

Understanding the Anatomy of the Fundamentalist Reading of the Bible:

Some Theological Ramifications

0.0 Preamble

All the churches are facing the new phenomenon of the mushrooming of various evangelical groups. These groups function both within and independent of the official sanction of the churches. Quite many faithful, be of middle class or working class, of the educated or illiterate, are attracted towards these 'new churches'.

Their conventions, conducted in rural communities like Kelambakkam or in urban settings like Marina Beach, attract throngs of Christians as well as non-Christians. The mega networks like Prayer Tower, Madras or Prayer Garden, Satharasanpatti are approached by thousands of people for intercessory prayers. Their prayer meetings are often emotionally charged. Their hymns composed in simple catchy tunes are rendered with well equipped orchestra and efficient sound system. For hours together the congregation is kept under the spell of the electrifying messages of the renowned speakers gifted with gripping modulation and intonation. Listening to moving testimonies (genuine or stage-managed?) of immediate healings even from chronic diseases, one might think that these people have certain hotline connection with God!

These zealous evangelicals hold on to certain fundamental elements of the Christian tradition. In common parlance, they are called the fundamentalist denominations. While the outsiders say that they are betrayers, the insiders claim themselves as 'the Saved Ones', saving the faith and gospel. Various elements enumerated above are practised in various degrees in these groups. But the common item

found uniformly with all of them is the specific focus given to the biblical texts.

In this background we seek to understand Christian fundamentalism¹ with a special reference to the reading of the bible. It is our hope that a well-informed awareness coupled with serious research in this area will enable all of us to discern the differences between the genuine liberative religiosity and the subtle oppressive one, operative or manipulated to be active in the midst of the faithful.

1.0 Historical Background

In the face of the challenges posed by the Reformation, the passion for *return to the sources* became the response. In the area of biblical reading, it assumed the form of fidelity to the literal meaning of the bible. Then modernism, as an outcome of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, engendered the scientific outlook. It assumed the shape of rigorous historico-critical method (the HCM hereafter) in the field of biblical criticism. This approach to the revealed text was considered by traditional Christians very dangerous to faith. It is in this background the fundamentalists were at war with the HCM, the product of modernism.²

The traditional belief in the inspiration and hence the inerrancy of the bible was quite strong both in the Catholic

1. "Christian fundamentalism is more than the alliance of dispensationalism and Princeton theology. It is also old revivalism with its characteristic emphases on the avoidance of worldliness, naked individualism, antithesis between truth and error, ambivalence towards doctrine and piety, and complacency of traditionalism". Narchison J. R., "Understanding Christian Fundamentalism through American Evangelicalism", *Journal of Dharma* xv/2 (1990) 104.
2. Fundamentalism can be the result of the "religiously defined traumas and contests arising out of the transition to modernity". Cf. Marsden G. M., *Fundamentalism and the American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth Century Evangelicalism 1870-1925* Oxford University (1980) 227.

and Protestant circles till about the middle of 19th century. The scientific rigour of the HCM was constantly challenging the traditional claims of authorships, dates of composition of the books of the bible and of the belief that all the dominical sayings were spoken by Jesus. In other words, the "higher criticism" or the HCM was seriously questioning the so-called faith contents and solid truths held in high esteem by the faithful so far.

In this context, organised reactionary responses towards the HCM were vehemently articulated in the Niagara Bible Conference in 1878 and the Northfield Conference in 1880. The documents titled *The Fundamentals, A Testimony to Truth* (12 volumes) were published by the conservative wing of the Federal Council of Churches in North America during 1910-1915. In 1919, the "World's Fundamental Association" was founded with its various branches. When Darwin's biological evolutionism was very popular in 1920-1930, there was an uproar against it on the ground that it was not in harmony with the biblical picture of the creation of the human being. Similarly social evolutionism, socialism and comparative religionism were countered with religious revivalism. Gradually, this type of revivalism spread out among the Christians of other countries.

The roots of the contemporary fundamentalism prevalent among the Christians today, can be very often traced to the conservative revivalist-evangelical tradition of American Protestantism.³

3. Cf. Narchison (see note 1 above) 95-113 and esp. 101 and 113. No wonder that the sudden flourishing of the fundamentalist denominations in the third world countries are related to the heavy flow of funds from affluent countries like America, may be for diverting the growing critical consciousness of the people from a healthy spirituality of legitimate confrontation with capitalism or indigenous feudalism.

2.0 Revolt Against Historico-Critical Method

The conservative evangelicals opine that the HCM poses a serious threat to the literal inerrancy and the plenary inspiration and thus to the authority of the bible.⁴ In addition to this, they were aware of the limitations of the HCM. That is to say, that the HCM is said to:

- * sideline the divine origin of the biblical truth expressed through each word and every text of the bible; rather it tends to attribute human motives for the generation of the biblical texts by way of highlighting the intention of the authors in the respective life settings. In this effort the natural historical process seems to gain grounds instead of the salvific intervention of God.

- * dilute the importance of the unique nature of the revelation attributed to bible in contrast to other texts of literature. Because, as the unique inerrant revelation of God, the bible should be uniquely treated with a unique method dictated by faith. It should not be subjected to secular methods such as the HCM or literary criticism.

- * be producing an enormous literature of ever-changing opinions not so helpful for immediate applications such as homilies and ethical prescriptions for the faith community; and the highly specialised tools required for such methods were beyond the reach of the simple readers of the bible.

- * be indulging in dissecting the texts into bits and pieces. Its search for the author or historical Jesus ends up in the final discovery that they are ever elusive.

With the above allegations, the HCM did not enjoy the patronage of the fundamentalists.

4. Sandeen E. R., "The Princeton Theology: "One Source of Biblical Literalism in American Protestantism", *Church History*, Vol. 31/3 (1962) 307-321.

3.0 Fundamentalism Defined

The word "fundamentalism" was coined in the Niagara Conference to denote its fundamental position of biblical interpretation. By way of revolt against the scientific scrutiny of the bible, it clung on to the traditional literal reading, in order to defend the traditional Christian doctrines. In this line of thought the following points were declared as non-negotiables in the interpretation of the bible: the verbal inerrancy of the bible, the divinity and virginal birth of Jesus, the doctrine of vicarious expiation of Christ the Saviour, the bodily resurrection of all of us during the premillennial second coming of Christ. And the term "fundamentalist" occurs in the above-mentioned 12 volumes to refer to those conservative Christians who accept the conclusions found in them.

In the same line, the word "fundamentalism" in the Christian circles⁵ primarily refers to the outlook which claims to believe in the absolute infallibility and inerrancy of the written bible as the basis of its authority.⁶ And the fundamentalists are affectively involved in the beliefs in and the discussions on God's miraculous interventions in immediate healings, terrifying exorcism, dreadful apocalypticism, hope of imminent parousia, final judgement etc.

5. The dynamics behind the rise of religious fundamentalism are quite a complex process. The interplay of various socio-political and religio-cultural factors requires a serious probe. Highly specialized tools will help us to delve deep into the phenomenon of fundamentalism, especially in a religiously pluralistic society like in India. Cf. Narchison R., "Is Religious Fundamentalism Inevitable?", *VJTR* 55 (1991) 95-101. In the present essay, we confine ourselves to the discussion on Christian fundamentalism with a special reference to the reading of the bible.

6. Cf. Frein, B. C., "Fundamentalism and Narrative Approaches to the Gospels" in *DTB* 22/1 (1992) 13.

4.0 Inerrancy-the Essential Doctrine

Biblical inerrancy is the most essential doctrine in the fundamentalistic interpretation of the bible. The implications of this doctrine can be amplified as follows:

There is a definite absence of any type of error in the original manuscripts of the bible.⁷ The text of the bible is God's truth in propositional statements. This truth of the bible is absolutely objective and universally valid. The true statements found in the bible actually represent realities as they were, are and will be.⁸ The biblical passages should not be treated in various literary forms such as myths, legends, prayers, homilies, call narratives, prophetic oracles etc., or as the product of a long theological reflection in the life situations of the believing community. Rather, they are the accurate description of the sequences of actual events; and the discourses or the sayings in direct speech were the original words spoken by the biblical personalities.⁹

In other words, "in fundamentalism the truth of the Bible, its inerrancy, understood principally as correspondence with external reality and events, is fed into the interpretative process at its very beginning."¹⁰

These types of evangelicals are preoccupied with the idea that unless the bible is infallible and inerrant in its in-

7. Osborne, G.R., "Evangelical Interpretation of Scripture" in Hagen K. (ed.), *The Bible in the Churches: How different Christians Interpret the Scriptures* (New York : Paulist, 1985) 74.
8. "Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics" by International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, 1982, Art. vi.
9. Ibid. Art. xiv.
10. Barr, J., *Fundamentalism* (London: SCM, 1981) 51. The linguistic and literary forms are permitted to operate as guides only under the overriding control of the principle of inerrancy and the defence of traditional doctrines.

formational and historical statements, its claim to doctrinal authority in the actual lives of the humans is not valid.

4.1 Literality for Inerrancy

Any theological position that bible is the testimony to the Word of God or as God's revelation through the words of the humans is rejected by the fundamentalists. For them, the words of the bible are simply the Word of God, because it is they, which were determined by divine inspiration-not the ideas behind them.¹¹

The bible therefore, they hold, must be understood only in its literal meaning which alone is its only original and valid meaning.¹²

4.2 Non-Literality too for Inerrancy

The simplistic equation of the fundamentalist reading as the literal interpretation is not always true. Even while the literal sense is sought, various figures of speech, literary categories, formal and stylistic features of the text are taken into account.¹³ In fact it is the assertion (truth) of the divine inspiration and the infallibility of the bible that is the characteristic mark of the fundamentalist reading of the bible. And the oscillation back and forward between literal and non-literal interpretation is made use of as a frequent instrument insofar as it serves the purpose of inspiration and the inerrancy of the bible.

For instance, by way of interpreting the texts of those events portrayed in more than one version, the fundamentalists normally employ juxtaposition and harmonisation of all

11. Gnuse, R., *The Authority of the Bible: Theories of Inspiration, Revelation and the Canon of Scripture* (New York: Paulist, 1985) 22.

12. "Chicago Statement..." (see above note 8) Art. xv.

13. Cf. Osborne, G. R., (see note 7 above) 165-167, 180.

the versions as mutually complementary.¹⁴ Only in certain quarters, it is conceded that these varying versions are attributed to the intention of various authors seeking to portray the same event. All the same, harmonization of the details of the narratives is made to serve the doctrinal harmonization at any cost.

The bible in its entirety is supposed to be a compact record of God's revelation. Hence any discrepancy attached to any part of it, be it on the identity of authorship or source, cannot be accepted by the conservative evangelical readers. They ascribe equal authority and importance to each word or passage of the entire bible.¹⁵ Even the apparently contradictory elements are to be understood only by meticulous 'comparison of scripture with scripture'.

Conservative evangelists do not give in, even to the minimum observation based on critical scholarship with the belief that such concessions will ultimately relativize the 'eternal truth' of the bible. Those who hold that the bible contains more factual errors, based on literary and historical grounds, are counted as serious enemies than those disagreeing on the theological plane. Hence the former are vehemently countered through empirical verification in and through the texts of the bible.

14. For instance, the event of cleansing of the temple portrayed in the synoptics during the passion week (Mt 21:10-17; Mk 11:15-19; Lk 19:45-48) and the initial stage of Jesus' ministry in John (Jn 2:13-17) is said to have taken place twice by way of harmonizing these four texts. If it has occurred only once, the possibility of constructing the evangelist's theological agenda based on the placement of the text, is not readily permitted by the fundamentalists.
15. But in practice, for instance, Esther and Ecclesiastes are not often preached on, in comparison with Pauline Epistles and John. And individual texts 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:19-21 are given a prominent place for the purpose of asserting the doctrinal position of the divine inspiration of the bible.

5.0 Meaning in the Fundamentalist Reading

The doctrine of inerrancy as elucidated by fundamentalists entails the assertion that the meaning of each word and text of the bible is definite and fixed once and for all.¹⁶ This singular meaning is supposed to be original and valid. This is nothing but the literal meaning. Defined by the author by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, this meaning is discovered by the reader(s). The grace of the same Spirit is required for the correct understanding of the same meaning. The preunderstanding of the interpreters is looked upon with suspicion since it will impose its own whimsical meaning upon the original meaning of the text.¹⁷ The locus of the meaning of the text is within the text.

And hence the goal of the interpretation of the bible is to discover the definite meaning enshrined in its texts as originally intended by the author for his¹⁸ first readers.

6.0 Method in the Fundamentalist Reading

For the fundamentalists, the texts of the bible and the grace of the Holy Spirit alone are adequate for the knowledge of the biblical truth.¹⁹ The methodological question asked by the fundamentalists is: Which is the correct path leading to that inerrant meaning?

16. Johnson E., "Author's intention and Biblical Interpretation", in Radmacher E. D., and Preus R. D., *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 410.
17. "Chicago Statement..." (see above note 8) Art. ix.
18. We are alerted to the general assumption of the fundamentalist interpreters that the authors of the biblical books are males. Cf. the bracketed comment of Frein (see above note 6) 13. While the feminist interpreters are decrying the male domination in the making of the bible, the fundamentalists by and large, in my opinion, do not take cognizance of their legitimate questions.
19. Osborne (see note 7 above) 77.

Normally the fundamentalist scholars begin their bible reading with the text found in the best manuscripts and the common readers with the reliable translations as commonly recognised by the denomination they belong to. The whole bible, each book and every text, they assume, is unified as the result of God's direct verbal inspiration effected upon the human authors. As God is one, the biblical message is one. It is in the light of this singular and unified message of the whole bible the meaning of each passage is to be elicited. For this mode of elucidating the biblical meaning, they seek to make use of the insights from the discussion on genre, plot, narrative structure and thought development.²⁰

While genre criticism is acknowledged to be a valuable tool in certain fundamentalist circles, the general climate prevails that the literary categories which question historicity of the bible are not to be employed for biblical texts.²¹ Consequently, even those evangelical scholars who are at home in applying the tools of form criticism for the texts of the parables are not very keen in doing the same especially for the texts of miracles, since the parables are taken to be the fictional depictions but the miracles to be the factual accounts.

While emphasising on the study of the internal relationship within a text or the texts or the whole of the bible, they discourage and choose to refrain from any dependence on the critical tools or commentaries made use of by those with their 'questionable faith' or 'scepticism'.

7.0 Brief Surveys of Certain Elements and Narratives

With the above background of fundamentalist method of eliciting meaning from the bible, we intend to briefly

20. Frier (see above note 6) 14.

21. "Chicago Statement..." (see above note 8) Art. xiii.

survey here, how fundamentalists approach certain core doctrines and certain types of narratives in the bible.

7.1 On Certain Core Elements

Besides the biblical inerrancy, the core elements emphasised by the evangelical groups are the identity of Jesus primarily as God, justification through faith, total depravity of the human beings and the substitutionary atonement. For want of space, we shall deal with the first two items in the sections below.

7.1.1. Identity of Jesus

Insistence on Jesus' supernatural sonship of God with divine attributes, even at the cost of his humanity, is the salient feature of the fundamentalist portrayal of Jesus. Passages which appear to claim Jesus to be God (Tit 2:13; Jn 8:58; 10:30, 33; 20:28) are given more frequent attention than those in which Jesus himself was reluctant to affirm the claim (Mk 7:36; 8:29; 10:17-18). We perceive that Jesus' identity as the Son of God predominantly comes to be affirmed as the result of fulfilling his mission (Mk 15:39; Rom 1:3ff; Phil 2:5ff).²² The conservative evangelical understanding of the identity of Jesus is not comfortable with the vulnerability of the *sarx* (flesh). As the flesh is associated with sinfulness, they insist on the dimensions of the glory of the *logos*.

7.1.2 Justification Through Faith

The major theological insistence of the evangelical groups is on justification through faith (Rom 5:1ff; Gal 2:16) in contrast to the grace as the result of the works of law. But this is much emphasised in the context of the individual life story and decisions not in the backdrop of communities experiencing the gratuitous grace from God.

22. Barr J., *Escaping From Fundamentalism* (London: SCM, 1984) 59.

Consequently a space is created for a highly individualistic piety and a partisan proselytisation. This partisan attitude expresses itself in terms of certain conformity to a typical vocabulary, reading certain chosen biblical texts, magazines or authors, association with selected groups, clinging on to some external code of conduct (abstaining from wearing jewels etc). In my opinion, these expressions of the 'conversion' are quite superficial. These could, perhaps, be 'the present life of new bondage' in the place of 'the past life of old bondage'.

7.2 On Certain Types of Literary Forms

As the corollary of their understanding of verbal inerrancy, fundamentalists seem to impose naive historicist interpretation upon various literary forms uniformly. For our brief survey, we deal with their reading of the forms of myths and miracles, and the legal codes in the bible.

7.2.1 Myths and Miracles

The fundamentalists hold that the events portrayed in the myths, legends, narratives of the miracles are factual reports. For instance, the ages of the forefathers (Adam 930 years, Seth-912, Methuselah-969 etc. in Gen 5:5ff.), the speaking ass of Balaam (Num 22:28-30), Joshua's stopping of the sun and moon (Josh 10:12-14), the accounts of healings, sequences of the teachings in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt) or on the Plains (Lk) are all interpreted as the accurate eye-witness accounts. They refuse to look into these materials as the literary forms of the time of composition, communicating different theological perceptions of the authors and their hearers/readers.

Also, the fundamentalists seem to brand any reading of the bible with a genuine objective of interpreting it for or on behalf of a faith community as operating against the possibility of the direct/immediate intervention of God, especially while dealing with the texts of the miracles.

They are vehemently opposing the naturalistic or rationalistic explanations attempted by certain quarters.

Similarly the background setting and the theological implications of symbols, schematization based on certain significant numbers, the order in the chains of genealogy and even chronology are not usually attended to by the evangelical enthusiasts.

7.2.2 Legal Codes

The legal codes found in the bible were taken from or were already functioning in various forms in the ancient Mediterranean world. These codes need not be exclusively taken as the unique discovery of the covenant between the self-revealing Yahweh and the Hebrews. What is important in the legal codes of the bible is the conscious attempt of the covenant community to do the will of the God of redemption in ethical decisions.

While interpreting the legal codes, the evangelical enthusiasts, tend to forget this and they try to understand them as the universal norms unrelated to the ancient cultural foundations. They seek to declare them as the universal norms in the present world too, irrespective of the contemporary cultural climate of the faith community reading the bible today.

8.0 Theological Ramifications

In the above attempt at delineating the anatomy of the reading of the bible by the fundamentalists, we come across certain ambiguities and even contradictions in their worldview. While acknowledging the criticism levelled against them by Pontifical Biblical Commission²³ as legitimate, we intend to amplify some theological ramifications of the

23. "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church" by Pontifical Biblical Commission, *Origins* 23/29 (1994) 509-510.

fundamentalist reading of the bible in five antitheses in the following sub-sections.

8.1 Theocentrism Vs Anthropocentrism

Biblical fundamentalism seems to decry that the inspired bible is de-spiritualized, while being subjected to the rational tools of the HCM. This may be due to the suspicion that the recognition of the human potentials in the evolution of the biblical texts will undervalue the significance of the salvific intervention of God.

Association of the inerrancy of the bible only with the verbal inspiration becomes blind to the facts of historical evolution of the biblical texts, of the literary cultural background of every age and of scientific truths. The crisis created by modernism with its resultant claim of autonomy of rationality, scientific outlook, technological revolution and even pluralism, seemed to have impelled the people to look for certain 'immutable' doctrines built upon certain 'unchallengeable' grounds - like inerrancy and infallibility,

Seeking the solution on the trans-human plane (direct verbal inerrancy and divine inspiration) for the problems on the anthropological plane (incertitude caused by modernism) is rather an escapism. Antithesis between anthropocentrism and theocentrism dilutes and even violates the richness of the mystery of incarnation.

8.2 Uniqueness Vs Pluralism

The importance assigned to the literalist sense as the only valid meaning elicited from the unique text of the written bible does not pay attention to the role played by the preunderstanding of the readers in a given socio-cultural location. This intellectual dishonesty in the name of spiritual rootedness is the by-product of intense indoctrination with emotional defence of doctrine. In any search, if the complex reality of the faith context is given its due pro-

minence, pluralist perceptions are to be genuinely respected. If a single point of view alone is pontificated for ever in the name of defending truth, I wonder whether we can have even some glimpses of the multi-faceted complex reality of the God-inspired salvific process. No doubt, the bible has a modest role to play in this process. But it cannot replace God.

Also the doctrine-oriented epistemology functioning through definite "either-or" dichotomy or the antithesis of truth and falsehood accrues to the obsession with defending the solid "truths". In fact, truth does not require defence. Rather we require an open minded search in order to surrender ourselves to truth which cannot be totally imprisoned by doctrines and dogmas.

The line of demarcation between "the saved" and "the unsaved ones" is again the implication of denial of the universal Fatherhood of God. This obsession with the division between the baptized and the non-baptized, and between the allegiance to 'this' or 'that' church, is quite oblivious of the fact that uniqueness is the language of love. Should the claim of uniqueness become an expression of superiority (religious or otherwise), then no genuine dialogue will ever take place among the religions, ideologies, cultures and the humans.

8.3 Emotionalism Vs Rationalism

Fundamentalism can be said to be a reaction towards domination of dry rationalism. While claiming to be objective, rationalism fails to be sensitive to the complex nature of realities, be they human or textual, present or ancient. Sometimes in such scientific pursuits, an overriding importance is given to the tools but scanty attention to the complexities of realities. This will not help the faith journey of the people.

At the same time, a complete moratorium declared against any type of rational search will be a death-knell of the same faith journey. The dogmatic position of "either-faith-or-science", reduces fundamentalists to be prisoners of their own ideology. In no way, can they have any serious dialogue with God who is self-revealing through historical events and scientific truths. Mere emotionalism with no respect towards rational search will not help to understand God at all.

At the same time, the churches have to undergo a serious soul-searching to assess the impact of the dry clergy-centred liturgies, hard-to-grasp faith declarations, catechetical manuals, heavy dose of theological jargons in the documents alien to the language of the common people. Cultural anthropological and sociolinguistic insights are to be creatively made use of, for enabling a spontaneous dialogue between the bible and their symbolic world. Active participation of the commonfolk in the process of interpretation of the bible and liturgical celebrations and of decision making in the management of the ecclesial activities, we hope, will ensure a healthy combine of rational-emotional dimensions in the life of the churches.

8.4 Imminence Vs Struggle

The emotional outbursts of the fundamentalists are indicative of the sense of urgency. With their pre-millennial or post-millennial hopes they are delighted much in frightening others with an apocalyptic immediacy of parousia, final judgement and destruction of the world. This may be a coping mechanism by way of revolting against their apparently endless fatigue caused by the demands of the technological age, or their need to see immediately that justice be done to the innocent and punishment to the wicked. But very often than not, the apocalyptic slant of their prayer experience drives them to take an easy flight into other-worldly spiritualism.

On the one hand, they look for this-worldly assurance by way of verbal inerrancy concretely visible. On the other, they seem to be addicted to other-worldly illusions.

Instead of enabling the faithful to encounter the problems of life and death, with faith-inspired struggle, they tend to offer short-cut solutions to their difficulties with the claim of immediate efficaciousness.

8.5 Individualism Vs Communitarianism

Salvation and ethics, in the perception of fundamentalists, are highly individualistic. Total depravity of the humans, decrying the loss of the sense of sin, condemnation of confidence in human goodness, individual decisions to abstain from personal pleasures etc., are the recurring themes in the sessions held by fundamentalists. Along with them, opposition to all forms of liberation struggles, condemnation of socialist and communist ideologies, exclusivism with regard to other faiths, cultures and even other denominations etc. betray their deliberate negation of critical social consciousness, both at micro-and macro-levels, needed for a responsible communitarian spirituality. Even while dealing with sin or justification through faith, they conveniently ignore their global or corporate dimensions.

We do not intend to underestimate the immense value of personal conversion in the life of the Spirit. But the emphatic insistence on the individualistic perfection and renewal at the cost of due awareness of the communitarian dimension and the structural sin, does create in us a suspicion whether they labour for executing the political agenda of their funding agencies. This, we are afraid, is designed to defeat the growing awareness of the subalterns by way of generating an illusory spirituality.

9.0 Conclusion

We started with the objective of understanding the anatomy of the fundamentalist reading of the bible. After certain initial historical remarks on the evolution of fundamentalism primarily as a reaction to the modernist trends of interpreting the bible, we tried to locate the few core elements prevalent among the fundamentalists. A brief survey of their mode of handling the biblical materials and of eliciting meaning from them has highlighted their customary theological themes. At the end, we sought to amplify certain theological ramifications of the ambiguities and contradictions in the outlook of the fundamentalists.

Any genuine biblical reading has to be sharply sensitive to the salvific interventions of God in concrete historical contexts. In the process of the sovereign mode of executing his redemption project, the biblical God acts with his universal compassion. This compassion has expressed itself in a privileged way in and through his definite bias in favour of the dispossessed and the disowned.

An authentic attempt to vibrate with the heart-beat of this biblical God is the essential prerequisite to understand what he speaks to us today through biblical texts and historical contexts as he did in yester years.

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