

Lecture 5

REBELS – John Darby, Joseph Smith, John Brown

Intro: Now we move into aspects of American fundamentalism that begin to bring in a lot of content. Previously I dealt with form mainly – how do fundamentalists think – and a bit of content. This was also an exercise in the history of ideas, trying to get a feel of the national temper, culture, attitudes and where they come from.. Where, for example, does racism come from? Where does capitalism come from? There are not clear answers to these questions, but you can show a lot of the background, and that's what I tried to do with American fundamentalism up to now. Now to specifics:

John Nelson Darby (1800-1882) was born in England and was the leader of a branch of the Plymouth Brethren. He traveled extensively in the US and Canada. Prominent in his thought was DISPENSATIONALIST PREMILLENNIALISM which has influenced fundamentalism profoundly. Roughly speaking, the dispensationalists interpreted the Bible as teaching that all history was divided into a series of periods or dispensations soon to climax in the Second Coming of Christ and the promised Millennium. Many famous evangelists and preachers found this approach congenial, and supportive of their belief in an inerrant Bible. The Book of Revelation was central and taken literally.

Darby divided up history into seven dispensations. They are:

1. **Innocence** [Gen 1.26-3.24]. This is from humanity's creation to fall.
2. **Conscience** [Gen 4.1- 7.24]. Approach God by blood sacrifice
3. **Human Government** [Gen 8.1 – 11.26]. Gov. in addition to conscience.
4. **Promise** [Gen 11.27 – Ex 18]. Abe to Sinai
5. **Law** [Ex 19.1 – Acts 1.26]. 613 commands
6. **Grace** [Acts 2.1 – Rev 19.21]. Christ and the Church. Great Commission.

7. **Kingdom** [Rev 20. 1-6]. The 7th and final dispensation will begin after Christ's Second Coming, and ends prior to Satan's release and final revolt. Since the promises to Israel will be fulfilled during this time, and Christ will reign personally, we may assume that only conscience as a governing principle from the past still applies. The primary principle of rule, however, will be the personal, righteous reign of Christ Himself from the throne of David.'

Each dispensation ended when human beings became so wicked that God was forced to punish them. Other dispensations ended with the Fall, the Flood, the Crucifixion. We are now living in the sixth, or penultimate, dispensation which is pretty close. Armstrong:

God would shortly bring to an end in an unprecedentedly [sic] terrible disaster. Antichrist, the false redeemer whose coming before the End had been predicted by St Paul, would deceive the world with his false allure, take everybody in, and then inflict a period of Tribulation upon humanity. For 7 years, Antichrist would wage war, massacre untold numbers of people, and persecute all opposition, but eventually Christ would descend to earth, defeat Antichrist, engage in a final battle with Satan and the force of evil on the plain of Armageddon outside Jerusalem, and inaugurate the Seventh Dispensation. He would rule for a thousand years, before the last Judgment brought history to a close.¹ Jews would come back to Israel as part of the divine plan.

The notion comes from a reading of St Paul, who said at the time of Christ's Second Coming that believers would be 'taken up in the clouds ... to meet the Lord in the air.'²

¹ Armstrong, Karen; *The Battle for God*; p 138

² I Thessalonians 4.16

There was a popular picture found in the homes of many Protestant fundamentalists today shows a man cutting the grass outside his house, gazing in astonishment as his born-again wife is raptured out of an upstairs window. So you'd better keep an eye peeled while gardening. 'Better watch out; better not cry; better be good I'm telling you why; Jesus Christ is coming to town.' He is going to sort out those who are naughty and nice. Binary. There were other antecedents to Darby. English Millennialism was rife in the first half of the 19th century. Edward Irving, a Scottish preacher in London who had the ear of the posh – tall, large hair, striking features crowned with a mass of black hair, but a squint. He sent the ladies swooning. The gift of tongues started in his church in 1831. Benjamin Wills Newton was a major figure here in Oxford. He was a student and fellow of Exeter College especially influenced by Henry B Bulteel, former fellow of Exeter and curate of St Ebbe's. Bulteel preached a University Sermon on Feb 6, 1831 which shocked Oxford by the vigor of its denunciations. He soon left for Plymouth. Life was tough.

This idea is different from **POSTMILLENNIALISM**. That was a belief for some of the 17th century founders of New England et al that God was making life and us better and better and Christ would return to reign over his Kingdom. There was an optimism that went up to the First World War that said life was getting more perfect, and that the combined efforts of good people were bringing an 'end to history.' Democracy, capitalism, good manners and morals, self-control, end of wars were on their way.

F D Maurice, major pioneer of the "social gospel", said in 1843: "the revival of it [the doctrine of the millennium] in our day has been one great means of removing the clouds which had hindered us from looking at Christ's church as a Kingdom, and from connecting all individual blessings and rewards with its existence and its establishment in that character. The wretched notion of a private selfish Heaven, where compensation shall be made for troubles

incurred, and prizes given for duties performed in this lower sphere – this unnatural notion, clothing itself in the language of Scripture ... but severing that language from the idea with which it was always impregnated, and connecting it with our low, groveling, mercantile habits of feeling, had infused itself into our popular teachings and our theological books.³

Others said that instead of a society on a steady course of betterment, they saw a society careening toward judgment. Increasingly pushed to the margins of American society, evangelicals – many of whom became fundamentalists after the turn of the century – began to espouse a theology that looked toward the imminent return of Christ to claim his followers and prosecute his judgment against a sinful nation and world.

Dwight L Moody said in 1877, echoing many before him, that

I don't find any place [in the Bible] where God says the world is to grow better and better, and that Christ is to have a spiritual reign on earth of a thousand years. I find that the earth is to grow worse and worse, and that at length there is going to be a separation.

The Hon. And Rev. Samuel Waldegrave, later Bishop of Carlisle, delivered the Bampton Lectures here in 1854 on the general subject of millenarianism. After one of the most comprehensive and learned reviews of the history of the doctrine, he came out in favor of a qualified millennialist view. Papal Rome is certainly the mystical Babylon, and although its fall has not yet truly taken place, it is shortly to be expected. There will be a progressive defeat of Satan. 'Even now the trumpet is sounding.' The heightening intensity of the struggle for the world 'may bring together the hosts of evil in once concentrated effort to crust the nation, whatever that nation be, which keepeth the truth.' Within a few years many Americans came to believe that such a thing happened when the

³ Maurice, *The Kingdom of Christ*, 2d ed, 1843, p 511

slave states rebelled and their support from abroad would seem to be the great effort to crush the nation that kept the truth as none other.⁴

Joseph Smith [1805-1844] was the founder of largest branch of the Church of the Latter Day Saints, commonly known as Mormons. He discovered golden plates in upper New York State that he said were hidden in the earth for more than fourteen centuries. In 1830 they were published as *The Book of Mormon*. Among other things, these writings claimed that Christ also visited the Western Hemisphere and Indians were the remnant of the House of Israel. There is much about the Hebrew Scriptures and Mormons had a close identification and amalgamating with the story of Israel. Along with the New Testament the Book of Mormon was considered a ‘second witness to Christ.’ The coming forth of a seer who ‘shall be like unto Moses’ was predicted in the texts. Smith as the new Moses gathered many followers to restore the house of Israel. Many were recruited from Britain. A settlement was founded in Ohio at Kirtland, east of Cleveland. The Aaronic and Levitical priesthoods were restored. The Prophet and his Second Elder were secretly visited by Moses, Elijah, and Elias who committed into their hands the keys to the gathering of Israel, recalling the Transfiguration of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels. Actually, Smith went one prophet better than Jesus with Elias there as well. Their community model was taken from the Old Testament. Patriarchal government was used for organizing their life together, and the later practice of plural wives also echoed the early biblical period.

⁴ Tuveson, p 70-1

There is an especially strong link with Moses and the Commandments and with Jesus and his messianic role. Both Christianity and Mormonism rest firmly on claims that they have fulfilled the Hebrew prophecy. In Christianity the miraculous circumstances at the time of Jesus' birth parallel the birth of Moses and Samuel. Jesus was carried to Egypt, so that 'out of Egypt I have called my son.' John the Baptist, who was an Elijah figure at the place in the Jordan where Joshua crossed to the Promised Land, baptized Jesus. Jesus had 40 days tempted in the wilderness similar to the 40 years of Israel. Jesus had 12 disciples as Israel had the 12 tribes. He gave the law in the Sermon on the Mount, similar to Moses at Sinai. The Last Supper was based on either a Passover meal or something very similar. For the Mormons the journey to the Promised Land is reenacted as it was before for Christians:

The gathering of the people of God has been a subject of great importance in all the ages of the world [and the miraculous deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage is comparable to us]. Now it appears that we live in a time in which the Lord is going to gather his people, to that land that was promised to Joseph and his seed [America] which is a choice land above all lands ... to deliver his people from the troubles that are coming upon the earth ... and that they build a sanctuary to the name of the Most High.⁵

As in Islam we see an extension of Judaism and Christianity, so too in Mormonism we have something similar in form if not content. As Jesus was the new Moses for his time, so Smith was for his. There would be a recapitulation of the key events of the exodus. This would be borne out by the coming events that forced the Mormons out and away.

As time went on the persecutions became even greater. The people began to move west. By the time they had settled in Nauvoo, Illinois they found much to their dismay

⁵ Flanders, Robert Bruce; *Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi*, Univ. of Illinois Press, 1975, p 70

that the people around them and the State of Illinois wanted them out. They built a Solomon style Temple but were bothered by people from Western Missouri that they called ‘western Egypt.’ The level of persecution was increased and eventually Joseph Smith was killed along with his brother. Under the leadership of Brigham Young some moved at great loss of property and funds taking the long and grueling trail to Utah. Many crossed the Mississippi on ice, a gift from God they claimed as was the Red Sea parting for the Hebrews. Some also found miracles in which quail and a manna-like substance were found on the way that kept them from perishing.

Many who were in Utah did not want them there and there were raids on the community. Some had to hide in the mountains; some went to Mexico or Canada. By forswearing plural marriage they were allowed to return. Thus in these ways the parallels to Israel in its formative years took place again, and these similarities were not lost on the Saints.⁶

There was a strong millennial strain within the Mormon movement, and Smith had to restrain his followers from getting involved from Wm. Miller’s predictions in 1843⁷.

Smith said he heard a voice saying “Joseph, my son, if thou livest until thou are 85, thou shalt see the face of the Son of Man; therefore let this suffice, and trouble me no more on this matter. They believed in the

‘literal gathering of Israel and the restoration of the Ten Tribes; that Zion will be build upon this [North American] continent; that Christ will reign personally upon the earth; and that the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory.’⁸

Some ‘narrow minded mortals’ have erroneously concluded that the

⁶ Cf. Jan Shipps, *Mormonism – the Story of a New Religious Tradition*, Univ. of Illinois Press, 1987, chapter 3

⁷ William Miller, Low Hampton, NY – converted in 1816. Most famous millenarian in US. Eventually became Seventh Day Adventist Church movement

⁸ Articles of Faith of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

Atlantic shore was to be the permanent seat of empire, but no, it will be in the mid-west. A **theocracy** will be formed. Joseph Smith announced for President in 1844. He died, but the mid-west (Texas) has certainly become the seat of Empire! Utah was undefeated in college football this year [2004]. What more proof do you need?

John Brown (1800-1859); *Murals of John Brown & George W Bush*

Driving across America last summer my wife and I stopped in the Topeka, Kansas to see the mural of John Brown in the State Capitol. It is well known to any devotee of the Civil War, and is on some book covers about the former tanner turned liberator. It is a massive, imposing creation just outside the governor's office that she sees every day in her comings and goings. A number of tourists were there at 9 am on the day we looked.

The mural has a strapping feel about it. It shows a leathery John Brown as a freedom fighter with a rifle in one hand and a Bible in the other, his white beard flowing and hair on end, eyes bursting, yelling orders, wildly stretching out his arms while leading his troops into battle against the slaveholders. There is a hint of crucifixion with his arms so wide and his hands are marked with blood. It shows soldiers living and dead from opposing sides facing each other. There is a tornado and prairie fire in the background, along with Conestoga wagons going toward the West. Slaves huddle under his mammoth figure. Brown moved out to Kansas, a free state, to stop the raids by the Missouri slavers. It was of many places he lived with his large family in order to wrestle the evil doers. One of his sons referred to him as 'Moses' and when I show a copy of the mural to friends they often say that as well. Moses too led the people out of slavery into freedom,

using force and the word of the Lord as the means and inspiration. As William Lloyd Garrison said, Brown is like Jesus trying “to give deliverance to the captives and to let the oppressed go free” – the Jubilee year of the Lord’s favor.

But the mural shows a fire in his eyes that borders on madness. Both Abraham Lincoln and the African-America leader Frederick Douglass were against Brown’s last adventure – the attack on Harper’s Ferry in 1859. With a dozen or so followers, Brown raided that arsenal in the firm belief that the slaves would rise up with him, welcome him as a deliverer, and join in the battle for freedom. That didn’t happen. His flock was defeated, his son was killed, and he was wounded but stood trial – or more accurately lay down during the trial because of his wounds – and subsequently was sentenced to be hanged. Eerily, the soldiers commanding the Virginia contingent that finally subdued them were Robert E Lee along with JEB Stuart. There was no uprising. Brown died with the words, “If it is deemed necessary that I should forfeit my life for the furtherance of the end of justice, and mingle my blood further with the blood of my children and with the blood of millions in this slave country whose rights are disregarded by wicked, cruel, and unjust enactments, I say, let it be done.”

I get a hint of this attitude in the current American administration. The Mosaic ideal is not just the Ten Commandments in courtrooms; its basic theme is freeing the oppressed. This is a sentiment very much blooming in our collective self-understanding. As Moses parted the Red Sea, we tracked Winthrop, Washington, Lincoln, Teddy, Wilson, FDR, JFK, Reagan, Clinton, and the Bushes. Freeing people from oppression is what we think we are good at, and the old isolationism has long gone. Security is the

main cause of this war, but the devotion of the troops and politicians to liberation is high on the slope. Notably one general said about the moon, “Too bad nobody’s there to free up.”

But we also have the same problem as John Brown. We too relied on faulty intelligence. The Iraqis didn’t hail us with cheers and flowers, just as the slaves didn’t follow Brown. Maybe it is hard to unshackle people who aren’t so sure of the motives and the manners of the liberators. But we might argue that the Southern slaves and the Iraqis couldn’t have done it by themselves. They tried a few times, with no success whatever. Would we have gone into Iraq knowing we would not be received by a zealous contingent of the people? I suspect, like John Brown, we would have pursued it because it was a principled cause. In Mosaic missionary thinking and in the religious fervor that dominates the nation at present, the end justifies the means.

Just outside of Topeka there is a small village where we spent the night. Looking up the church directory, I spotted one called “Beecher Bible and Gun Church.” Having thought the NRA got a big toe-hold in Kansas, I inquired about it. “No,” I was told by a knowledgeable woman in the town, “that is named after the abolitionist Rev Henry Ward Beecher of Brooklyn who sent some Sharp’s rifles to Brown in boxes marked ‘Bibles.’” The guns were nicknamed ‘Beecher’s Bibles.’

When I asked my American students who Brown looked like, some said Charlton Heston. There is a similarity holding his gun reciting to the NRA ‘from my cold, dead hands’ and those who know the film 10 Commandments will remember Heston as Moses at the end of his life with a beard like that, mimicking Michaelangelo’s Moses in St Peter in Chains Church in Rome. But he also looks like Moses, and Brown’s son called him

that. So we see a Bible in one hand and rifle in another. That is aggressive fundamentalism for you.

Many in Kansas deem Brown a true Right-Winger. As one proudly proclaimed, “If John Brown lived today, he’d be considered a right-wing religious fanatic. He’d be considered one of us today.’ [Brown 183] That shows how the eyes of the mind work.

Is this the Jubilee Year for Iraq, and with it the spread of democracy in the Middle East which will help solve the Israel/Palestine problem as well? That is certainly the dream of the Bushies, and they want to keep the American people on board with this picture. In West Texas future generations indeed may see a ‘Bush Bible and Missile Church’. Capitol murals may forgo the big ears and portray the bulging eyes of the true believer.

Some hymns often used by fundamentalists that show various aspects of theology:

Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so. *Use of Bible*

He’s got the whole world in his hands. *Sovereignty of God*

Trust and obey, there is no other way. *Binary?*

Onward Christian Soldiers marching as to war. *War song of Ft Knox, KY et al*

Let Jesus fix it for you, he knows just what to do. *{cf. southern black prayer ...}*

The Old Rugged Cross – *hymns of redemption*

There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel’s veins; and sinners, plunged beneath that flood, lose all their guilty stains.

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine ... Heir of salvation, purchase of God.

I'm just a poor wayfaring stranger traveling through this world of woe ... I'm just a going over Jordan; I'm just a going over home. {*'Jordan' as major theme*}

We're marching to Zion ... the beautiful city of God {*Doubtless the heavenly Zion, but easy to transfer to Israel*}

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine

Battle Hymn of the Republic

By far the most famous hymn of the period is Julia Ward Howe's *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*, first published in February, 1862. It sets out the mission of the Civil War from the North's perspective, and has been used subsequently by the USA on many occasions to understand and to celebrate itself, giving a solemn biblical underpinning to America's many efforts. It has Anglo-Saxon appeal as well, being used at the funerals of Prime Ministers Winston Churchill and Harold Macmillan. Both had Yankee mothers.

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord:
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;
He hath loosed the fateful lightening of his terrible swift sword;
His truth is marching on.

I have seen Him in the watch-fires of a hundred circling camps;
They have builded Him an alter in the evening dews and damps;
I can read His righteous sentence by the dim and flaring lamps;
His day is marching on.

I have read a fiery gospel writ in burnished rows of steel:
As ye deal with my contemners, so with you my grace shall deal;
Let the Hero, born of woman, crush the serpent with his heel,
Since God is marching on.

He has sounded for the trumpet that shall never call retreat;
He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment seat:
Oh, be swift, my soul, to answer him! Be jubilant, my feet!
Our god is marching on.

In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,
With a glory in his bosom that transfigures you and me:
As he died to make men holy, let us die to make men free,
While God is marching on.

Glory, Halleluiah.

There are biblical references mainly from the Book of Revelation, and Tuveson points them out on p 200 ff. It is an apocalyptic hymn with overtones of freeing the slaves but also manifest destiny [lecture 8].

Moby Dick

Another interesting feature of binary thinking, universalized gospel, obsession with time, and intolerance of dissent is found in the greatest of the 19th century American novels by Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. There is a lot in common to today's government too.

- The ideological background to the New England settlement in the 17th century was Puritanism, developed in England over a couple of centuries and finding its supreme expression during the English revolution under Cromwell. Many Americans who came to New England, and some to other colonies, expressed themselves within this framework. A rough summary is:
 - strong focus on God and the mission of individual and national purity, democracy, small national government, strict control of rules in community, anti-establishment, revolutionary, covenantal, ethnic cleansing, military action, liberation of self and other nations, sin & forgiveness, individual responsibility, visions of heaven and hell.
- *Moby Dick* is an expression of this. Captain Ahab, watched by the narrator Ishmael, pursues the white whale with unswerving dedication and ruthlessness. It is partly vengeance, but also the whale can be interpreted as a metaphor for evil. It is a total clash, with the whale just as dedicated to destroying Ahab as he is the whale.

‘The White Whale swam before him [Ahab] as the monomaniac incarnation of all those malicious agencies which some deep men feel eating in them, till they are left living on with half a heart and half a lung ... All that most maddens and torments; all that stirs up the lees of things; all truth with malice in it ... all evil, to crazy Ahab, were visibly personified, and made practically assailable in Moby Dick.’

The 9/11 Commission plainly recognized [Richard] Clarke’s kinship with Melville’s Captain: ‘Clarke hoped that the August 1998 missile strikes would mark the beginning of a sustained campaign against Bin Ladin. Clarke was, as he later admitted, “obsessed” with Bin Ladin, and the embassy bombings gave him new scope for pursuing his obsession. Terrorism had moved high up among the President’s concerns, and Clarke’s position had elevated accordingly.’⁹

- The biblical Ishmael and his mother Hagar were ejected from the family of Abraham because of Sarah’s jealousy and Abraham’s weak character. Radical Islam has stressed their congruence with this story and the humiliation they have felt from the Christian West. This is partly the reason for 9/11. Al-Qaeda vows to destroy America and all it represents, which they feel is opposite to true religion and justice.
- The Bush Administration has puritan roots not only with President Bush’s morality but with its unmitigated dedication to destroy Al-Qaeda and any other form of radical Islam that threatens America. There is little attempt to convey the ideological battle lines, but behind

⁹ Rabin, Jonathan; *The Truth About Terrorism*; NY Review of Books, January 13, 2005, p 22ff.

America's actions are deep rooted semi-religious reasons that have informed the American Dream of freedom, equality, and peace¹⁰.

- Will this be our vision of heaven and hell? Does America have any way of critiquing this mortal battle? It is crucial to see Islam as an equal theologically and start the repairs on a long and sad history of humiliations. Let the dialogue begin.

¹⁰ I am using 'peace' in the biblical sense of 'shalom' and Koranic meaning of 'salaam' which means success, health, victory, absence of conflict, and general well-being of oneself, one's family, and society. So to offer a person 'peace' is to hope and work for all those things.

Partial Reading List

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