



## Ministry in the Emerging Religious Context: The Neofundamentalist Phenomenon

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### I. TRACKING NEOFUNDAMENTALISM

“Pastor, did you hear what Jerry Falwell said about the Middle East last night?” So the vestry leader—one of 13.3 million viewers of today’s televangelists—asked on the way out of the church door. Indeed, the 1983-84 study conducted by the Anneberg School of Communications together with the Gallup Organization reports that people and monies are not being so massively drained from established churches as some assumed.<sup>1</sup> But the influential “video vicars” do create a new religious environment that cannot help but affect the way the ministry in the mainline is carried out.

An exploration of the complex of modern religious movements variously identified as the electronic church, the evangelical empire, the Christian Right, political fundamentalism, etc., will here be different than the outpouring of reportage and assessment that have appeared in the past few years.<sup>2</sup> For one, we shall in the main do theological analysis, not cultural commentary. For another, the ministry context of our inquiry invites the use of a classical framework, the triple office—prophetic, priestly, royal. And for another, we will carefully delimit our investigation to a subcommunity within modern evangelicalism, “the neofundamentalist phenomenon.” This latter term is an adaptation of the phrase and title, *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon*, written from within this constituency.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>See George Gerbner, Larry Gross, Steward Hoover, Michael Morgan, Nancy Signorielli, Harry E. Cotugno, and Robert Wuthnow, “Summary,” *Religion and Television* (Philadelphia: The Anneberg School of Communications, 1984).

<sup>2</sup>As a contributor to this avalanche of diagnosis and prescription (Gabriel Fackre, *The Religious Right and Christian Faith* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982, 1983]) I would list the following as most helpful: Robert C. Liebman and Robert Wuthnow, *The New Christian Right* (New York: Aldine, 1983); Erling Jorstad, *The Politics of Moralism* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1981); Peggy L. Shriver, *The Bible Vote* (New York: Pilgrim, 1981); Jeffrey K. Hadden and Charles E. Swann, *Prime Time Preachers* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1981).

<sup>3</sup>Ed Dobson and Ed Hindson, *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon*, ed. Jerry Falwell (Garden City: Doubleday, 1981).

To find our way into neofundamentalism, we must follow a trail of both language and piety from the sixteenth century. At the Reformation the term “evangelical” came to be associated with those of Protestant conviction, with special reference to the authority of Scripture, on the one hand, and justification by grace through faith on the other, commitments sometimes described as the formal and material principles of Protestantism. As a result of

developments within and without the Reformation churches, “evangelical” has in our own time come to signify the intensification and radicalization of these two accents. Passing through Anabaptism, Puritanism, Methodism, Pietism, the awakenings, and revivalism past and present, the word evangelical has taken on highly personal and experiential connotations, as in “born again Christianity.” Inextricable from the conversion experience and subsequent reorientation is an attention to the Book, notable for its devotional and oracular status. “Evangelical” in its current North American usage, therefore, is in continuity with Reformation accents, yet amplified in both affective and cognitive dimensions, signifying the experiential piety and biblicism of “regenerate” Christians and churches.<sup>4</sup>

Evangelicalism today, however, is very diverse. To identify the group in question here, we must make our way past a number of other evangelicals who vigorously distinguish and frequently disassociate themselves from neofundamentalism. Thus traditional nineteenth and twentieth century evangelicals for whom the conversion experience, often in the context of mass evangelism, is the heart of the matter, and “new evangelicals” of 1950s vintage who added apologetic to evangelism and called for the social relevance of piety (represented by the founding of the magazine *Christianity Today*) customarily put some distance between themselves and our reference group. So too do many charismatic evangelicals for whom glossolalia and a life of praise and prayer are the animating features of their faith. Especially different are the “justice and peace evangelicals” (sometimes called “young evangelicals”) whose political visions and eschatological conviction are polar opposites of neofundamentalism.

Fundamentalism, in general, is a form of modern evangelicalism addressing its cognitive features, vigorously espousing an ultra-inerrancy view of Scripture (applying it to the details of cosmology and history as well as theology and morality), and is consistently militant, separatist, and often acerbic.<sup>5</sup> Within fundamentalism today, there are variations that follow the lines of response to two critical questions, the relation of faith to politics, and the relation of faith to the End time. Fundamentalism can be either political or apolitical, and apocalyptic or nonapocalyptic.<sup>6</sup> Neofundamentalism is political, apocalyptic fundamentalist. The “neo” feature is related to a strange courtship carried on with modernity. In contrast to the cultural and ecclesiastical separatism that characterizes traditional fundamentalism, neofundamentalists enter into selective

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<sup>4</sup>For details see the author’s article “Evangelical, Evangelicalism,” *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology*, ed. Alan Richardson and John Bowden (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983) 191-192.

<sup>5</sup>On fundamentalism see George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University, 1980).

<sup>6</sup>*The Religious Right and Christian Faith*, 5-7.

partnership with facets of contemporary society. In the political sphere a pragmatic pervades neofundamentalist involvement, enabling its constituency to enter into close alliances with Mormons, Jews, and any “God-fearers” who support the long list of New Right causes. In fact, the inseparability of specific political programs from fundamentalist belief is so predictable that neofundamentalists have been accused of “secular humanism.”<sup>7</sup> Again, neofundamentalist employment of modern technology, especially in the production of television programs, brings with it the stigmata of consumerism, materialism, and video chic to such a degree that

conventional fundamentalists excoriate the neofundamentalists for their worldliness. Indeed, Jerry Falwell is a regular target of fundamentalist denominations for these kinds of accommodation. However, the cultural payoff has been a remarkable penetration by neofundamentalism of the institutions and value premises of modern culture.

Who the neofundamentalists are will be clearer when we examine the specifics of this penetration. However, initially let us name some names and movements: political apocalyptic television evangelists, especially the prominent ones and their constituencies—Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, Jim Bakker, James Robinson, and Jimmy Swaggart; widely-read interpreters of “theology and culture” such as Timothy and Beverly LaHaye and Hal Lindsey; the leadership in the creationist crusade; the leadership of many “Christian schools”; numerous neofundamentalist congregations; significant political figures such as Jesse Helms and James Watt.

## II. CHRIST’S MINISTRY AND OURS

Neofundamentalism’s effect on the way the church carries out its ministries in the closing decades of the twentieth century can be discerned by placing it within the framework of the threefold office of ministry. Let us be clear, first, about the origins and meaning of the *munus triplex*.

Our ministry is rooted in Christ’s ministry. What he did and does is carried out in the life and witness of his Body on earth. The work of atonement effected in Christ’s life, death, and resurrection is carried through in his prophetic role of disclosing ultimate truth and envisioning the divine purpose; in his priestly role of sacrifice for the sins of the world; and in his royal role as liberator from the powers of evil and death and his regency over all things. The triple office is executed by Christ in servant form, thereby transfiguring common understandings of proclamation, sacrifice, and sovereignty. This ministry continues through the people of God who as the Body of Christ make the moves he did, in the ways they are called to do so, and in the servant form he pioneered. The pastoral office exercises the threefold ministry in the church gathered; it equips the saints for their ministry, being responsible in this locale for the identity of the Body, and therefore through Word and sacrament preserving it from amnesia. The ministry of the laity, being responsible for the vitality of the Body, exercises its threefold ministry primarily in the world as the church scattered,

<sup>7</sup>Ibid, passim.

moving the Body toward the horizon Kingdom (thereby preserving it from nostalgia).<sup>8</sup>

With this classical scheme in mind, we shall examine the neofundamentalist phenomenon under each rubric. And then we shall note the effects its ministries have had upon the wider church, and discuss responses appropriate to them.

### A. *Prophetic Office*

Neofundamentalist prophecy is known more for its foretelling than its forth-telling. Destiny charts and maps of “the late, great planet earth” abound. As those who watch the religious talk shows see, and those who listen to commercial religious radio or frequent the Christian bookstores hear and read, prophetic disclosure in these circles means revelation of the figures and events of the End. Prophetic preachers confidently answer the questions when?

where? who? how? The Bible becomes a text of secret sayings about the last days for those who have the key to this wisdom. And the prophetic cognoscenti know that the movement of troops on an Arab border, the flight of an AWACs plane near the Suez Canal, an uprising in Afghanistan, tumult at a Geneva conference, all portend a soon-coming tribulation and the imminent rapture of the saints.

We are well-supplied with theories that seek to explain the rise of modern apocalypticism—political, sociological, psychological. Does the nuclear peril invite transcendental retreat? What of the frustration of cultural or economic hopes in the marginalized? What of the predictable end-of-the-millennium fears? Are the devotees of the Endtime a swarm of jellyfish craving a rock?<sup>9</sup> Whatever social factors contribute to the emergence of the apocalyptic mind—perhaps they are multiple—the theological questions remain for those exercising ministry in the mainline churches. What Word do we speak into this context of apocalyptic scenario-making? And especially, how do we deal with the prognostications that claim biblical warrant?

Before we seek to answer these questions, we must attend to other aspects of the prophetic ministry of neofundamentalism which influence our context. There is a forthtelling as well as a foretelling which confronts us in this phenomenon. It takes the shape of an ellipse with the appropriate foci. Neofundamentalist prophecy of this sort moves regularly between authority and affirmation issues. The Book is held up in the first case, and sacred Doctrine in the second.

As we have seen in our preliminary definition, fundamentalism is a viewpoint born in disputes about authority. Fear of critical methods of biblical study and the perception that human experience and opinion (secular or churchly) is moving to replace God's word in matters of theology and morality evoked an oracular bibliology, a "hardline" inerrancy position as the test of orthodoxy. In

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<sup>8</sup>For a development of these themes, see Gabriel Fackre, "Ministries of Identity and Vitality," *Theology Today*, 36 (October, 1979) 375-382.

<sup>9</sup>Paul Hanson has drawn on various cultural research and hypotheses to develop a religious analysis of apocalypticism. For his most recent views, see "Apocalyptic Consciousness," *Harvard Divinity Bulletin*, 14.4 (1984) 4-6; 14.

sophisticated fundamentalist and neofundamentalist circles, inerrancy is carefully distinguished from "the dictation theory," a view associated with Mormon and Muslim hermeneutics. No, say fundamentalist exegetes, the inspired, writers were not the amanuenses of the Spirit, inscribing the Word from the mind of God. Rather, Deity honors their humanity as can be seen from the varying vocabulary ranges and the cultural idiom of each author. But at the same time, the Holy Spirit protects the biblical words from any error—any error, scientific and historical as well as theological and moral. Yet, here an ultra-inerrancy view must be distinguished from modifications that have developed in more irenic quarters of evangelicalism, ones that have made use of critical apparatus and been in dialogue with ecumenical constituencies. The latter evangelicals who are neither fundamentalist nor neofundamentalist are under heavy attack in the "battle for the Bible," with this war being waged in evangelical seminaries and churches.<sup>10</sup> Even a "trajectory view" which espouses the inerrancy of the autographs but only the "infallibility" of the copies (doctrine and morals in the copies are absolutely trustworthy even though small errors are possible in other matters through transmission) is attacked as a camel's nose in the tent and

resisted with vigorous efforts in harmonizing the received texts. Ultra-inerrancy, therefore, is the theory of biblical authority that characterizes the neofundamentalist phenomenon.

Neofundamentalist forth-telling manifests itself not only in the regular preaching and teaching of its pulpits, periodicals, and books, but also in the curriculum of the Christian schools springing up around the country (one every seven hours according to Falwell). It is pre-supposed in the views of creationists striving to place a second hypothesis of the world's origins in public school textbooks, although the argument for the latter is made on the basis of presumed scientific evidence, given the church-state separation issue.<sup>11</sup> And in endings as well as beginnings—both being a preoccupation of neofundamentalists—the apocalyptic scenarios are made possible by hyper-inerrancy premises. Thus, we come full circle as the forth-telling aspect of prophecy touches its foretelling dimension in eschatology.

The other feature of forth-telling in neofundamentalism is the affirmation theses that appear in partnership with the authority premises. In creationism and apocalypticism, we meet themes from the great Christian narrative that runs from creation to consummation, and, therefore, touch upon the loci of classical doctrine. As such, one of neofundamentalism's prominent characteristics appears—that of answering ultimate questions. Neofundamentalism has a very clearly dogmatic character and sees its role as didactic in a world of religion awash in sentimentality, moralism, and mysticism. A waterfall of tracts and books, radio talks, and television portrayals descends upon its audiences. The believer knows what kind of a cosmos we live in, who is going where, and when.

These affirmations are set in the framework of the Great Story with its center point in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As such, neo-

<sup>10</sup>Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976).

<sup>11</sup>Roland Mushat Frye, ed., *Is God a Creationist?* (New York: Scribner's, 1983) is the best overview of the subject.

fundamentalism does make use of Christian tradition and its formulation of that saga, including the doctrines of the person of Christ and the Trinity, and concurs with orthodox Protestantism at many points on the work of Christ and the *ordo salutis*.

Guidance is also given within this framework on moral as well as more directly theological issues. Amidst the confusing voices of modernity, here the believer gets the direction on matters of sexuality, law and order in the *polis*, and timely maps through the thicket of international affairs. An astute commentator has spoken, therefore, of the “new Protestant gnostics” who have superior wisdom about the things necessary to know in our journey through this unenlightened terrain.<sup>12</sup> In fact, the moral topography provides neofundamentalists with their impetus to political engagement and their alliances with those who do not share their explicit doctrinal commitments.<sup>13</sup> Here we find the Moral Majority aspect of the neofundamentalist phenomenon, in which the prophetic role is carried out in very specific crusades for and against political and social programs, parties, and partisans.

Again in the prophetic vein, neofundamentalist forth-telling also entails denunciation as well as affirmation. A thunderous No! is spoken to the enemy, doctrinal and moral. Here in this denunciatory context prophetism becomes apocalypticism in yet another sense. The sharp juxtapositions that mark the apocalyptic mind are employed in neofundamentalist descriptions of

the moral and theological state of affairs. The armies of light are arrayed against the armies of night as a political or ecclesiastical dualism becomes a metaphysical one. The apocalyptic thereby raises the level of political rhetoric, rousing passions, intensifying loyalties and energies, and sharpening the lines of controversy. This is war-in heaven as well as on earth.

### B. *The Priestly Office*

Ministry is the exercise of the priestly office. Christ, our High Priest, is the fulfillment of priesthood in its promissory expression in the Hebrew cult. Christ is the source and model of all other priestly work, in the making of intercession and the act of mediation with their centerpoint on Golgotha and circumference in prayer and praise. For the pastoral aspect of our own priestly work this means the conduct of worship, with the celebration of Baptism and Eucharist as the sacramental center of our participation in Christ's death and resurrection, and leadership in prayer, praise, and pastoral care as the environment in which the pastor sustains and nurtures the priesthood of all believers.

Is there evidence of a priestly ministry among neofundamentalists? Many of the traditional landmarks seem to be missing. The sacraments do not play a prominent role in the piety of neofundamentalism (except in the local church context where the Baptist tradition is strong, and even here among Baptists in media settings this aspect of neofundamentalism has low visibility), and the theology of sacraments (mostly construed as "ordinances") is highly subjec-

<sup>12</sup>Canadian theologian Philip Lee.

<sup>13</sup>Concepts of human nature and destiny, and thus theological judgements, are implied in political commentary, as Reinhold Niebuhr demonstrated in his critiques of another day. As applied to the Religious Right, see *The Religious Right in Christian Faith*, 45-57.

tivistic. Liturgy in its classical sense is virtually absent, although there is an implicit ordering of worship with its own rationale in spite of disclaimers and appeals to the freedom of the Spirit. In the area of pastoral care, of course, the, electronic church medium by its very nature cannot provide for a one-on-one ministry.

Yet, if ministry is viewed in its wider biblical habitat and in terms of its christological paradigm, clear priestly features can be found in neofundamentalism. When the intercessory and mediatory aspects of priesthood are put to the fore, neofundamentalist figures in the electronic church or on the speaking/revival circuit show strong priestly characteristics. In charismatic neofundamentalism, and well beyond it in the anticharismatic wing of neofundamentalism, prayers for personal welfare and physical and spiritual need are of central concern.<sup>14</sup> And with them come promises of blessings in proportion to the support of neofundamentalist programs. More about this later.

If there is a rough correspondence between the prophetic office and the cognitive dimension of selfhood, and the priestly office and its affective dimension, then neofundamentalism can claim credentials in the latter role. Sacramental and liturgical rhythms honor and employ sensory stimuli that reach below the levels of discursive communication. Images, color, and movement are very much part of the neofundamentalist phenomenon in its electronic form. The studies of Gregor Goethals have shown how the artful employment of new media technology by the video preachers makes the same kind of subliminal impact on viewers

as that of their most sophisticated secular counterparts.<sup>15</sup> Thus, ancient priestcraft in its most primitive sense lives again in the craft of today's television priests. This address to the affective self through visibilities is, of course, related to emotive encounters that come through the audibilities of proclamation for which the evangelical heritage is known. Here it is a liturgy of the Spirit, or more exactly a liturgy of the evangelically preached Word as Spirit, that is the organ of priestly work.

While more reduced in proportions relative to the work of prophecy, neofundamentalist priesthood in its clerical form is a practice of ministry that, in turn, has its effect on how we carry out that office in our ministry.

### *C. The Royal Office*

The royal office of ministry is rooted in the regency of Jesus Christ, in what he was and what he said and did. In Galilean ministry he leads us out of death into life, and in his crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension he has become head over all things. Christ exercises Lordship in ways alien to the power systems of this world. Indeed, he takes the garments of royalty and symbols of authority in Israel and transfigures them. Christ reigns from the cross. Thus, "the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Corinthians 1:25). Leadership is exercised through suffering, solidarity with those of low estate, and in servant form.

<sup>14</sup>There is a significant division within the ranks of neofundamentalism on the issue of the charismatic movement. See, for example, Jerry Falwell's sharp criticism of the charismatic movement in a policy statement on "Tongues" for his Liberty Baptist College.

<sup>15</sup>Gregor Goethals' earlier work, *The TV Ritual* (Boston: Beacon, 1981), is the foundation for the subsequent study of the television evangelists, as yet unpublished.

The servants of the Servant of God live out their royal office in like manner. The whole Body of Christ, wherever it is called to be his hands and feet in a leader role, exercises this ministry, and it does it alongside those it serves, not from a throne above them. Leadership happens in various expressions in both the pastoral office and the ministry of the laity. As we are dealing with the clergy leadership primarily in the fundamentalist phenomenon, we shall examine the outworkings of the royal office in that setting. However, the way it is done there, and the relation of that to the manifestation of the threefold office among the laity needs also to be examined.

Royalty as rulership in its general meaning is an apt characterization of the clerical ministry in neofundamentalism. Jerry Falwell put it this way: "God's plan is that His flock is to be led by shepherds, not run by a board or a committee. God never intended for a committee, nor a board of deacons, nor any other group to dominate a church or control a pastor. The pastor is God's man, God's servant, God's leader. When you tie the hand of God's man, when you keep him from acting as the Holy Spirit leads him, you have murdered his initiative, you have killed his spirit."<sup>16</sup> This view of the hegemony of the pastor (and all the pastors are clergymen in neofundamentalism) is part of a larger theory of leadership and diagnosis of the ills of leaderlessness in the modern world. The cure for the latter is "the mighty man." Again, Falwell: "You will find that when society begins to fall apart spiritually, what we find is missing is the mighty man, that man in governmental position, that man of war, that judge, that prophet, that

preacher who is willing to call sin by its right name.”<sup>17</sup> The institutions of society—government, law, business, family, church—function best when designed in pyramidal fashion with power vested at the apex in a moral, mighty man. Leadership is overlordship entrusted to those with the credentials of righteousness.

The military metaphor, so common in the lexicon of neofundamentalism, takes on special force in the exercise of pastoral ministry. There is a clear “chain of command” in neofundamentalist institutions—in the organizational structure of its congregations, especially its super-churches, as well as in its “television empires.” The combat leader has total control of his troops. A former member of such a congregation comments, “Imagine a spectrum that runs from a Jim Jones cult on the one hand to the most arid of liberal churches on the other.... Well, some of the big fundamentalist churches in the south would fall close—dangerously close—to the Jim Jones end of the spectrum. I know because I used to belong to one of them. I got out, but it was a terrible culture shock.”<sup>18</sup>

Ministry belongs to the whole people of God which, by implication, shares in its entirety in the three-fold office that continues Christ’s ministry. With the formative role of clergy in neofundamentalism, especially in its highly visible media forms, we have not said much about the role of the laity. Without the funds and support of great masses of laity, there would not be a neofundamentalist phenomenon. Yet the laity so involved are quite willing to supply the

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<sup>16</sup>From the sermon “The Day of Great Men Has Not Passed,” quoted in Frances FitzGerald, “A Disciplined, Charging Army,” *The New Yorker*, May 18, 1981, 96.

<sup>17</sup>Jerry Falwell, *Listen, America!* (New York: Doubleday, 1981) 14.

<sup>18</sup>F. FitzGerald, “A Disciplined, Charging Army,” 96.

base for this pyramidal structure, with its clerical royal officer. How the pastor’s role is construed gives us a clue as to how the ministry of the laity functions throughout neofundamentalism: as an accessory to the clerical prophet, priest, and king who is the one who carries forward Christ’s work.

### III. A RESPONSE

The burden of this essay has been the phenomenology of neofundamentalism. Yet, at each turn of the tale, the description begs for assessment. How do churches which stand closer to the classical Christian tradition function in this emerging religious context, and how do they respond to these influential new patterns of ministry? We follow the lines of the triple office in seeking to answer briefly these questions.

What can we say about the stewardship of the prophetic office by neofundamentalists? First, we must acknowledge that there is here a faithfulness to some aspects of the biblical practice of the prophetic role. This includes a connection with Jesus’ own ministry as prophet and a tangential relationship as well to the carrying out of this office in the long tradition of the church. That is, the future-orientation of neofundamentalist proclamation coheres with the prophetic pointing to the Shalom of God, to Jesus preaching of the coming Realm of God, and to the eschatological commitments of historic Christian belief. Again, the apocalyptic form of this can point to threads of this kind of teaching in both Old and New Testaments. And paradoxically, neofundamentalist eschatology can show some similarities with the “theology of hope,” insofar



as it provides an ultimate assurance against the despairs of the hour, one which spurs to political involvement rather than providing an apolitical escape route.

Further, the attention to world view speaks forcefully to current quandaries about the meaning of life. The destiny charts and doctrinal diagrams represent in their own way a theological vigor, one that contrasts sharply with the theological listlessness and doctrinal vacuum to be found in too many mainline churches. In fact, the presence and power of neofundamentalist scenarios, as well as increasing self-criticism within mainline churches, have contributed significantly to concern about the theological disarray of some denominations.<sup>19</sup>

The moral passion and political consciousness-raising associated with the prophetic office in neofundamentalism is not to be ignored. To see the political implications of faith is a new thing for the fundamentalist mind. And the concern for personal moral issues is itself a judgement on mainline avoidance and ambiguity, one that like the broader theological impact is calling for reassessment in our churches. While the denunciatory tone of its judgements falls harshly on modern ears, it is well to remember that the strength and courage of Barmen was in its “Rejections” as well as its affirmations, the No and Yes, for which the prophetic office in Scripture and tradition has always been known.

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<sup>19</sup>Celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Barmen Declaration, The Craigville Colloquy of United Church of Christ leadership acknowledged this kind of theological vacuum and asserted its biblical and christological commitments. See “A Letter to Our Brothers and Sisters in The United Church of Christ,” *Keeping You Posted*, 19. 6B (June, 1984) 3-4.

While we can learn some new things from the judgements of neofundamentalism on the household of faith, we must ourselves finally say a firm No to this movement and its theological and moral world.

We face a certain irony in the prophetic forth-telling of neofundamentalism. While vociferously proclaiming biblical authority and content for its views, the specifics of teaching show the influence of the ideas and programs of modern culture. This secularization of Christianity is found in its teaching about the beginning and ending of the biblical narrative, themes that have a high profile. It can also be found in its moral and political accents and their theological undergirding. The modernizing tendency of neofundamentalism can be especially seen when the cosmologies of creation and consummation are compared with the treatment of these doctrines in classical Christianity. The same tendencies can be seen in the ethical arena when compared with the struggle against acculturation in other eras as in the Confessing Church’s response to the “German Christians.”

In contrast to creedal and catechetical modesty about creation and consummation, neofundamentalism features timetables, maps, blueprints, and playbills. The great whys and whats of the tradition touching the End—the resurrection of the dead, return of Christ, final judgement, everlasting life—are not enough for the neofundamentalist mind which requires the details of secular forecasting: the where, when, how, and who of political and social history. The same is true for the classical doctrine of creation; the affirmation of the Creator, the goodness of the earth, and the dignity of human nature must be supplemented by scenarios of cosmic origin valid enough to be taught in the public schools. Thus the Bible is forced into the mold of modernity as a textbook in geology or astrophysics. As the Scriptures are turned into an oracle of

the penultimate, the ultimate Word about life, death and destiny that is there addressed to us becomes muted.

The prophetic forthtelling of neofundamentalists that moves into the political area gives like evidence of accommodationism. Specific legislative and social programs, and political or para-political movements are linked unambiguously with the divine intention. Human words are fused with God's Word, and foes are aligned with Satan's work in a metaphysical, and finally, apocalyptic dualism, one closer to Zoroastrian and Manichean cosmology than Christian faith. Meanwhile, accents on justice and peace with strong prophetic lineage in the Old Testament and in Christ's own prophetic office are replaced by current nationalistic and militaristic postures and policies. Thus, "secular humanism"—the substitution of human judgement for God's Word—enters under the guise of biblical rhetoric. How timely are the words of the Barmen Declaration:

Jesus Christ, as he has attested for us in Holy Scripture is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death. We reject the false doctrine, as though the Church could and would have to acknowledge as a source of its proclamation, apart from and beside this one Word of God, still other events and powers, figures and truths, as God's revelation.

In priestly ministry we must say a Yes as well as a No to the neofundamentalist stewardship of this office. Because the Spirit blows where it will, main-

line churches must be ready to acknowledge those winds of power and truth, that make their presence known outside the appointed means of grace. Vitalities that are not always found in our midst, and constituencies not so easily won to Christ by our more pedestrian ways, may be the portion of another through God's surprising grace. Such exuberances may be captured better by the electronic eye or mediated more meaningfully through the prayer and praise of assemblies not of our making. And the constituencies may be the marginalized whom we have failed to reach or chosen to avoid—lonely and forgotten elders, rural and urban poor, alienated blue collar workers. The statistics say that these make up the audience of commercial religious television. Can we learn from all of this? Until we do, we must acknowledge how God can raise up children of Abraham from stones and fashion Assyrian rods.

Yet Assyria is not a substitute for Israel. Judgement accepted through the priestly work of neofundamentalism falls far short of the biblical model and historic church practice. While the Spirit ranges far beyond the ordinary means of grace in the Body of Christ, God does not disdain nor desert the places of promise in the community of faith where two or three are gathered around bread and wine and water. Not only does the Spirit nurture the Body unfailingly here, but when the means of grace are neglected, Christian identity erodes. This is often the case in the neofundamentalist phenomenon. Especially is it so when the standards of worldly success, signs of worldly excitement, or modes of secular manipulation become normative for priestly work. Indeed, the secular humanism that makes its way into the prophetic ministry of neofundamentalism finds a counterpart in the secular humanism of its priestcraft.

The secularizing of the means of grace is most clearly manifest in the bartering of blessings that takes place in the electronic church. Every time an appeal for funds is made in

association with soteriological promise—wholeness and hope in this life or the next, in body or soul—Tetzels coins ring again. Here and throughout this ministry, the work of our great High Priest, done once but a force always, is put into question by the priests of neofundamentalist modernity. Let such works-righteousness be named for what it is.

Also to be challenged is the illusion of intimacy cultivated by the strategems of the television vicar. Genuine koinonia cannot be transmitted over the airwaves. The life together of the Christian community is a gift of grace in the local congregation. Transient images of togetherness are no substitute for this. Yet, the vacuum we leave in the life of the congregation invites the quest for ersatz community. We have work to do here as well as a Word to say.

Touching the royal office, the leadership initiatives of neofundamentalist clergy show energy and imagination. There is something here from which mainline pastors might learn. Too often the jargon of “resourcing” and “facilitating” has weakened the understanding of the royal role that is part of the pastor’s call. The equipping of the saints cannot be done without envisioning and initiating. While the entrepreneurial mode of neofundamentalism is not the best way to express it, pioneering is part of Christ’s royal ministry and ours.

The images of both entrepreneur and king are taken from the secular world, and have to go through the transmutation that Christian baptism requires—servant leadership and royalty in cruciform. This is the way of Christ

who does not conform to this world but transforms it. When the values and direction of the borrowed categories continue to determine Christian usage, captivity ensues. So it is in the neofundamentalist phenomenon. The “mighty man” philosophy is an unbaptized secular value that controls the pastoral exercise of the royal office. The mighty churchman is the Oriental potentate *redivivus*. Alongsidedness, collegiality, servanthood are foreign to the chain of command framework.

Affected by all this is not only leadership style within the congregation or institution, but also the theology of the laity. Functionally as well as pedagogically, there is no place for the prophetic, priestly, and royal ministries of the whole people of God, a dramatic departure from the Reformation heritage. The hegemony of the leader figure, and the absence of participatory theory and practice, have their implications for political and social witness as well. As is illustrated by the mighty man philosophy in general, pyramidal decision-making by moral and spiritual figures is the model for leadership in the polis. Not only does this run counter to the christological transmutation of regency, but it also presupposes a sanguine view of human nature: the trust of power in the hands of moral agents. The biblical teaching about the universality of sin and the corruptibility of power (“power corrupts and absolute power tends to corrupt absolutely”) and even the sobriety about these things in the American experience—one which seeks to disperse power throughout the body politic, and use checks and balances in its institutions—is lost upon the neofundamentalists. Ironically, an Enlightenment view which trusts the goodness of human nature (in the Moral Majority or the Moral Leader), secular humanism, once again edges out biblical faith. Here, as in the other neofundamentalist practices of the threefold office, a secularizing process has displaced Christian teaching.

Cultural commentary discovered the neofundamentalist phenomenon five years ago. After their impact on the 1980 election, the Religious Right, the electronic church and their kin

received wide media attention. But the pulse-takers and reporters moved on to other things, judging that the fad and frenzy were over. However, the morning post brought computerized direct mailings to Moral Majority Report subscribers, laying the groundwork for a massive get-out-the-vote campaign for the fall of 1984. Dr. Falwell achieved the largest ingathering of funds in the history of his financial appeals for his “agenda for the 80s.” Only the politically and theologically naive can believe that we are dealing here with the transient and trendy. Neofundamentalism is a force to be reckoned with in the religious climate of the late twentieth century, a formative context for our own prophetic, priestly and royal ministry.