

## CHAPTER 1

# Fundamentalist Fling

Life in 1919 was anything but certain. Today, after a century, it is difficult to imagine just how different life was for people back then. The world was still reeling after an unprecedented global conflict. World War I left in its wake sixteen million dead. Expectations of human progress lay shattered on the battlefield. Technology that should have facilitated human progress was instead used to kill fellow human beings more effectively and efficiently than ever before in human history. As if this were not enough, a worldwide influenza pandemic wiped out an even more staggering number of people. The most conservative estimates state that globally at least twenty-five million people perished from the disease, and some estimates suggest that number could be quadrupled. So much death only heightened eschatological expectations that the end of the world was nigh.

For many Seventh-day Adventists, such apocalyptic fears confirmed their belief that Jesus was coming again very soon. Adventist evangelists at the time were not shy about getting the word out about what they believed. Yet Adventism was going through an identity crisis of its own. The war raised questions about how church members worldwide should relate to such global catastrophes. As the church grew globally, for the first time it had members on opposite sides of the conflict. This resurrected debates about military service that the

church had struggled with at its organization in 1863 when it found itself caught up in the American Civil War.

This chapter provides a contextual background for the rise of Fundamentalism. While the term *Fundamentalism* was initially coined by Curtis Lee Laws in 1922, the movement began much earlier. Two primary catalysts—the rise of the Prophetic Conference Movement and the publication of *The Fundamentals*—were noticed by Seventh-day Adventist thought leaders. It is vital to understand these in order to make sense of the 1919 Bible Conference as well as the relationship of Adventism to Fundamentalism.

### **The prophetic conference movement**

During the opening address of the 1919 Bible Conference, the General Conference president, A. G. Daniells, explained why the church leaders needed to have this meeting. He began with some logistical background (material we will cover in chapter 3) but pointed to a “series of Bible Conferences” organized by Dr. W. B. Riley (1861–1947) as the inspiration for the 1919 meeting. Riley was a rising star in what was known at the time as the Prophetic Conference Movement. The burgeoning conservative Christians making up this movement would come to be known as Fundamentalists. Daniells believed that the work that Riley and others were doing was a model for Adventism. At the outset of the 1919 Bible Conference, he stated that he hoped, this initial meeting following the model of these prophecy conferences, would be the first of a series of annual Bible conferences for Adventists. After all, from his perspective, no meeting like this had ever been held by Adventists before.<sup>1</sup>

Leaders like Riley were harnessing a collective angst within American society caused by the fact that the world they lived in was rapidly changing. In addition to the upheavals of World War I and the influenza pandemic, American culture was rapidly changing in other ways. What was once a predominantly Protestant religious landscape had become a melting pot of religions. The loose nature of the Fundamentalist Movement allowed it to transcend denominational affiliations. The largest number of participants in these prophetic

conferences came from either a Presbyterian or Baptist background, yet there were significant numbers from other denominations as well. What united them were four distinct characteristics. First, they cherished their revivalist, evangelical heritage hearkening back to the Protestant Reformation. Second, a renewed interest in end-time events revived a focus on the premillennial return of Christ. Third, many carried some kind of loose affiliation with the Holiness Movement, which arose in the late nineteenth century emphasizing personal piety and holiness in the Christian life. And last, but not least, they embraced militant efforts to defend the faith.<sup>2</sup> These same characteristics would later be echoed within Fundamentalism, and the prophecy conferences were a seedbed from which Fundamentalism arose.

Another rising star in the Prophetic Conference Movement, one whose example would later be referred to by participants at the 1919 Bible Conference, was Arthur T. Pierson (1837–1911). A Presbyterian minister, Pierson rose to prominence for his engagement in world missions. He accepted premillennialism during the summer of 1882 at the Believer's Meeting for Bible Study, which gave further impetus for him to evangelize the world. After Baptist preacher Charles H. Spurgeon passed away, Pierson took the pulpit of the prestigious Metropolitan Tabernacle in London for two years and then returned to teach at Moody Bible Institute. He was a consulting editor for the dispensationalist *Scofield Reference Bible* and later became one of the three primary editors of *The Fundamentals* (more on this later in this chapter). Pierson loomed large on the prophecy conference circuit in the years leading up to and encompassing World War I.

These prophecy conferences were, in reality, a loose network of conservative, evangelical Christians who held to the reliability and inspiration of the Bible. Such conferences renewed their faith in the second coming of Christ as described in the Bible. It would seem that such conservative Christians would resonate closely with Seventh-day Adventists, who also adhered to the soon return of Christ and the authority of Scripture. Instead, these conservative Christians largely ignored the Seventh-day Adventists who attended their meetings.

However, the fact that Adventists were ignored did not lessen the enthusiasm Seventh-day Adventist thought leaders had toward these prophecy conferences. Their admiration resembled a one-sided love affair on the part of Adventist thought leaders. Enthusiasm for these prophecy conferences began with Lee S. Wheeler, an Adventist pastor in Pennsylvania, who was the first to call the church's attention to the prophecy conferences held during World War I. He appreciated their premillennial views and how effectively the meetings garnered public interest in the "subject of Christ's second coming" juxtaposed against the "dark cloud of the present European war." Wheeler traced the origins of the present prophecy conferences to the work of Dwight L. Moody and a significant prophecy conference held in 1878. His initial reporting of these early prophecy conferences certainly caught the eyes of prominent Adventist church leaders.<sup>3</sup>

F. M. Wilcox, the editor of *The Review and Herald*, considered the prophecy conferences to be some of the most significant events in Christian history—parallel to Luther's Ninety-Five Theses and other great religious milestones. Even though Adventists might disagree with their positions on some minor points, these prophecy conferences were significant for Christians, particularly in these last days. The fact that they disagreed on a few matters, such as the seventh-day Sabbath and the state of the dead, was merely evidence that they had not followed through all the way on their convictions about the authority of Scripture and the dangers of modernism. With some input from thoughtful Seventh-day Adventists, Wilcox believed, these spiritual cousins would naturally, over time, become Seventh-day Adventists.

Clearly, Wilcox felt at home at these meetings. In a strange irony of history, Wilcox, one of the more conservative and stalwart Seventh-day Adventist leaders within the denomination at the time, espoused an ecumenical form of Adventism because he resonated strongly with facing a common foe and emphasizing points Adventists held in common with these conservative Christians, who were the harbingers of the rising Fundamentalist movement. Above all, Wilcox admired how successful they were in calling the attention of the

world to the soon return of Jesus Christ.

Another influential Adventist of the time was Carlyle B. Haynes. He attended the 1918 Philadelphia Prophecy Conference and reported on his visit in *Signs of the Times*. Haynes believed the meeting was significant because it was drawing attention to the second coming of Christ, a doctrine that he viewed as having lost its emphasis among Protestants. He noted some minor differences between various speakers, yet overall, he appreciated the general tenor of what they were trying to do.

One of the largest prophecy conferences was held November 25–28, 1918, in New York City. This time, Wilcox could not attend, so he sent a *Review and Herald* associate editor, Leon L. Caviness. Caviness was apparently accompanied by Charles T. Emerson, an Adventist evangelist from New England, and possibly a few other individuals. Regarding their experience, Caviness and Emerson shared: “The keynote of the first meeting, as well as of the whole conference, and the point emphasized by every speaker, was the personal, literal, imminent, premillennial coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.” Such widespread interest in this conference, Caviness believed, would open doors for Adventists to share their faith. He saw his visit as an opening of his eyes similar to the experience of Elijah, who discovered that there were many more who had “not bowed the knee to Baal.”<sup>4</sup> Of special interest for Caviness were the presentations at this prophecy conference about the infallibility of the Bible. Clearly, this meeting “was one of the most successful religious gatherings ever held in this city [New York] in recent years.”<sup>5</sup> He was nothing short of enthusiastic about how many there were who shared his faith in the soon return of Jesus Christ, and who affirmed the authority of Scripture in contrast to the speculative winds of doctrine that would shake the confidence of people in the divine inspiration of God’s Word.

The nascent Fundamentalists holding these conferences just before and during World War I were part of a group of conservative Christians who after the war and through the 1920s would coalesce into a much more clearly defined, and militant, historical movement.

As various Seventh-day Adventists attended these prophetic conferences, they clearly admired the work that these people were doing in calling the attention of the world to the soon return of Jesus Christ. As a consequence, these Adventist thought leaders clearly saw the conferences as having great historical significance and believed they were aligned with Adventists in warning the world about Christ's return. While they recognized there were some minor differences between Adventist beliefs and those of the speakers at these conferences, they also knew that there were some differences among the various speakers themselves at these meetings about how the end would take place. What united them was the fact that they shared common enemies in those who sought to undermine the authority of Scripture.

Although Adventists who attended these meetings were excited about the publicity being given to the Second Advent, it appears that theirs was a one-sided love affair. No Adventist was ever asked to speak at these meetings, and although the extant records acknowledge a wide variety of persons from different faiths as having participated, no mention was ever made of any Adventist participants.

### *The Fundamentals*

In addition to these prophecy conferences, another major catalyst behind what eventually became the historic Fundamentalist movement was a series of pamphlets titled, simply, *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*. Their original purpose was quite simple. The goal was to widely disseminate conservative Christian values and beliefs in a culture that no longer placed authority in the divine inspiration of Scripture.

The publication of these pamphlets was innocuous enough. Two oil tycoons in the Standard Oil Company, Lyman and Milton Stewart, had used their fortune to fund a wide variety of philanthropic projects, ranging from overseas missions to the education of Bible college teachers. In 1908, Lyman Stewart devoted a large portion of his estate to develop the Bible Institute of Los Angeles (BIOLA),

after which he gave only token financial gifts to other worthwhile endeavors.

The initial impetus behind founding BIOLA, according to Lyman Stewart, was to create a theological safe haven where the authority of God's Word would never be questioned. He was especially concerned when he discovered that, during the 1890s, a teacher at Occidental College had questioned supernatural aspects of the biblical narrative—in spite of the fact that Stewart had funded not only that teacher's position but the entire Bible department! This teacher's use of historical-critical methods was considered "positively devilish" because it destroyed faith in the "absolute inerrancy" of Scripture. In order to make sure his funds were never again diverted to such nefarious schemes, Stewart envisioned a modest Bible school under his guidance.<sup>6</sup>

Stewart also had a much wider vision of warning Christians everywhere against liberal Bible teachers who, from his perspective, undermined the reliability of Scripture. He envisioned publishing Christian literature that would refute modernist authors who undermined the Word of God. This publishing effort would become the largest recipient of his funds outside of the Bible Institute of Los Angeles. Stewart recruited A. C. Dixon, pastor of the Moody Church in Chicago, to head this project. He suggested that Dixon contact potential authors to produce a "series of articles" to warn "all the Anglo-Saxon Protestant ministers, missionaries and theological students in the world."<sup>7</sup> After 1913, Dixon was succeeded by R. A. Torrey, and then by Louis Meyer. Yet the purpose of the project always remained the same. Christians must be warned about any dangerous forms of liberal Christianity that might undermine the supernatural claims found in the Bible. By 1914 and the beginning of World War I, the Stewart brothers had financed the circulation of over three million copies of *The Fundamentals* at the cost of \$200,000. Thus, this publication gave the Fundamentalist movement its enduring name.<sup>8</sup>

The booklets contained ninety articles from sixty-four different authors. These contributors included "a broad range of conservative

and millenarian scholars, ministers, and laypersons”<sup>9</sup> from America, Britain, and Canada. *The Fundamentals* addressed three main themes. Approximately one-third of the articles dealt with the inspiration of Scripture and generally endorsed a view of infallibility and verbal inerrancy, at least of the original autographs. (This view stood in contrast to Ellen White’s endorsement of thought inspiration as opposed to verbal dictation.) Another third dealt with traditional theological pillars, including the Trinity, sin, and salvation. The last third of the articles contained personal testimonies, attacks against competing, aberrant forms of Christianity (such as Mormonism and Roman Catholicism), the relationship between science and religion, and general appeals for support of missions and evangelism. Altogether, these articles show that although the emerging Fundamentalist movement did not have a clearly defined set of beliefs, its adherents knew what it was against: anyone and anything that might challenge the divine authority of Scripture.

It is difficult to assess the impact of *The Fundamentals*. One historian, Ernest R. Sandeen, argues that these booklets had “little impact upon biblical studies.”<sup>10</sup> Despite the media blitz, it seems that the average Christian layperson still remained largely unaware of historical criticism of the Bible, which remained primarily in the purview of scholars, or at least of those who paid attention to scholarly works. Yet for Fundamentalists, such concerns became “the origin of their crusade.”<sup>11</sup> For some lay people, *The Fundamentals* sensitized them that such debates about the critical study of the Bible existed. Furthermore, these publications helped coalesce such concerns into an emerging movement.

In the same way that Seventh-day Adventists noticed, and even attended, the prophetic conferences, Adventist thought leaders also took notice of the publication of *The Fundamentals*. One of the first persons to notice these publications was Stephen N. Haskell, a veteran Adventist minister, who had become embattled in several controversies within the Seventh-day Adventist Church during the early twentieth century. Haskell viewed himself as a stalwart defender of the prophetic writings of Ellen G. White, even going so far as to



argue that they were an infallible lens for interpreting the Bible and that her writings were infallible and inerrant.

Thus, Haskell grew concerned when some people tampered with, or revised her writings. Of special concern to him were those historians who proposed changes to the 1911 edition of Ellen G. White's *The Great Controversy*, the story of church history from the close of the apostolic era through end-time events. Haskell resonated with articles in *The Fundamentals* regarding inerrancy that he saw as being in harmony with his own views of inspiration.<sup>12</sup>

By and large, however *The Fundamentals* did not receive widespread attention within Seventh-day Adventism. W. W. Prescott, one of the most visible persons at the 1919 Bible Conference, referenced these booklets in the published version of his presentations. Some church periodicals also carried advertisements for *The Fundamentals*. Within Adventism, at least for those who were paying attention, this was a wake-up call that times were changing. Adventists in general resonated with the same kinds of concerns that they saw published in *The Fundamentals*.<sup>13</sup>

### **Uncertain times**

In addition to the prophetic conferences and the publication of *The Fundamentals*, there was much evidence that life was uncertain in the 1910s. Most significant of all was World War I, the dominant event of this time period, although it did not directly affect the United States until 1917. But once America was in the war, Adventists were affected in several important ways. Evangelists cited the conflict as proof of Christ's impending return, but the war also had an impact on the church in more tangible ways. Church leaders were once again confronted with the problem of military service. Overseas missionaries were cut off as communication and even finances slowed to a trickle or even ceased completely at times. Tragically, English missionary Homer R. Salisbury perished when the ship he was sailing on was sunk by a submarine in the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>14</sup> Some Adventists brought into question their loyalty to a country—the United States—that was identified eschatologically as the lamblike beast that becomes oppressive

as described in Revelation 13. Adventists were cognizant that the end could be near as new discussions about Sunday laws were brought up in some areas.<sup>15</sup>

It is not surprising, therefore, that as tensions about war increased, Adventists saw the emerging conflict as a fulfillment of prophecy. Just how significant this event was considered to be varied among Adventist interpreters. Traditional interpretations, most notably that of Uriah Smith in his landmark book *Thoughts on Daniel and The Revelation*, published and republished in numerous editions from 1865 onward, argued that a final battle would take place between the king of the north (which Smith identified as Turkey) versus the king of the south (identified as Egypt).<sup>16</sup> Smith believed Turkey would be propped up until “he shall come to his end” (Daniel 11:45). This would mark the beginning of Armageddon. Adventist expositors referred to this as the “Eastern Question” in discussions of the fate of the Ottoman Empire, or Turkey. When Turkey suffered defeats in 1912 and 1913 from the armies of the Balkan League, Adventists drew upon Daniel 11 and Revelation 16 to predict that the Turks would be driven from Europe and temporarily relocate to Jerusalem, and then the “great time of trouble” would usher in the end.<sup>17</sup>

Adventists used the uncertainty generated by the war as an opportunity for evangelism. The *Review and Herald* printed a *War Extra* that sold fifty thousand copies per day during its first week of publication, and then followed it with a bonus *Eastern Question Extra*. Both eventually sold well over a million copies. Despite cautions by church leaders in the *Review and Herald* not to sensationalize the war by jumping too quickly to conclusions about the fulfillment of prophecy, many Adventists echoed Percy T. Magan’s assertion that the words *Mene, Mene* were “written across the lintel of the Turkish house.”<sup>18</sup>

Adventist historian Gary Land, in his analysis of this conflict, concluded that Adventist predictions were supplanted by rapidly changing events; for example, Adventists could not explain the British victory over the Turks at Jerusalem on December 9, 1917. Although Adventists maintained a “general expectation of impending disaster,”

the fact that so many Adventist expositors had jumped the gun and now were wrong showed that earlier cautions by church leaders were justified. Over the next couple of years, “Adventist interest in Turkey,” adds Land, “continued to flicker” as a few diehards still urged that “Turkey’s end was very near.”<sup>19</sup>

World War I affected Seventh-day Adventists in other ways beyond their interpretation of prophecy. Adventists in Europe were split on the issue of military service. The widespread devastation affected the church broadly as members on both sides of the Atlantic focused their efforts on humanitarian relief. Adventists were encouraged to donate to the American Red Cross, and after the war, denominational relief efforts took more tangible shape, resulting in the Church organizing an Adventist relief agency of its own. Today, the organization is known as the Adventist Development and Relief Agency.

### **Perspective**

Some Seventh-day Adventists during the time just before and during World War I (1914–1918) were flirting with Fundamentalism, including its somewhat rigid views of biblical inspiration. The war heightened eschatological expectations as Adventists saw in it the fulfillment of Bible prophecy. At the same time, they were envious of the success of their conservative Protestant Christians who garnered increasingly large crowds as they called the attention of the public to the soon return of Jesus. Adventist leaders attended these gatherings and reported on them with enthusiasm in church periodicals. They noted minor theological differences, but they downplayed these and emphasized, instead, similarities and the significance of these events for Christian history. Likewise, although not quite so effusively, Adventist thought leaders noticed, and promoted, the publication of *The Fundamentals*—the main catalyst behind these publications’ namesake movement. The concerns of the Fundamentalists resonated with Adventists, at least those who paid attention to what was going on around them as society changed and new, liberal forms of modernist Christianity invaded the classroom.

1. Report of Bible Conference, July 1, 1919, 11, 12.
2. Donald W. Dayton, "Introduction," in *The Prophecy Conference Movement*, ed. Donald W. Dayton, vol. 1, *Fundamentalism in American Religion, 1880–1950* (New York: Garland, 1988).
3. Lee S. Wheeler, "A Deepening Conviction: Prominent Men of Many Persuasions Earnestly Proclaim the Doctrine—The Events of the Time Compel Serious Reflection," *Signs of the Times*, June 1, 1915, 337, 338.
4. Leon L. Caviness, "The Prophetic Conference, New York City," *Review and Herald*, December 12, 1918, 1, 2.
5. Charles T. Emerson, "The Prophetic Conference," *The Watchman Magazine*, March 23, 1919, 29–30.
6. For background on this discussion, see Lyman Stewart to L. H. Severance, June 8, 1909, BIOLA University Archives and Special Collections, Letter notebook #1, 121–123.
7. Lyman Stewart to Charles C. Cook, February 28, 1910, BIOLA University Archives and Special Collections, Letter notebook #3, 127.
8. For an overview of this, see George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 119.
9. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 119.
10. Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism 1800–1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 188–207.
11. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 118–123.
12. For a discussion of Haskell and his view of inspiration, see Denis Kaiser, "Trust and Doubt: Perceptions of Divine Inspiration in Seventh-day Adventist History (1880–1930)" (PhD diss., Andrews University, 2016), 301–323.
13. See Kaiser, "Trust and Doubt," 310–312.
14. For details on the story, see Koberson Langhu, "The Origin and Development of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in India (1895–1947)" (PhD diss., Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, 2017), 155, 156.
15. For a discussion, see Michael W. Campbell, "The 1919 Bible Conference and Its Significance for Seventh-day Adventist History and Theology" (PhD diss., Andrews University, 2008), 23, 24.
16. See Uriah Smith, *Daniel and The Revelation* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald®, 1897), 203–318.
17. For a helpful background, see Gary Land, "The Perils of Prophecy: Seventh-day Adventists Interpret World War One," *Adventist Heritage* 1, no. 1 (January 1974): 28–33, 55, 56.
18. Percy T. Magan, *The Vatican and the War; A Retrospect and Forecast: Being a Review of the Past Attitudes of the Vatican Towards Civil and Religious Government, and an Analysis of Her Latest Utterances Upon These Matters as Related to the European War* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1915); See also, F. M. Wilcox, "A Time to Pray," *Review and Herald*, August 13, 1914, 6.
19. Land, "Seventh-day Adventists Interpret World War One," 33, 55, 56.