pressed with the choice between evolution or creation, is that (a belief) in evolution is used as a type of “litmus test” (lit., *fumie*) for orthodox, evangelical faith. Since there are no other options, there have up until now been no means by which creation science could be objectively and calmly evaluated. In Japan the evangelical Christian publications which are available and related to creationism and evolution almost all take the position for creation science. For example, adequately researched publications for an evangelical Christian to calmly investigate and evaluate evolution are quite sparse (Otani 2001), and dialogue in this field with society in general or the sciences in general has not materialized. Still, since arguments from differing positions have come out from within Japanese evangelicalism in recent years, such as Old Earth creationism and theistic evolution, the groundwork for healthy debate is being prepared, a trend that should be welcomed.

IV.B. Eschatology (Dispensationalism and Politics: the Connection to the View of the Nation)

Regardless of whether it is right or wrong, eschatological views of the Bible in America have had no little influence on how individuals view life, on how they view the world or on their political leanings. But it cannot be said that for evangelical denominations and churches in Japan, the majority stand upon dispensational doctrine. The direct connection of this theology to how politics and the state is viewed (by Christians) is minimal. On the other hand, there is a great inadequacy because of the fact that eschatology is rarely taken up as an issue by the local church for how we (should) view life, the world and the state. It is a

important topic that the church should tackle from hereon. Evangelicalism as a whole is united in the belief of the certainty of Christ's Second Coming.

However, with *Left Behind* and the series that followed it, as well as with publications by the representative evangelical publishing company, Word of Life Press, under the outward signboard of a literal biblical hermeneutic are quite a number of books based on one type of eschatology which stand dispensational theology (in many cases without an explanation or proviso). And the reality within the local church is that lay persons uncritically read these without knowing this.

V. TOPICS FOR JAPANESE EVANGELICALISM REGARDING AMERICAN CHRISTIAN FUNDAMENTALISM

V. A. The Danger of a Movement Ruled by Anger and a Simplistic Dualism of Good Versus Evil

There is an ideology in the claims of the Religious Right in America that labels its opponents as devils and foments anger and enmity. This cannot be said to be a biblical way of looking at this world nor a correct worldview. At the center of Christian fundamentalism is the emotion of "anger", an anger that runs counter to the act of loving others, the core of the gospel. A band of people united by anger is strong yet constructive, liberating emotion is not in that bond and there is the pursuant danger that some will try to rule over others by their own will with a desire that increases in strength. It is natural that a sense of absoluteness and of exclusivism accompanies the unique truth of salvation in the gospel in which we believe. But we who are Christians are no more than weak sinners who have been forgiven and entrusted with the gospel by the Lord Jesus, and it is easy to commit the error of making our ego the absolute. We must not mistake the privileges of our being chosen (as God's people) for something different, and we must serve the world to cause the gospel entrusted to us to permeate this world.

V. B. Avoiding the Extreme Literal Interpretation of the Bible; Toward a Moderate Understanding of Biblical Inerrancy

Since the Reformation the foundation of evangelical biblical interpretation has been a literal hermeneutic but when this is taken too far we are in danger of (creating) a distorted interpretation to support our own theories or of extreme interpretations of prophecies. Because of this, in order to avoid barren radicalism, I believe that the evangelical churches of Japan should join to take a position of a moderating full inerrancy over absolute inerrancy in relation to their view of scripture. Full inerrancy says that the Bible does not try make matters proposed concerning science and history its first objective but that what is recorded in the scripture which describes things of science and history are sufficiently correct. However, these scientific and historical descriptions are phenomenological, written from the viewpoint of how people at that time saw it.

V.C. Biblical Eschatology and its Related Worldview and the Need to Study the Interpretation of the Kingdom of God

We need to know how much different eschatological theories (which include the dispensational view) we learn in our local churches have influenced our worldview as Christians. We should place import upon the fact of how great an influence the differences in

understandings of eschatology has on the lives and politics of Christians in America. (As Japanese evangelicals) we should learn from the scriptures, from Genesis through Revelation, not only about the incarnation of the Lord Jesus and the history of the atonement but also of how the kingdom of God plunged into this world; how Christians should live who have been sent out into this world to take forth that kingdom of God; our motivation for maintaining relations with this world; and (to see) that the church's responsibility to society is a different stance from traditional, pessimistic eschatology. Especially among Christian youth, the biblical value of work in this world should be taught. I believe that it is most important for them (to know) the meaning given by the motivation to work. This is a pressing need.

V.D. The Balance between God's Transcendence and Immanence

In the relationship of God to His created world there is both "transcendence" and "immanence." Traditionally, evangelicals have had a tendency to emphasize the former, liberals the latter. In other words, evangelicals see this world beginning as the supreme God's supernatural and special creation, where all that is came about through God. In time, God intervened in this world through miracles. The miracles of God are especially considered to be a foundational doctrine of the gospel. On the other hand, liberals assume that God was within the natural world and believe that He was working through the process of nature. They don't especially see miracles and make them a part of that process. Biological evolution is also seen as a means used by God. Thus, the liberal argued for the world to be Christianized by transformation of its social structures and by a social gospel. On the one hand, American Christian Fundamentalism excluded evolution and emphasized God's special creative act and "transcendence." On the other hand, they emphasized reaching God's objective with a warped "immanence" through the just war that America is involved in. One can see here confusion and poor balance in the understandings of transcendence and immanence. A sense of balance for understanding God's transcendence and immanence is the key by which we Christians decide in what aspects we should see God's workings in this world (e.g., it is the balance between praying for the Lord's healing and making use of the help of physicians and medicine when someone is sick).

V.E. The Certainty of Correct Biblical Hermeneutical Methodology at the Level of the Local Church

Hidden at the roots of both apocalyptic, sensationalist eschatology and creation science are problems with biblical interpretation. It is easy to fall into extreme claims with a literal biblical hermeneutic, lacking in covenantal and atoning consideration and which ignores the purpose for which the Bible was written or the linguistic and cultural restrictions that were upon the writers at the time. American Christian Fundamentalism, especially in the South where it has widely infiltrated its background with simple-minded (thinking), avoids intricate methods of biblical interpretation and has an abusive trend particular to evangelicalism that simplifies the reading of scripture. Accordingly, for we Japanese as well, there is a need for clear leadership and education in the local church that does not incline toward a mistaken reading when the Bible is read, exegeted, interpreted and applied on a daily basis. We can wait for publications in Japanese made for lay persons with a new and practical biblical hermeneutic but methodologies which seek great knowledge in a troublesome manner should be avoided. I also believe that there is a need to show forth a

public example for a biblical hermeneutic by continuing with the careful reading of the Bible in accordance with its original intent in worship and in prayer meetings, and by doing expository sermons which can be applied in real life to believers' lives.

V.F. An Attitude which is Open to Knowledge from the Sciences

The scientific method is a way of inquiring about the truth that God has vested upon humankind. At its origin it does not contradict with religious truth. Based on the cultural mandate, because we are also to rule over the earth (Genesis 1:28), the advance of scientific inquiry is an essential duty. Thus, with the advancement of science we should humbly and with awe accept the new information on the form of the universe or nature as it is continues to be made evident and we should not discard (this) based on a simplistic comparison to the biblical record. Rather, this new information might demand a new interpretation which goes beyond the original, traditional interpretation. We must always maintain an open posture toward the truth. Whether or not evolution is correct, there is a need for us to objectively know how far contemporary evolutionary biology has advanced, what kinds of conclusions have been reached, and what sorts of issues are being dealt with. There is room to sufficiently investigate whether there is scientific knowledge and persuasive power in creation science when it makes the enormous knowledge in biology today into merely an enemy to be opposed. To make this one-sided interpretation of scripture into something positive, we must avoid only the extremes of denying at its base that the scientific methods and knowledge that have been built up (came) through enormous effort and knowledge.

IN CONCLUSION

In his book, *Revisiting Christian America*, Yasuo Furuya is an evangelical who remains in a mainline (liberal) denomination and is a rare presence who makes regular evaluations. He analyzes the decline of mainline groups and the present phenomenon of the rise of evangelicalism in America. Even as he criticizes the obstinacy of Christian fundamentalism, he writes about his expectations for the moderate evangelical to uphold the certainty of Christian faith and says the following: "In a word, the mainline, liberal churches are being self-critical and I believe that there is no other way to the path of regeneration outside of a recovery of the certainty of Christian faith through humbly learning from evangelical churches and from their theology. Or, one could say that there is no other way to the path of regeneration outside of passing down the societal interests to which liberals are inclined as they continue to uphold the certainty of faith that evangelicals did by overcoming fundamentalism. I think that the second possibility is strong for us today" (Furuya 2005:172-173).

The defeat of the tendency toward fundamentalism which had a propensity toward erroneous forms of that certainty is a most important topic for we evangelicals who firmly uphold the certainty of the gospel which the mainline has lost. We cannot sidestepped the fact of the treasure God has given to us by the gospel; we are to fulfill the command to serve the world with this richness.

The issue we have of Christian Fundamentalism in America is in the progressive tense. From this point I would cautiously like to analyze this trend and be one who continues to raise a voice of protest against extreme ways of living. I want to be one who tries to keep a

healthy balance on the understanding of the gospel so that Japanese evangelical churches will have a healthy stance toward their society.

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