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fundamentalism by blunt instrument

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cart before the horse?

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In Kevin Bauder's ongoing series purporting to retell the story of fundamentalism, he lately accuses fundamentalism of adding elements not necessary to Biblical Christianity. Supposedly fundamentalism has added at least three things to Biblical Christianity: the philosophy of [Scottish Common Sense Realism](#), [populism](#), and sentimentalism. [Only the first two of these have been discussed at this point.]

It seems that Mr. Bauder has gotten some things confused in this revising the story of Fundamentalism.

Here is how Mr. Bauder states it in Essay #3:

On the other hand, Fundamentalism has also tended to add elements that are not necessary to any form of biblical Christianity. Over the next few essays, I wish to explore three of these additions: Common Sense Realism, populism, and sentimentalism.

Later in the same essay, he says:

Many Christians embraced Common Sense Realism, particularly in America. It became a powerful force in American theology before the Civil War. It was still influential in the proto-Fundamentalist milieu of the 1870s through the 1910s. Proto-Fundamentalism is the social and ecclesiastical environment out of which the Fundamentalist movement emerged around 1920.

Now... which is it? Did *Fundamentalists* add Common Sense Realism to Christianity, or did someone else do it? Note this line:

It became a powerful force in American theology before the Civil War.

Before the Civil War... a powerful force...

And when, exactly, did Fundamentalism come along? Certainly not before the Civil War.

Well, what of the second supposed error added by those dastardly fundies, populism? What does Mr. Bauder have to say of that? (From essay #4)

At the time of the American Revolution, populism was widely (though not universally) assumed by American Christians. The influence of populism continued to grow during the first half of the Nineteenth Century. Under its sway, many expressions of American Christianity became anti-traditional, anti-clerical, and anti-intellectual. Branches of American evangelicalism rejected the value of creeds and confessions, of advanced study (sometimes of any specialized study), and of a trained ministry. The ideal became the individual who, without any particular theological training, read the Bible and came to his own convictions.

What, then, of populism? It was added to Christianity when?

- At the time of the American Rebellion “widely ... assumed by American Christians”
- It grew during the “first half of the Nineteenth Century” (which would be 1800-1850 for those in Minneapolis)

And Fundamentalism began when? And it added what?

Mr. Bauder seems to be quite good at making bald assertions, then denying them with his own words later on. Am I the only one noticing this?

Some discussion of the Common Sense philosophy has occurred over at Sharper Iron. Some reasonable objections to the supposed link that Bauder is making have been posed (and not been answered as far as I can tell). Further, it has been argued that rather than Common Sense philosophy, simple common sense thinking (ordinary human thinking) has been the order of the day and has its place in the approach any believer ought to take.

On this next point, populism, one has to wonder if Mr. Bauder is arguing against Soul Liberty and Congregational Government. Is populism so bad? Isn't it the genius of the Baptist churches that the governance of their bodies has been in the hands of the people rather than in an elite presbytery or an autocratic episcopacy? Is Mr. Bauder arguing for some change back to elitism because the people have made errors in judgement or been swayed by some manipulative leader? Is the solution to the dangers of populism to take decision making power for local churches out of the hands of the people because

not everyone is equally qualified to make every choice or to hold every opinion

This doesn't seem to be a typically Baptist view. Perhaps someone can enlighten me on how the Regenerate Members of local churches are not to be trusted with making choices for those churches.

Finally, an attempt is made in this article to link the abuses of Fundamentalism¹ with such things as cults and (of course) everybody's favorite whipping boy, Charles Finney:

The ideal became the individual who, without any particular theological training, read the Bible and came to his own convictions. Such individuals, if articulate, could become the leaders of significant communities and movements.

Some of those movements turned out to be less than evangelical. Seventh-Day Adventism owes its origins to this period, as does the Stone-Campbell movement. Indeed, this was a time when novel sects and cults were beginning to abound.

Yes, let's include the cults in this discussion! That is really relevant to the existence and state of fundamentalism. Why, they are just one step removed, aren't they? What a bad lot!

And Finney... Well, I am not one to defend Finney, but it does seem all too convenient to blame the ills of Fundamentalism on Finney. His influence was felt all over Old Evangelical Christianity (the conservative Christianity that existed prior to the rise of Modernism and the subsequent emergence of Fundamentalism). Let us not be so smug in our superiority to those old Christians who saw value in at least some of the methodology of Finney. These methods gave the strength of real conversions and increased numbers to the conservative Christians who became the Fundamentalists of the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy. Without them, would there have been sufficient numbers of conservative believers to have even formed a Fundamentalism at all?

Well, you can see that I disagree yet again with the picture that Mr. Bauder is painting. He seems to be picking threads of out of the historical record from a time prior to fundamentalism, calling them evil, and blaming fundamentalism for their presence. Remember:

On the other hand, Fundamentalism has also **tended to add elements** that are not necessary to any form of biblical Christianity. Over the next few essays, I wish to explore three of these additions: Common Sense Realism, populism, and sentimentalism. [emphasis mine]

It boggles the mind that Fundamentalism can be blamed for errors (if they were errors) that occurred before there was a Fundamentalism.



Maranatha!
Don Johnson
Jer 33.3

Notes:

1. those bad people who added this new thing, populism, to the church, even though it was already in the church over 100 years before Fundamentalists existed [[↔](#)]

14 comments ↓

[#1 Dan Salter](#) on 09.07.09 at 6:01 am

Don,

While I don't agree with all Bauder's assertions (especially his general overly Roman Catholic-gilded brand of Reformationism that claims a curious mixture of sola fide and church hierarchy), I think you jumped at a couple of things that really don't need jumping at. He did not accuse fundamentalism of causing Common Sense realism and populism. He gave a very brief touch on how CS realism and populism came about and affected American evangelicalism (before the Civil War and around the Amer. Rev.), but his point there was only to explain how it came into American evangelical thought. He accuses fundamentalism, not for initiating these views, but for adopting them and promulgating them. Likewise, his reference to the SDAs was to show how error can result from these populist and realist paths, warning that holding to such things as populism and realism, endangers fundamentalists by encouraging certain people who are prone to less-than rigorous study to go splintering off in whichever way some heretical wind may take them.

Again, I don't agree with Bauder on much of his discussion. Error can creep in among fundamentalism as well as reformed evangelicalism or any other conservative Christian -ism. His argument seems to attempt to discredit a theological system because if acted on incorrectly, error could result. What?! That is an argument against everything.

If he disagrees with fundamentalism, let him argue an issue, not discredit it by attempting to tie it to a dangerous idea that fundamentalism may have partially adopted. He says these things are not biblical. He should discuss that.

But back to the other point. I think you falsely accuse him of charging fundamentalism for the cause of cs realism and populism. He seems to be just saying fundamentalism adopted a doctrine that he considers unbiblical (though he doesn't say why), and then goes on to discuss its previous history.

[#2 Ryan Martin](#) on 09.07.09 at 6:53 am

Pastor Johnson,

I would urge that you deal fairly with those with whom you disagree.

Even a cursory reading of Bauder's article on Common Sense Realism would have shown that you have misrepresented Bauder a bit here. He says, "Common Sense Realism is now more than two centuries old. So thoroughly did Christians accept its categories, however, that it remains influential among many evangelicals and most Fundamentalists." In other words, it was influential among Christians, and was since embraced by Fundamentalists.

The same goes for populism. Bauder says in that article, "All of this occurred long before Fundamentalism arose as an identifiable movement. Nevertheless, populism was a significant aspect of the milieu out of which Fundamentalism emerged. Certainly Fundamentalism reflected the evangelical context that gave it birth."

I know you think you caught Bauder in a "gotcha moment," but a fair and careful (maybe even "good faith") reading of his own writing would have dampened this prospect. When he says that Fundamentalism "has also tended to add," then, he very clearly means that by perpetuating these "intellectual" traditions and methods from their ancestors, they continue to add elements to the Christian faith. If the man who taught me theology believed that one should add to the Christian faith prayers to saints, and by his influence I pray to the saints, I am, just as he was, adding to Christianity.

Even so, you may not believe fundamentalists have acted as Kevin says, but interacting with his argument would have been a better way of debunking him than trying to show an inconsistency with his history (even if one actually existed).

[#3 ox](#) on 09.07.09 at 7:26 am

Ryan and Dan

Thanks for the comments. Since you are both basically making the same point, I'll make one reply.

My point is that when one introduces a series of editorials this way:

On the other hand, Fundamentalism has also tended to add elements that are not necessary to any form of biblical Christianity. Over the next few essays, I wish to explore three of these additions: Common Sense Realism, populism, and sentimentalism.

The impression given is that Fundamentalism is largely responsible for the introduction of these ideas into Christianity. In addition, if these elements are not necessary to any form of

biblical Christianity, it appears that the author is implying that Fundamentalism has added to Christianity in an unbiblical way, which is a very serious charge.

I don't see how I am misreading this statement.

I agree with Dan when he says this:

If he disagrees with fundamentalism, let him argue an issue, not discredit it by attempting to tie it to a dangerous idea that fundamentalism may have partially adopted. He says these things are not biblical. He should discuss that.

It remains to be seen how dangerous these ideas are.

Maranatha!
Don Johnson
[Jer 33.3](#)

#4 Ryan Martin on 09.07.09 at 7:44 am

Don,

You are incorrigible. Read my illustration again: “f the man who taught me theology believed that one should add to the Christian faith prayers to saints, and by his influence I pray to the saints, I am, just as he was, adding to Christianity.”

Again, I stress to you, if you have a problem with Bauder's arguments, then volley contra-arguments against them, don't try to play “gotcha” like this is a junior high debate club, especially when the “gotcha” has no basis in what your opponent actually said. Are you unable to interact the ideas themselves? If so, then why stoop this kind of rhetoric? Perhaps you say that the SCSR and/or populism is not unbiblical; perhaps you say that fundamentalists have never allowed them in their camps. That, to me, would be a valid argument against Bauder.

Of course the charge is serious. I'm glad you take it that way.

#5 Dan Salter on 09.07.09 at 8:02 am

Dead horse beating time now —

Yes, but... Though the statement to which you refer could be taken as you did, it certainly is not the only way to read it. Just as in Scripture we take full context to interpret, so should we collectively assess all the comments in the article when reaching a conclusion about a point being made.

Okay, horse is thoroughly dead (unless, of course, you'd care to take another whack. It may

be only mostly dead.)

[#6 Kent Brandenburg](#) on 09.07.09 at 10:57 am

Not to sound better-than-thou, but I'm waiting for Bauder to finish before I evaluate his views. I think he suffers from some lack of editing. I don't know if he has anyone edit his pieces. I know I don't have anyone editing mine, so when I see myself quoted in different places, I sometimes cringe. The way I see it developing, I can predict that I'll have some problems with what he is saying, but I'm happy to hear his take on it.

[#7 Kent Brandenburg](#) on 09.07.09 at 10:57 am

By the way, I do have my books proofread by someone else very good, but no one does my blog posts—that's what I meant.

[#8 tjp](#) on 09.07.09 at 1:17 pm

Hi Don,

I've been following Bauder's essayettes on Fundamentalism. So far I've spewed coffee twice, caught my breath twice, and shook my head several times. But there's something quite telling not only about what he's saying but about what he's revealing concerning himself and those who cluster around him.

Personally, I don't think your criticisms are entirely misplaced. Bauder comes off to me as a man recently bitten. And he's looking to bite back. Perhaps these essays are his way of biting the britches out of those Finneyesque fundies who've incorporated all those extra-Biblical truths into their faith stock and have shunned the intellectual for the practical.

I think Bauder's essays are interesting and perhaps reveal the direction northern fundamentalism is headed. And if my sense of things is correct, it's a direction southern fundamentalism isn't going, at least not anytime soon. I think a real battle is shaping up here and the ideological lines are being drawn.

Fundies should pay close attention.

What should disturb fundamentalists more than Bauder's remarks is the absolute silence on the part of say, the FBFI. Where are they? Why haven't they launched a set of public forums to answer their critics openly? Are they so confused themselves that they can't even articulate a coherent fundamentalism and defend it against its enemies?

Personally, I think FBFI silence is shameful. I would think they would answer Bauder openly and their lessor critics immediately. Perhaps they will. But it doesn't look like it at this point.

The members of that group should demand their leaders step up and make the case for fundamentalism as currently observed or resign.

Have a good one!

tjp

[#9 ox](#) on 09.07.09 at 5:35 pm

Ryan, I suppose I have two problems with your illustration.

First, I think we all agree that praying to saints would be a serious problem. However, we don't immediately agree that the elements Bauder is putting forward as unnecessary Fundamentalist additions to Christianity are actually either so damaging or even damaging at all ... or even really additions. Witness the arguments put forward by Aaron Blumer and even Joel Tetreau on Sharper Iron with respect to these articles.

Second, I don't see how you can be charging Fundamentalism with making a grievous addition to Christianity when these elements were clearly part of Christianity already. If the argument is true, then it is a Christian problem, not a fundamentalist problem. (And we are not sure the argument is true — and Bauder has given no reason why we should think so.)

The charge that I think is serious is the charge that somehow Fundamentalism is adding something to Christianity. That is almost tantamount to accusing Fundamentalism of violating the commands in Rev 22 to not add anything to the words of the book.

Maranatha!
Don Johnson
[Jer 33.3](#)

[#10 ox](#) on 09.07.09 at 5:38 pm

Dan, I will concede that the articles are laying a groundwork and we don't know all of Bauder's conclusions at this point. Perhaps he will make everything come out right in the end. In the meantime, however, I object to the implications of his articles.

Maranatha!
Don Johnson
[Jer 33.3](#)

[#11 Ryan Martin](#) on 09.08.09 at 7:09 pm

You have ventured off-topic with your response. Nor did you show me how you disagreed

with my illustration (which was merely an illustration to show how the word “added” is sometimes used in common speech, not to say anything about problems). Your problems really don’t have anything to do with my illustration of a valid use of the “add,” but problems you have with Kevin’s argument.

My comment was not about Kevin’s argument, but to show that you are misreading (and now, it seems, continually and deliberately misreading) the word “add.”

You implied that Bauder said fundamentalists *originally* added these things to Christianity. Bauder clearly did not say this. In fact, he quite clearly showed how he did not think that fundamentalists *originally* added these things to Christianity, but perpetuated (at least in his mind) the “added-to-Christianity” they inherited.

With respect, Pastor Johnson, it seems that you are bent on adding deception to Christianity.

[#12 ox](#) on 09.08.09 at 8:30 pm

Ryan, deception? I don’t think so.

The bottom line is that I think Bauder is making charges against Fundamentalism that aren’t true. I think in this case he has done so in a self-refuting way.

That’s all.

Maranatha!
Don Johnson
[Jer 33.3](#)

[#13 Keith](#) on 09.09.09 at 3:10 am

No way Don. He may be wrong (I don’t think he is here), but he’s not self-refuting as you allege. Just replace “required” or “assumed” for “added” and it’ll clearl everything up for ya.

Is common sense realism commonly assumed amongst fundamentalists — even when they are not aware of their assumption? (Yes). Is it a self-evident, obviously biblical requirement of Christianity? (No — ask Augustine, ask VanTil, etc.) Does that prove it is wrong? No, but it does establish that it is “added”.

Also, by the way, you seem to equate Baptist with Fundamentalist which is historically inaccurate. There were/are fundamentalist presbyterians who would strongly disagree with your view of populist church government.

Keith

[#14 ox](#) on 09.09.09 at 8:05 am

Hi Keith

Thanks for the comment. I am going to revise my post in response to your criticism and the others who have chimed in. I plan to preserve the original and all comments, but will revise and start over with a new post in place of this one.

With respect to my Baptist-centric point of view, I make no apologies for it. I think Baptist Fundamentalism is the best Fundamentalism there is. I think it is the best Christianity there is. I do think that populism does have some impact in Presbyterianism as well, but likely not as obviously as it may amongst Baptists.

Maranatha!
Don Johnson
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