

---

LBTS Faculty Publications and Presentations

---

1986

## Review: Evangelicalism and Modern America and Fundamentalism Today: What Makes It So Attractive?

A. Boyd Luter

*Liberty University*, [abluter@liberty.edu](mailto:abluter@liberty.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/lts\\_fac\\_pubs](https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/lts_fac_pubs)



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), [Comparative Methodologies and Theories Commons](#), [Ethics in Religion Commons](#), [History of Religions of Eastern Origins Commons](#), [History of Religions of Western Origin Commons](#), [Other Religion Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Luter, A. Boyd, "Review: Evangelicalism and Modern America and Fundamentalism Today: What Makes It So Attractive?" (1986). *LBTS Faculty Publications and Presentations*. 270.

[https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/lts\\_fac\\_pubs/270](https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/lts_fac_pubs/270)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Crossing. It has been accepted for inclusion in LBTS Faculty Publications and Presentations by an authorized administrator of Scholars Crossing. For more information, please contact [scholarlycommunications@liberty.edu](mailto:scholarlycommunications@liberty.edu).

*Evangelicalism and Modern America*. Edited by George Marsden. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984, 220 pp., \$8.95 paper. *Fundamentalism Today: What Makes It So Attractive?* Edited by Marla Selvidge. Elgin: Brethren, 1984, 134 pp.

Both of these volumes are made up primarily of papers given at two conferences. Because of the continuing widespread fascination with evangelicals and fundamentalists, these two collections are made available to a wider audience.

Both books will make helpful, though limited, contributions to the rapidly growing mass of literature on evangelicalism and fundamentalism. Unfortunately neither can lay serious claim to being the comprehensive type of study that is needed in both arenas. Hopefully both will prove to be stimuli, if not steps, in the right direction: toward broad and more objective self-examinations of these vital overlapping sectors of the American religious scene.

The chief value of a side-by-side review of two such volumes is that their individual strengths and weaknesses tend to be seen even more clearly in the comparison. However, it is not without its points of confusion and frustration.

Such a recurring difficulty had to do with the meaning attached to the terms "evangelicals" and "fundamentalists." Though such nomenclature is notoriously slippery, it did not seem to this reviewer that either book finally succeeded in drawing any consistent boundary lines between evangelicals and fundamentalists. (Perhaps it is not possible to do so with clarity and precision. But, if not, we should certainly revise the widespread assumptions to the contrary and revive the mutual respect and appreciation of the kindred movements.)

At first glance, there is a marked similarity between these two collections. *Evangelicalism* contains thirteen essays, *Fundamentalism* twelve. Both give attention to historical roots and development, perspectives on the media, women and science, and the "new right" participation of these two sectors. Interestingly, historian and ETS past president Richard Pierard is the only contributor to both volumes, writing on "The New Religious Right in American Politics" in *Evangelicalism*, and, oddly, on "Reagan and the Evangelicals" in *Fundamentalism*. (The latter inclusion, along with M. Marty's "Fundamentalism as a Social Phenomenon" in *Evangelicalism*, are prime examples of the muddled lines of demarcation between the two groupings in these books.)

The differences between *Evangelicalism* and *Fundamentalism* are more striking and significant than the parallels. Though containing roughly the same number of chapters *Evangelicalism* is considerably longer and is mostly serious scholarship, although pleasantly readable. The forty-five pages of endnotes in *Evangelicalism* are alone worth the price of the book, while the few notes in *Fundamentalism* are all internal. (Sadly, although the format of *Fundamentalism* indicates that it is targeted to a popular audience, it will not likely hit its target with much force.)

Another fairly obvious contrast between these works has to do with who the contributors are. Many of the writers in *Evangelicalism* are evangelical "insiders" themselves, or are at least well known to evangelical leaders (e.g., M. Marty, L. Sweet). Such is not the case with *Fundamentalism*. With the exception of Pierard, D. Rausch and evangelical scientist J. Moore, the reviewer had only passing familiarity (at best) with the other authors. Although such lack of knowledge may reveal this reviewer's ignorance, it may also bolster Jerry Falwell's comment in the foreword to *Fundamentalism*: "Too much of the published material on fundamentalism has been written from 'ivory towers' and is therefore somewhat uninformed and distorted. Parts of this book reveal that" (p. 7). Thus although editor Selvidge introduces *Fundamentalism* by saying that the contributors are Protestants and Catholics who "have experienced or discovered fundamentalist thinking and fundamentalist theology" (p. 9) it seems certain that most are decidedly liberal in conviction. Far from an evangelical persuasion, and even farther from the fundamen-

talist outlook that they are supposed to be accurately evaluating, their occasional glimmers of helpful insight tend to be overshadowed by the unsupported repetition of caricature (e.g. E. Towne's charge of "bibliolatry" in the place of Jesus or the Holy Spirit, pp. 33 ff.) or bizarre psychologizing (e.g. R. Shinn's "Fundamentalism as a Case of Arrested Development").

In summary, it should be made clear that both *Evangelicalism and Modern America* and *Fundamentalism Today* are worthy of gracing the evangelical's library, but for quite different reasons. On the one hand *Evangelicalism* succeeds rather well at its twin tasks of description and evaluation (p. vii) of wider contemporary evangelicals, as well as several selected aspects of the "evangelical denomination" (editor Marsden's phrase in the introduction). On the other hand *Fundamentalism* succeeds in providing an updated hodgepodge of nonevangelical opinions about "fundamentalists" with an occasional evangelical exception taken. Thus it serves as an effective, realistic reminder that those of us who hold to Biblical authority and orthodox theology who desire a "serious hearing" in broader circles have not yet been met with many open arms and ears.

A. Boyd Luter, Jr.

Christ Presbyterian Church, San Antonio, TX

*The Pastor As Evangelist*. By Richard Stoll Armstrong. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984, 191 pp., \$9.95.

The author, a minister in the Presbyterian Church (USA) and professor of ministry and evangelism at Princeton Seminary, wants to help ministers to be more effectively evangelistic. He holds seminars with ecumenical constituencies for pastors "in search of an adequate theology and a viable style of evangelism for the contemporary church in a pluralistic world" (p. 16). This book grows out of his concern and his seminars. He is apparently aiming at a reader who is a pastor of a "congregation of a so-called mainline denomination" (p. 13).

The larger part of this book is concerned with the style of evangelism. It is filled with practical suggestions about relationships and communications skills. One whole chapter is devoted to the different ways that one addresses different-sized congregations.

Of greater concern is the first part, in which he seeks to develop a theology of evangelism. It seems painfully apparent that he is writing for ministers that are suspicious if not hostile to evangelism. He is very careful to write in terms they will identify with, and he attempts to defuse their objections as he proceeds.

After considering many definitions he offers his own: "By evangelism I mean reaching out to others in Christian love, identifying with them, caring for them, listening to them, and sharing faith with them in such a way that they will freely respond and want to commit themselves to trust, love and obey God as a disciple of Jesus Christ and as a member of his servant community, the church" (p. 39). At this point he adds a significant footnote: "My original expression was 'sharing one's faith with them,' which suggests that it is the evangelist who does all the talking. For that reason I eliminated the word 'one's,' so that it now reads, 'sharing faith with them,' to emphasize that sharing is a two-way process. The effective evangelist is one who encourages others to share *their* faith" (pp. 188-189).

Armstrong says much more about sharing faith than about what the content of faith ought to be. He does quote approvingly "John Stott's exposition of the gospel" (p. 48) from *Christian Mission in the Modern World*. Armstrong considers it "arbitrary and artificial" but also "a very helpful teaching aid" (p. 50). He insists that Stott's definition of the gospel must be supplemented with W. Rauschenbusch's concept of the kingdom and says,