

Article

From Social Reform to Fundamentalism: The Career of Arthur T. Pierson

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Abstract

Arthur T. Pierson (1837–1911) was a noted Presbyterian pastor, writer, and advocate of world missions. His career spanned a turbulent era in American Presbyterianism which was reflective of the growing challenges faced by Protestant denominations and illustrates one path some Presbyterians took over the last decades of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. Born into the antebellum northern evangelical world of the Second Great Awakening and its support of social reform, Pierson, by his death, had become a prominent voice for various doctrines that would coalesce into fundamentalism of the 1920s.

Keywords: Arthur T. Pierson; Presbyterian Church; *The Fundamentals*; social reform; evangelicalism; fundamentalism; premillennialism; holiness

1. Introduction

In 1888, Arthur Tappan Pierson resigned as pastor of Philadelphia's Bethany Presbyterian Church after serving there for not quite five years. His established reputation as a preacher and writer continued to grow while at Bethany, and he increasingly came to focus his efforts on promoting world missions. The demand for him as a speaker and his growing conviction of the necessity of evangelizing the world conflicted with his sense of obligation to the pastoral duties of one of the largest Presbyterian churches in the United States. In a letter to the session, he explained, "I feel called to a particular service, to the cause of missions through my tongue and pen, which might be consistent with continued occupancy of this pulpit, but would not be consistent with the pastoral charge of this congregation." With great reluctance, the session eventually accepted his resignation and affirmed its "great interest in foreign missions" and a desire "to seek some relation to him that we may share in his work" ([Bethany Presbyterian Church 1888](#)). Though he did serve as preaching supply to several notable congregations, not again in the remaining 23 years of his ministry did he hold the full-time responsibilities of a pastor. This step marked a significant turning point in Pierson's career, one that took him further away from his familial roots in the Presbyterian Church and antebellum evangelical social reform and moved him toward the emerging theological movements and networks that would coalesce as fundamentalism in the twentieth century.

2. Background and Scholarship

Pierson is one of the more important figures of this era, and until recently, one of the more overlooked. He is rarely, if ever, mentioned in standard histories of American religion ([Corrigan and Hudson 2004](#); [Gaustad and Schmidt 2009](#)) while others mention him in passing as a participant in the late nineteenth century emergence of a conservative Protestant



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reaction to social and theological trends (Ahlstrom 2004, pp. 806–7) or his advocacy of missions (Noll 2019, p. 631). In “A Critical Period in American Religion, 1875–1900”, Arthur Schlesinger, Sr., argued that American Protestantism faced two challenges: one to its system of thought from without in evolution which threatened the belief in a divine creation and from within in higher criticism of the Bible which undermined the inspiration of the Bible and the other to its role in an industrializing and diversifying society (Schlesinger 1930, pp. 524–7, 531–8). Following Schlesinger’s analysis, early scholarship on this era paid more attention to the challenges Protestant America faced from urbanization and immigration and to new solutions like the Social Gospel (Abell 1943; Hopkins 1940; Hutchison 1976). These authors largely ignore or downplay the activities of more conservative Protestants, but more recent work suggests a more complicated picture: they were not “the frozen foundation of complacency”, as Hopkins charged (Hopkins 1940, p. 14). For example, Grant Wacker suggested that the proponents of more liberal theology and the conservative promoters of new interpretations of holiness doctrines were “biological twins” who, though expressed in different terms, demonstrated a common understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit in believers’ lives and the work of the Spirit in human history (Wacker 1985, pp. 49, 54–59). Gary Scott Smith surveyed the various programs and pronouncements of conservative Calvinist denominations to demonstrate their efforts to address the problems of the United States at the turn of the twentieth century (Gary Smith 1984). Norris Magnuson highlighted the work of the nondenominational Salvation Army and the newly organized Christian and Missionary Alliance in providing social services to the poor in cities (Magnuson 1977). In this scholarship, Pierson received some notice as well as in the increasingly sophisticated analysis of the networks and theological developments which shaped the emergence of Protestant fundamentalism in the 1920s (Marsden 1980; Sutton 2014). Dana Robert’s biography is the most important contribution to restoring Pierson to a place of prominence in American religious history, particularly in detailing his contribution to Christian missions (Robert 2003).

Pierson’s career spanned the time from the Civil War to the eve of World War I and represented one track some Presbyterians followed from antebellum social reform to fundamentalism. Moreover, he was a prolific writer and tireless itinerant preacher who promoted and popularized a variety of doctrines like premillennialism and the holiness teachings of the Keswick movement. But his most significant contribution was in championing the world missionary enterprise. Through convening conferences, editing a missionary journal, taking preaching tours, writing biographies of noted missionaries and books on missions, and, most importantly, being the “father figure to the... student missionary movement”, Pierson played a key role in the expansion of Christianity at the turn of the twentieth century (Robert 2003, p. 147). The argument of this essay is not that Pierson was typical of Protestants in general or Presbyterians in particular but that he was representative of the path that some clergy and laity took them from a broad vision of bettering society and its institutions, albeit within a specific Christian framework, to one that focused defensively on a particular expression Christian doctrine and a program of moral change through personal conversion.

3. Early Life in the World of Northern Antebellum Social Reform

Born in 1837 to Stephen and Sallie Pierson of New York City, the youngest son and the ninth of ten children, Pierson was named after his father’s employer, Arthur Tappan, a successful merchant and radical evangelical anti-slavery advocate (Tappan 1870; Wyatt-Brown 1969). More than name, though, linked Pierson to the social reform and theological ferment of the Second Great Awakening. Timothy Smith’s seminal *Revivalism and Social Reform* forcefully made the case that certain segments of antebellum Protestant evangelicalism

played a key role in supporting a variety of reform causes in the northern states (Timothy Smith 1957). A debate over the doctrinal innovations and revivalist practices associated with Charles Finney and the Second Great Awakening led to a schism in the Presbyterian Church in 1837, with Old School adherents rejecting Finney's challenges to Presbyterian orthodoxy and New Schoolers supporting him and his conviction that Christian commitment required engagement in social change (Moorhead 2012, chap. 5). Stephen was an elder in New York's Thirteenth Street Presbyterian Church, a church which sided with the New School faction to form the Third Presbytery, a group of congregations that experimented with abolishing pew rents to encourage the poor to join, supported a variety of reform causes like abolition and temperance, preached an experiential gospel emphasizing conversion and service, and maintained a strong commitment to personal morality and familial piety. This engagement with reform was born, in part, out of a postmillennial belief that the church had the duty to prepare society for Christ's return by eliminating social evils (Howe 2007, chap. 8; Moorhead 1979). Also, Pierson attended Sunday school at Spring Street Presbyterian Church, a center of the city's abolitionist organizing (Pultz 2018). Perhaps more important in inculcating religious values and knowledge were the morning and evening devotions practiced in the Pierson household. Pierson's interest in missions manifested itself as early as age seven when he joined the church's missionary group for children and was nurtured by the example of his cousin George Thompson, who served as a missionary in Sierra Leone (Robert 2003, pp. 5–10).

4. Conversion

If family devotions and missionary stories marked the start of Pierson's spiritual journey, its continuation moved him out of the social reform milieu of his childhood and away from the Presbyterianism of his upbringing. That transition can be marked by four turning points: his conversion, his participation in the revival of 1857–58, his relationship with George Müller, and a spiritual crisis where he questioned the effectiveness of his pastoral ministry. While the first two were well within New School Presbyterianism, they led Pierson to focus more on the spiritual rather than social dimension of his ministry, and the latter two took Pierson away from his Presbyterian roots to a more interdenominational evangelicalism. Leaving home at age 13 to attend boarding school contributed to his conversion. While there, Pierson attended a revival service in the Methodist church of nearby Tarrytown and was converted. As he recounts it, the real test came when he returned to the dormitory where none of the other boys were Christian, but all had heard of his experience. "How am I to act as a Christian", he wondered, "before the other boys? ... I felt that now or never I must show my colours. If my life were to count I must give some testimony before my schoolmates" (Pierson 1920, p. 32). He chose to kneel and pray by his bed. Though laughed at and hit by pillows, he did not falter and finished his prayers. Pierson excelled in school and eventually graduated from Hamilton College in the burned-over district of upstate New York.

5. Prayer Meeting Revival

He returned to the city to study at Union Theological Seminary, matriculating just as the revival of 1857–58 swept northeastern cities. Hailed at the time as the event of the century, the Businessmen's or Prayer Meeting Revival has subsequently been largely relegated to a footnote in the history of American religion, in part because it lacked a central, charismatic preacher like Charles Finney. The revival began spontaneously in prayer meetings in New York city, where the most notable converts were young men engaged in various businesses. Kathryn Teresa Long (1998) complicates this story by analyzing its spread across the nation, even into the South, showing that far more than

young businessmen were among the converts, and evaluating its impact on church growth. His experiences with those seeking conversion seemed to confirm his decision to become a minister: “I have just begun to realize the true worth of souls and the true secret of living near to Christ. ... I feel I have been baptized with the Holy Spirit and am fully resolved never again to pass a day when I cannot feel at its close that I have done something for my Saviour” (Pierson 1920, p. 66). Graduated from seminary, licensed, and ordained in 1860, Pierson began his ministerial career when he accepted the call to be the pastor of the Congregational Church in Binghamton, New York (Robert 2003, pp. 23–40).

6. Postmillennialist to Premillennialist

In the next twenty years, Pierson served several congregations in New York state before moving to the pulpit of Fort Street Presbyterian Church in Detroit, Michigan. This congregation began meeting in 1849 as the Second Presbyterian Church and then moved in 1855, changing its name to indicate its new location. In the 1850s, Fort Street was known as mansion row as some of the richest Detroiters had their homes there and some of them joined the church, “envision[ing] a Protestant church with a congregation that looked a lot like them” (Fort Street Presbyterian Church n.d.). They constructed a magnificent neo-Gothic sanctuary that became a landmark in the city. In 1869, a few months after Pierson arrived in Detroit, a visitor to the city had this to say about the church and its minister: “In the matter of churches Detroit occupies a high position, the Fort Street Presbyterian (the pastor of which is the Rev. Mr. Pierson—an scholarly and eloquent gentleman) in point of architectural beauty is inferior to none we have ever seen” (A Trip from Montreal to Chicago 1869). That building was destroyed by fire in 1876 with an estimated loss of \$100,000 (In Ruins 1876). As we will see, this incident played a key role in Pierson’s spiritual journey. Fort Street’s presbytery was a part of the New School and, according to its historian, supported the abolition of slavery, temperance, and sabbath observance (McCorkle n.d., pp. 18–20). Given Pierson’s upbringing and experiences in antebellum evangelicalism, he would have been familiar with the inclinations of the congregation, though with a midwestern accent and a wealthier membership.

His theological orientation was not marked by a strict Presbyterian Calvinism. His conversion at a Methodist revival and experience with the Holy Spirit in the Businessman’s Revival were still within the parameters of New School Presbyterianism. Moreover, his tenure at Fort Street and especially the time at Bethany in Philadelphia show that a traditional evangelistic role for the pastor preaching for conversion and nurturing the faith of believers could co-exist alongside a more socially engaged purpose for congregations in their communities. During these years, Pierson experienced two more passages that led him to adopt two theological positions that drew him further from his Presbyterian roots. In becoming a dispensational premillennialist and a holiness advocate, Pierson became a part of the theological streams that would feed into the development of fundamentalism in the twentieth century. In *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, George Marsden identifies evangelism and missions, holiness, premillennialism, and reaffirmation and defense of traditional doctrines like the Bible’s inspiration as the main theological roots of fundamentalism (Marsden 1980, pp. 32–39, 48–55, 72–80, 103–23). Premillennialism is the belief that the Bible teaches that Jesus will return to establish a millennial kingdom on earth. The dispensational version was a restatement formulated by John Nelson Darby and popularized through conferences, itinerant preaching, and, in the twentieth century, the Scofield Reference Bible. Daniel G. Hummel (2023) has the most comprehensive discussion of the historical development of premillennialism and how the dispensational version divided conservative Protestants. It split human history into a series of dispensations in which humanity fails to meet God’s requirements. The current era ends with Christ’s

return and the start of his earthly kingdom. In his biography of his father, Delavan Pierson indicates that Arthur believed the dominant postmillennialism of the antebellum era but became acquainted with dispensational teachings through George Müller, a director of an orphanage in Bristol, England, whom Pierson admired greatly for running it on faith that God would supply the resources to keep it open. Müller convinced Pierson to accept this scheme because Müller carefully took Pierson through the Bible, demonstrating to Pierson's satisfaction that it was the correct interpretation (Pierson 1920, pp. 142–44).

7. Holiness: The Second Blessing

The holiness that Pierson came to preach was not the perfectionism in Wesleyan circles nor was it the Pentecostal variety that developed at the end of the nineteenth century. Rather, it described the Christian life as a struggle against sin but one where victory over sin could be had through a post-conversion surrender of one's life to God and a daily appropriation of the Holy Spirit's power. It, too, spread among American Protestants through Bible conferences, though the main center was in Keswick in the Lake District of England (Bebbington 2000, chap. 4; Marsden 1980, pp. 73–90). In some ways, Pierson's conversion and revival experiences preconditioned him for this teaching, but it was a spiritual crisis over his sense of accomplishment in his career that led him to embracing this teaching.

In this mid-life spiritual crisis, Pierson was in good company. A common theme in the biographies of late nineteenth century evangelical leaders is the way these men experienced a crossroad in their understanding of their ministry. Often this turning point was provoked by seeing the successful work of an evangelist like Dwight Moody in their city, and the result was the realization that their relative contentment with a moderately successful pulpit ministry was inadequate to meet the social and spiritual needs of people in their cities. They recognized their own need for a deeper spiritual commitment and for finding new directions in their ministries, though most maintained a base in a particular church as its pastor. For A. J. Gordon of Boston, it meant developing a training school for layworkers, which became Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (Gordon 1896; Gibson 2001). George Pentecost followed the example of Dwight Moody in conducting city-wide evangelistic campaigns (Headley 1880). A. B. Simpson of New York developed new ways of organizing and financing missionary endeavors through founding the Christian and Missionary Alliance (Thompson 1920).

Pierson's crisis began with a growing frustration that, despite his best efforts, he was unable to reach the poor and working class of Detroit nor was he able to convince his congregation to help him. Despite building Fort Street Presbyterian Church into a noted mid-western congregation and winning renown as a preacher and writer, he came to see his sense of failure as possibly indicating that he was unconverted. Led by Major D. W. Whittle, a Civil War veteran and associate of Dwight Moody, a seven-week evangelistic campaign in 1874 started Pierson's transformation. Inspired by Whittle's simple but effective extemporaneous preaching, Pierson stopped writing his sermons and began delivering them from just an outline. But this style required intense Bible study, and in 1882 he told the Presbyterian Synod of Indiana the realization he had during the preparation of a sermon:

In November, 1875, I discovered that I myself was the principal obstacle to a revival of God's work. I had been preaching the most literary sermons I could produce. God showed me that I was laboring for human applause. I had a magnificent church building and \$35,000 was spent on the interior decoration of that church. Then and there I said to God that I would renounce all the idols of which I had been made conscious if He would only let me do His work. While I was praying for

this blessing the church took fire and in half an hour it was in ashes. We went into the Opera House and I threw aside my elaborate manuscripts and the Holy Ghost came. (Rev. Arthur T. Pierson 1882; cf., Robert 2003, pp. 85–88)

This renewed commitment in turn led him to seeing the church as a vital resource in solving the problems in its community (Pierson 1920, pp. 127–33; Robert 2003, pp. 85–92). Marsden (1980, pp. 80–85) notes the way this holiness teaching was often linked to “power for service.” Usually service meant evangelism and missions, but before 1900, it could also entail social action in addressing the problems of American cities. In the 1870s, the neighborhood around the church began changing with less wealthy residents moving in, and Pierson saw this change as an opportunity to evangelize the newcomers. The move to the Opera House gave Pierson the opportunity to hone his skills at extemporaneous preaching and give his sermons a more evangelistic flavor. A few years after Pierson left Fort Street, noting this shift, the Detroit Free Press commented, “It is evident that Dr. Pierson is determined to adopt the working methods of the Evangelists [like George Pentecost], as all his sympathies that way tend” (Sayings and Doings 1883). Even after the sanctuary was rebuilt, Pierson continued holding Sunday afternoon meetings in the Opera House and served as chair of the committee making arrangements for George Pentecost to conduct revival meetings. These services last over ten weeks, from early January to mid-March 1880 (Pentecost 1880; The Last Meeting 1880). But Pierson saw only limited success in moving the Fort Street members to accept his vision of a church’s role in evangelizing its community.

8. The Turning Point

So, in 1883, when Pierson moved to Philadelphia to serve as pastor of Bethany Presbyterian Church, the church and the man seemed a perfect fit. Founded in the late 1850s and largely through the leadership of its founder John Wanamaker, a dry goods merchant turned department store innovator, Bethany had an creative Sunday school program and a variety of social services to meet the needs of the residents of its neighborhood, programs that came to include medical clinics, nurseries for children of working parents, an employment bureau, and adult education classes among others. (Glass 1990). Thus, Pierson oversaw a church that anticipated the ministries of congregations that in the 1890s came to be called “institutional churches.” In Presbyterian circles, the most famous of these was Labor Temple in New York City. The career of Charles Stelzle, its founder, represents a different track from Pierson that some Protestants took at the turn of the twentieth century. Stelzle followed a very different path to the ministry from Pierson. Born to German immigrant parents in 1869 in New York City, raised in poverty where he began working from age eight, he was self-educated and drawn to religion through the work of Presbyterian J. W. McKittrick in Hope Chapel. Never taking any formal theological training other than a year at the Moody Bible Institute, he was nonetheless ordained in the Presbyterian church and had a genuine evangelical zeal to reach the members of the working class with whom he had grown up (Stelzle 1926). Labor Temple was his vehicle. It had similar programs to Bethany and drew in unskilled immigrant laborers (Nash 1972, pp. 216–17). On the other hand, Bethany’s membership was drawn from skilled blue collar workers like carpenters and brick masons and white collar clerks and salesmen (Glass 1990, pp. 187–88).

During Pierson’s tenure, a variety of social programs were expanded or added, but they seemed more at Wanamaker’s initiative than Pierson’s. For example, in 1888, Wanamaker organized a savings bank in the Sunday School to encourage thrift among the neighborhood’s poor (Glass 1990, pp. 183, 187, 188). Pierson was not disengaged from these social programs—he served as head of the church’s vocational college, where he added courses on religion to the curriculum (Bethany College 1884)—but his contribution had

a narrower focus on evangelism rather than social reform. He continued his emphasis on a strong evangelistic ministry from the pulpit, but he also believed that the church's laypeople should be engaged in evangelizing their community (Pierson 1888, p. 248ff). To this end, Pierson supervised the creation of the Evangelist Band to "train young men for all forms of Christian work, and to engage them in active service for souls." And one place he set them to work was in a revival tent in South Philadelphia, where Bethany's assistant pastor preached during the summers (Pierson 1885, p. 37).

But during the 1880s, Pierson's popularity as a conference speaker and his regard as a writer continued to grow. Furthermore, he began looking beyond his local community to the broader cause of world missions. By 1888, he was convinced that he had to leave the security of a regular pastoral appointment and devote the rest of his career to promoting "the evangelization of the world in one generation." This phrase became the motto of the Student Volunteer Movement, and Pierson denied that he coined it. Robert is correct in suggesting, "Nevertheless, he defined it and popularized it through his speeches and writings" (Robert 2003, p. 151).

9. The Missionary Advocate

Pierson's interest in missions was not new; the seeds were planted in his youth, but it matured while pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Waterford, New York, in the 1860s. The congregation sponsored its own missionary in Thailand, and in 1904, he told the members that "I owe much of my own enthusiasm for missions to my six years in this church" (Pierson 1920, p. 94). Seeing the way they provided for their missionary led Pierson to study the history of missions and make supporting missions a part of his preaching. At Fort Street Church, he regularly delivered sermons promoting missions, reinvigorated the women's prayer meeting for missions while creating similar meeting for men and young people, and encouraged these groups to support financially a specific missionary (Mission Work 1870; Foreign Missions 1874; The Presbyterians 1876; Church Annual 1878; Women's Missions 1883; cf., Pierson 1920, pp. 110–11). While at Bethany, he was quite active in the Presbytery's mission program (Missionary Convention 1883; Home Missions 1884; The Church and the World 1885; Dr. Pierson Reads 1885), but a new sense of exigency began to grip him, particularly that the need demanded greater cooperation among evangelical denominations and independent mission organizations. The result was his first book on missions, and it established him as a major American voice on the issue. Undergirded by a premillennial perspective that the nearness of Christ's return required prompt response, *The Crisis of Missions* (Pierson 1886) was a call to action that dramatically explained the need and morally justified the effort.

Just as he was finishing the book, Dwight Moody invited him to speak in Northfield, Massachusetts, at a conference for college students. Ostensibly invited to lecture about prophecy, Pierson talked about missions as well, and the students asked him to give a special address. By the end of the conference, 100 young men pledged themselves to missions, and two years later, the core of these men formed the Student Volunteer Movement (SVM), perhaps the most significant American Protestant contribution to world missions in the late nineteenth century (Robert 2003, pp. 145–50; Parker 2008, pp. 1–21). Pierson maintained a close association with the movement and seemed to have a unique ability to transfer his passion for missions to a younger generation. For example, in response to one of Pierson's sermons, Robert Speer dedicated his life to Christian service, later, with Pierson's support and encouragement, leading the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church. Speer is an interesting contrast to Pierson, setting aside generational differences, and represents a more mainstream path to Pierson's movement to the theological right. Conservative in theology, but moderate in temperament, he worked

within the institutions of the Presbyterian Church in the USA to further the goals of the SVM. In a sympathetic biography, John Piper described the difference as Speer “never saw himself ... as a nondenominational or interdenominational leader” as Pierson would have been perceived. But Speer “saw himself as a denominational leader who worked to achieve denominational goals in the context of larger cooperative and global ecumenical ones” (Piper 2000, p. 146).

What was different about Pierson’s message in these decades from earlier mission advocates was his conviction that the task of taking the gospel to all nations had to be accomplished in this generation and, more startling, that it could be done. It was this sense of urgency that led him to resign from Bethany’s pulpit and spend the rest of his career spreading this message through preaching, lecture tours, writing, and editing the *Missionary Review of the World*. Along with J. M. Sherwood, Pierson became editor in 1888 and greatly expanded the scope of the publication. He remained editor until his death. During his tenure, the various sections of the *Review* underwent occasional reorganizations, but the intent remained the same: to inspire support of missions, to inform its readers of missionary work around the world, highlighting the work of both denominational missions and independent organizations, and to offer practical advice about conducting evangelism (Prospectus of the Review for 1888 1888; Editorial: Thirty Years of the Missionary Review 1908). The resignation meant that Pierson had no regular source of income, a remarkable step of faith for a man who still had four children in school and two at home and his ailing, elderly mother living with him. Yet this move was something Pierson had tried to take before. At Fort Street, he asked the congregation to pay his salary from free will collections, while he rejected Bethany’s initial offer of \$5000 a year, asking for \$3000 raised by special offerings. Not only was Pierson trying to live by faith and follow the example of George Müller, but he was also battling the nineteenth century custom of supporting a church through pew rents, a practice Pierson loathed because he felt it discriminated against the poor. Freed from the pastorate, Pierson maintained his household through his writing and extensive lecturing schedule. No account of Pierson’s household finances remain, but as Grant Wacker notes, if international travel is used as a proxy for class standing, then Pierson’s twenty-eight trips to Europe and three to Asia would suggest that the income from these sources was more than sufficient to provide for his family (Wacker 1985, p. 52; cf., Robert 2003, pp. 109, 120, 176–78, 205–15, 219–20). Occasionally, he accepted a short-term assignment as pulpit supply, the most notable being two extended stints in London’s Metropolitan Tabernacle of Charles Spurgeon beginning in 1891. Spurgeon was perhaps the most well-known Baptist preacher with a following across the English-speaking world. That the church turned to the Presbyterian Pierson to fill its pulpit while Spurgeon fought the illness that would lead to his death suggests a bit about the extent to which Pierson was no longer perceived as a Presbyterian and foreshadows the emergence of a transatlantic fundamentalism in the twentieth century (Glass 2013; Marsden 1977). Initially, Pierson committed to a three-month term, but as Spurgeon’s health faltered and eventually failed, he remained for an additional five months. Then as the congregation struggled to find a permanent replacement, Pierson returned for an additional ten months (*Paddington Times* 1891; *The Metropolitan Tabernacle* 1893). Pierson was not considered for the position full-time, because of his ordination as a Presbyterian minister, and some objected to a “sprinkler” in a Baptist pulpit even as a temporary supply. On one occasion, hecklers interrupted Pierson’s sermon shouting “How dare you, not being a Baptist, stand in that place?” (*Church and School* 1893; *Dr. Pierson’s Return—‘Brawlers’ in the Gallery* 1892). Reports in London newspapers about the large crowds attending Pierson’s services show that his time there was warmly appreciated by Tabernacle congregants (*Dr. A. T. Pierson* 1892; *Pall Mall Gazette* 1892).

10. The Fundamentals

While Pierson's advocacy of missions was his most notable contribution to American evangelicalism, his essays in *The Fundamentals* show most clearly his transition from antebellum social reform to fundamentalism and deserve more attention for what they reveal about the state of conservative Protestant thinking on the eve of World War I. The 1893 heresy trial of Charles A. Briggs, a professor of theology at Union Theological Seminary, was an early skirmish between conservatives and liberals that exploded in a holy war between Fundamentalists and Modernists in the 1920s. Pierson and Briggs were from the same generation, with Pierson being two years older. Both were native New Yorkers and earned degrees from Union Seminary. While Pierson entered the pastorate, Briggs eventually made his career in academia. Briggs gradually accepted some aspects of the higher critical theories concerning biblical interpretations. The trial concerned Briggs's attempt to defend the inspiration of the Bible while acknowledging that the text contained errors and reflected a particular cultural moment in an ancient society. Conservatives found this formulation straying too far from Presbyterian norms, convicted him of heresy, and revoked his ordination (Hill 2002). By 1910, when the first volume of *The Fundamentals* was published, Briggs's accommodations to modern thought were more widespread and represented an existential threat to Christian orthodoxy that the authors of the essays sought to reverse.

Given Pierson's long career and worldwide reputation, that A. C. Dixon, the initial editor of *The Fundamentals*, would solicit contributions from Pierson is not surprising. But Pierson and his essays also illustrate well George Marsden's analysis of these volumes. In *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, he suggests, "At the center of the interdenominational anti-modernist movement were the evangelists and Bible teachers of the dispensational and Keswick movements", a description that certainly fits Pierson (Marsden 1980, p. 121). Moreover, Marsden classifies the essays in *The Fundamentals* into three broad categories: one vindicating the inspiration of the Bible; a second defending traditional Christian doctrines; and the third covering a variety of topics like missions, Christian living, and personal testimonies (Marsden 1980, pp. 121–22; cf., Sandeen 1978, pp. 203–6). The first two represented traditional Christian apologetics, though here the defense was not against attacks from unbelievers but from Christians who went too far in accommodating Christian doctrine to modern science and higher criticism. The last group seemed more aimed at encouragement than argument. Even in the more polemical essays of the first two groups, a moderate tone dominates, with debatable issues like the interpretation of prophecy and the Holy Spirit avoided. As Marsden notes, dispensationalists and Keswick teachers "showed remarkable restraint in promoting the more controversial aspects of their views" (Marsden 1980, p. 121). That Pierson mentioned dispensationalism once and holiness teachings not at all reveals his willingness to further the irenic spirit of these volumes, even if a careful reader might detect in his essays a framework that was both dispensational and Keswickian. That the goal was to send *The Fundamentals* to Christian workers—including pastors, missionaries, and theological professors, and to lay volunteers like YMCA directors and Sunday school superintendents—seems to confirm that the design in publishing and distributing these volumes was to remind and reassure Christians that traditional statements of orthodox doctrines could be maintained in the face of modern thought.

The Fundamentals had ninety articles written by sixty-four different authors, nearly 50 percent of whom came from various American and British Presbyterian and Reformed traditions. Some, like Pierson, served outside of denominational structures, while others, like Robert Speer, who contributed two essays, remained within their denominations. Pierson contributed five essays to *The Fundamentals*, more than any other author. Covering inspiration of the Bible, God's existence, foreign missions, money, and prayer, they fall

into all of Marsden's categories of essays. Moreover, all of them reflect that the intended audience was Christians of every theological stripe, with a message to liberals to return to conventional expressions of Protestant doctrine and to conservatives encouraging them to hold to their faith. For example, in trying to prove God's existence, Pierson appealed to the life of George Müller (Pierson 1910c). Pierson's argument is straightforward. Müller had a remarkable career and accomplished much in his work. He never publicly appealed for funds to support his work, yet the financial resources were always available to sustain Müller's orphanage. The secrets of Müller's success, according to Pierson, were that first Müller believed God's promises in the Bible that God would support his workers and second, he prayed diligently, asking God to supply his needs. That Müller had the resources were answers to his prayers and those answers were proof that God exists. It is an odd essay in some respects. The argument was not a classical one for God's existence, one that might convince atheists or agnostics. "Mere coincidence", skeptics might claim. No, Pierson replied, "The coincidences between the need and the supply can be accounted for on no law of chance or awakened public interest" (Pierson 1910c, p. 83). Rather, Pierson's argument seems more designed to inspire believers of God's continued activity in the world or perhaps to remind liberal Christians of the supernatural element integral to their religion. In this last respect, Pierson contributed directly to the central purpose of *The Fundamentals*.

Similarly, Pierson's other apologetic essay defending the inspiration of the Scriptures does not seem aimed at convincing unbelievers but rather at encouraging wavering Christians that the traditional orthodox interpretations of Christian doctrines could be maintained. Again, Pierson is simple and direct: despite different authors, languages, styles, and genres, the Bible shows its unity in a variety of ways, and this unity demonstrates that one mind is behind the Bible; therefore, it is inspired. Pierson then moved quickly through the next six examples of the Bible's unity (historic, dispensational, prophetic, personal, symbolic, and didactic or ethical) to give more extended discussion to his last two points. The Bible's unity is scientific and organic. In discussing science, Pierson moved into more traditional apologetic terrain of how the "facts" of science might be reconciled with statements in the Bible. His central point is that while the Bible is not a scientific treatise and employs popular language, "no scientific fact is ever misstated" (Pierson 1910e, p. 61). He points out that the order of creation described in the Bible is, in outline, the same as what is seen in the geologic record; that the emergence of living creatures is the same as order revealed by comparative anatomy; and that modern astronomic observation confirms Jeremiah's comment that the number of stars cannot be counted. In short, the words used by Biblical authors may not be scientific, but they can accommodate what science discovers. His argument concerning the Bible's organic unity is that every part of the Bible contributes to the whole and each part complements all the others:

The Unity of the Bible is the unity of one organic whole. The Decalogue demands the Sermon on the Mount. Isaiah's prophecy makes necessary the narrative of the Evangelists. Daniel fits into the Revelation as bone fits socket. Leviticus explains, and is explained by, the Epistle to the Hebrews. ... The Passover foreshadows the Lord's Supper, and the Lord's Supper interprets and fulfills the Passover. ... Nay, when you come to the last chapters of Revelation, you find yourself mysteriously touching the first chapters of Genesis. (Pierson 1910e, p. 68)

Pierson did not elaborate or explain in detail these points, and the implied object of his defense is those who claim the Bible is a mass of contradictions. Moreover, the tone of the essay is more ministerial, more that of a preacher exhorting his congregation to hold to their faith.

Pierson's pastoral instincts are evident in the three remaining essays as well. They might be seen as companion pieces to the essay on Müller, in a sense, offering a complemen-

tary argument for God's existence and doctrinal explications of the lessons from Müller's life. In "The Testimony of Foreign Missions to the Superintending Providence of God", Pierson used the history of Protestant missions to demonstrate how God was active in the world to prepare people for becoming missionaries and prepare the lands in which they would work. Implicit in the discussion is the conclusion that Pierson explicitly drew from the example of God's answers to Müller's prayers: God's providence in shaping the circumstances that matched missionary with mission indicates the existence of God (Pierson 1910d). In "The Divine Efficacy of Prayer", Pierson provides a brief, straightforward treatment of the role of prayer in a believer's life, emphasizing that "everything . . . depends on prayer" (Pierson 1910a, p. 66). According to Pierson, prayer is the key to developing the Christian virtues of faith, obedience, patience, love, and holiness, to bringing revival in churches and success in evangelizing non-Christians, and to seeing God's power unleashed in the believer's life. Finally, in "Our Lord's Teaching about Money", Pierson explains the principles by which a believer should follow concerning money. The foundation, Pierson asserted, was for Christians to live as stewards: "Not only money, but every gift of God, is received in trust for His use. Man is not an owner, but a trustee, managing another's goods and estates, God being the one original and inalienable Owner of all" (Pierson 1910b, p. 39). Pierson then elaborates eight principles, if followed, would "forever banish all limitations on church work and all concern about supplies" (Pierson 1910b, p. 39). Here again, he uses Müller to illustrate how God supplied the resources for him to conduct his work without publicly appealing for aid.

Running through these three essays is a more muted apologetic appeal but one that supports the overall design of *The Fundamentals*. Pierson implicitly emphasized the supernatural character of Christianity. God's answers to prayer, God's providential manipulation of history and individuals to further missions, and God's ability to supply the means to those who live according to Biblical principles concerning money all showed God's continued activity in the world and the divine reality at the core of the Christian faith.

11. Conclusions

Not only do Pierson's essays reflect the main themes of *The Fundamentals*, but they also represent most of the major motifs in his preaching and writing. Though premillennialism and Keswick teachings are largely missing from these essays, living a life of faith and prayer and a determination to promote missions were prominent concerns in Pierson's career. This essay is not the place to enter the fray over the post-colonial critique of the missionary enterprise as a form of cultural imperialism as destructive as the economic imperialism of the nineteenth century. That Pierson contributed to the fervor through *The Crisis of Mission*, his other writings, and his involvement with the Student Volunteer Movement is undeniable, but he did so with the sincerity and the tunnel vision typical of evangelicals that prioritized the gospel with little consideration of the consequences to the indigenous culture and society. In "Understanding Early American Missionaries in Korea (1884–1910)", Dae Young Ryu offers an insightful case study of the cross-currents of American missionaries (many of whom were Presbyterians and were influenced by the Student Volunteer Movement), American merchants, and their impact on local culture. In Pierson, that narrowness of focus reflected the drift away from his antebellum roots. The optimistic postmillennial environment in which he grew up, one that embraced both evangelism and social reform, became circumscribed by a dark premillennialism that promised only cultural and social decline, leaving Pierson to pursue the evangelization of his generation. Premillennialists, dispensational or not, would dispute the characterization of their eschatology as "dark" because the outcome is Christ's ultimate victory over evil, but the current era was portrayed as one of social and cultural decline and irredeemability.

This shift is detailed in Moorhead's *World without End* (Moorhead 1999). The number of Presbyterian contributors to *The Fundamentals* suggests that Pierson was not alone in this journey, even if some did not go as far as Pierson. The careers of Robert Speer, Charles Stelzle, and Charles Briggs suggest other paths some Presbyterians followed. Returning to Schlesinger's observation about the challenges Protestants face at the turn of the twentieth century—one to its theology and the other to its social program—Briggs represents the effort to adapt traditional theology to modern thought and Stelzle, through founding the Labor Temple, showing the struggle to orient the church's program to changes in society. Speer and Pierson followed more conservative roads, with the former choosing to work through traditional denominational institutions and the latter channeling his energies into broader, interdenominational evangelical networks. It is worth noting that in the 1930s, Pierson's protégée in missions, Speer, fell victim to an attempt to purge him from his position by followers of the fundamentalism that Pierson helped to shape. The effort failed, with the critics abandoning the denomination for their own (Patterson 1986). Finally, these essays were Pierson's valedictory. He died in 1911, never seeing the publication of all the volumes of *The Fundamentals*, and his passing marks a generational shift in American Protestantism, one where more strident voices would raise the volume and produce the denominational battles of the 1920s and 1930s (Longfield 1991).

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