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*Deputy Speaker  
 Romanian Parliament*

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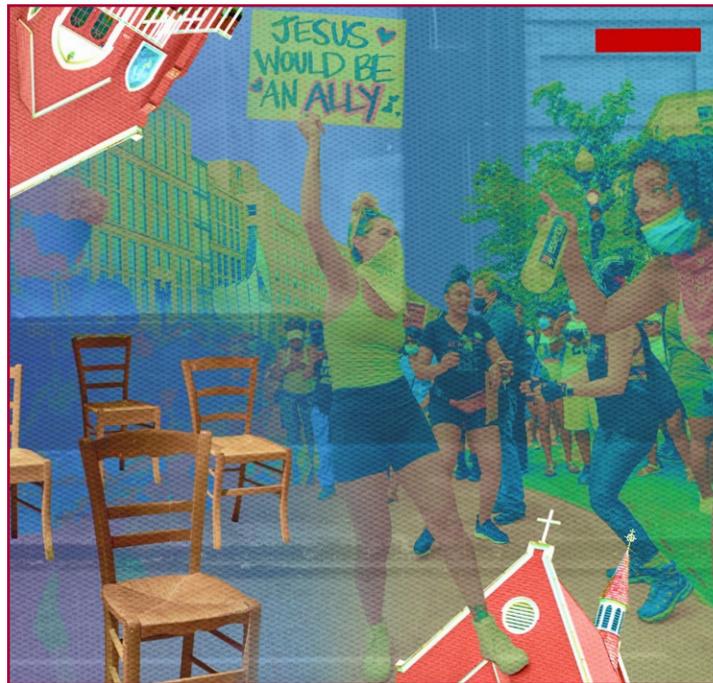
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**Capitol Ministries**® ..... 8



✿ PART 3 OF 3

# Societal Deterioration and the Epochal Analysis of a Bungling Church



In this three-part series, we have been examining evangelism and discipleship as the primary calling of the institution of the Church and how that relates to the five major epochs of American Church history. We've given a close look at how well the Church has executed that primary focus that Jesus instructed His Church to be about until He returns.

This week we will examine the last three of the five epochs with this in mind. I think you will find this study very insightful as to your personal understanding

*Continued on next page*

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- Former Cabinet Members / White House Senior Staff: Wednesdays 7am, Zoom.*
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- House Members: Thursdays 8am, The Capitol Hill Club, hot breakfast served.*

*The views expressed in each Bible study are those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect the position of any individual Bible Study Sponsor.*



■ MINISTRY UPDATE

## Ben-Oni Ardelean

*Deputy Speaker of the  
Romanian Parliament*

*Capitol Ministries Europe Director*



Expanding Capitol Ministries discipleship Bible studies to political leaders across Europe is a priority for Romanian Parliamentarian Dr. Ben-Oni Ardelean after winning re-election in December 2020.

Dr. Ardelean, who has served as Europe Director for CapMin since early 2019, has already spearheaded efforts to further the ministry’s mission among many nations.

“Still, my main focus will be to build a solid team for CapMin in all European capitals and major cities,” he said. “Hope we can do great things for God in the near future, mainly after the pandemic season.”

A leading Evangelical officeholder in Europe, Dr. Ardelean serves as Deputy Speaker of the Romanian

*Continued on page 4*

of the present spiritual fabric of our nation and how important it is for the Church to “stay in its lane” and execute the primacy of its calling in order to best effectuate preservation and illumination in our great, but increasingly troubled, nation.

Read on, my friend.

Ralph Drollinger

### I. 1920: THE FUNDAMENTALIST REACTION

One of the recurring themes in Joel Carpenter’s classic book *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* is the idea that apart from evangelism, the Fundamentalist movement’s social involvement was motivated out of reactionary pride to take back the center stage from the Modernists who had stolen it away from the Puritans. States Carpenter:

Those who founded the fundamentalist movement witnessed this shift in cultural leadership and began to notice that their own status and influence was waning.<sup>1</sup>

Earlier in his book he states:

[They saw] their status as community leaders and the influence of their evangelical values decrease sharply while a new elite of university-trained secu-

lar professors and liberal clergy gained power and prestige.... Fundamentalists had been deeply shamed in the battles of the 1920’s, but they could not give up on the vision of a Christian America.<sup>2</sup>

The human desire to get back all that had been lost to the liberals, i.e., seminaries, colleges, denominations, churches, mission agencies, publishing companies, and the like was a compelling motive that seemed to eclipse the need for a clearly reasoned and biblical theology relative to how to go about doing that. This same compelling desire seemed to eclipse as well the need to stop and question the validity of the earlier Puritan objective to “Christianize America” as was motivated by a faulty Postmillennial eschatology. Furthermore, there existed an underlying assumption by the Fundamentalists that that which was lost was that which God intended for believers to get back and always possess. Again, how biblically speaking one should go about



♥ VERSE OF THE WEEK

**Luke 3:9**

*“Indeed the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; so every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”*

achieving repossession of these institutions is missing from the literature of the time. Accordingly, Fundamentalists sought many means to “take back America from the liberals,” but there exists no biblically reasoned document by any leader during the period as to how one should achieve that. Fundamentalists were motivated and driven by, if not captivated by, an overwhelming reactionary pragmatism to recover their huge losses.

One of the chief intellectual spokespersons for Fundamentalism (although he did not identify himself as a Fundamentalist) was, as already mentioned, J. Gresham Machen. Importantly, Machen argued against Fundamentalist political/social involvement that was intended to change culture.<sup>3</sup> Machen believed it was too easy for the Church, when focused on means other than evangelism and discipleship, to lapse into a moralizing campaign void of a biblical justification. “Why try and take back that aspect of Theological Liberalism?” he reasoned. Machen alludes to this when he says,

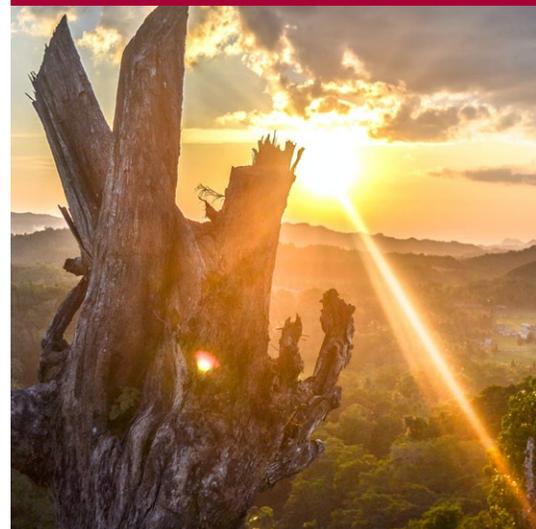
The Christian Missionary ... His chief business, he believes, is the saving of souls, and souls are saved not by [teaching] the mere ethical principles of Jesus but by His redemptive work ... human goodness [the emphasis of theological liberalism] will avail nothing for lost souls; ye must be born again.<sup>4</sup>

Theological liberals had united with the institution of the State in order to

forward a false gospel: that salvation was not through personal conversion, which is the basis of solid historical, biblically driven Christianity, but rather by means of a Social Gospel. They taught that social redemption is what Jesus and the Bible are all about not what the Bible actually says it’s about—personal redemption. Thus, the reaction of the legitimate Christian—the Fundamentalist—to this aberrant view of the gospel was to withdraw from all forms of civil governmental involvement. Second Corinthians 6:17 was a passage used to justify such separatist actions: **“COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE,” says the Lord. “AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN...”** For sure, the *militant Fundamentalist did not want to be perceived as a Modernist!* This reactionary withdrawal would have a devastating effect on the future of America.

The Fundamentalist, who understood and believed in the power of change via personal conversion to Christ who held a Luke chapter 3 understanding of societal change and possessed the unadulterated message of salvation, had a knee-jerk reaction to ever being remotely associated with Modernism and retreated from the mission field of the State! Summarily:

**Whereas the Puritans were intrinsically intertwined with the State to achieve Postmillennial objectives, a reactionary Fundamentalist had now abandoned it!**



Without its strong suit—the primacy of evangelism—any other play the Church may make to change the State will prove powerless and ineffective.





*Continued from page 2*

Parliament, one of the highest offices in the nation.

Among degrees he has earned are a Ph.D. in political science from the National School of Political and Public Administration, and a Ph.D. in theology from the University of Bucharest.

Dr. Ardelean has built relationships with faith leaders during his political career that has spanned decades.

“I believe Capitol Ministries could provide the answer for not only spiritual ‘searches’ in the political arena but could also further transform nations and lead the way for a new environment in divisive Europe,” he said. “Capitol Ministries has a unique mission to impact the secular political arena in Europe with the transforming Word of God.”

Capitol Ministries’ mission is to create discipleship Bible studies in the political arena throughout the world from local city and county commissioners to state legislatures, national public servants, and in foreign nations.

CapMin has created Bible studies in 43 states, four studies to national ministries in Washington, D.C., and national ministries in 24 foreign nations.

The Fundamentalists held a proper understanding of how best to achieve societal change in the sense of Luke 3 and Ephesians (and the other parallel passages listed in this study’s endnotes)—that coming to Christ for salvation would internally change a sinner and result in his becoming a good citizen. But they abandoned the mission field of civil government to distance themselves from the Modernist and as a way to discredit those unbiblical views.

Fundamentalists took on an attitude of “politics is dirty.” To this day many Fundamentalist pastors want nothing to do with governmental involvement. How tragic! (Many of you elected leaders whom I counsel experience this disdain, ask me about it, and wonder, “Why?” The above will aid you in your understanding of this matter.) Based on Scripture, both Theological Liberalism and the Fundamentalist’s withdrawal from politics is faulty theology.

In our search across American Church history for the application of the simple truth of Luke, chapter 3—that saving faith is the best progenitor of societal advance—let us recap:

**The Modernists** engaged culture motivated by a social understanding of Jesus, not personal evangelism.

**The Fundamentalists** did not engage culture even though they believed wholeheartedly that personal evangelism was the way to change it.

## II. 1950: THE BIRTH OF NEO-EVANGELICALISM

During the late 1940s Harold Ockenga and Carl Henry, among others, establish Neo-evangelicalism with the intent of sanding-off the seemingly rough edges of an increasingly sectarian militant Fundamentalism. By this time Fundamentalism had been bloodied in its war with liberal Protestantism, and its resulting public image was one of a combatant, which in simple terms had marginalized its influence in the eyes of broad society. Accordingly, “Neo” evangelical is coined, a new title to a movement and desire to, among other things, increase Evangelical influence in society. Motivated by the belief that Fundamentalism had isolated itself from playing a major role in the influence of American culture, the purveyors of Neo-evangelicalism attempted a “Christian religion metamorphosis,” a makeover, a reset, a reintroduction of biblical Christianity. This “new chapter” idea can be illustrated in several ways.

First is the landmark article that ap-

### A Summation of the First Three Epochs

**The Puritans** engaged culture motivated by Postmillennialism more so than personal evangelism.



peared in *Christian Life Magazine* in March 1956 titled, “Is Evangelical Theology Changing?”<sup>5</sup> Contributors to the article were numerous noted Christian leaders. Among the eight listed major changes from Fundamentalism to Neo-evangelicalism was the need to have “a more definite recognition of social responsibility.” The article states in this regard, “Nevertheless—unlike Fundamentalism—Neo-evangelicalism realizes the Church has a prophetic mission to society. There are times when the Church must thunder, ‘Thus saith the Lord!’” The article goes on to say in greater specificity, “We must ... make Evangelicalism more relevant to the political and sociological realities of our time.” But the article fails to build a biblical basis for the aforementioned conclusive statement. It follows that Carl Henry does not cite the simplicity of what John the Baptist is stating in Luke 3; in fact, to do so would counter his argument.

Carl Henry was the leading voice in the Neo-evangelical movement. He is known for his leading work in this regard, titled *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*. This book represents the magna carta of the Neo-evangelical position as the emerging movement attempts a pendulum swing away from historic militant Fundamentalism. It is important to note this big picture book thesis when examining Henry’s overall reactionary argumentation.

From a sense of logic and reasoning, Henry’s postulations seem quite persuasive. However, again, he fails

to provide any sort of biblical basis for his thesis regarding the necessity of a social emphasis by the Church. Sadly, his thesis for Neo-evangelicalism’s engagement in culture is not based on Luke 3. As a matter of fact, again and again, the simple formula of Luke 3 is nowhere to be found in Henry’s book!

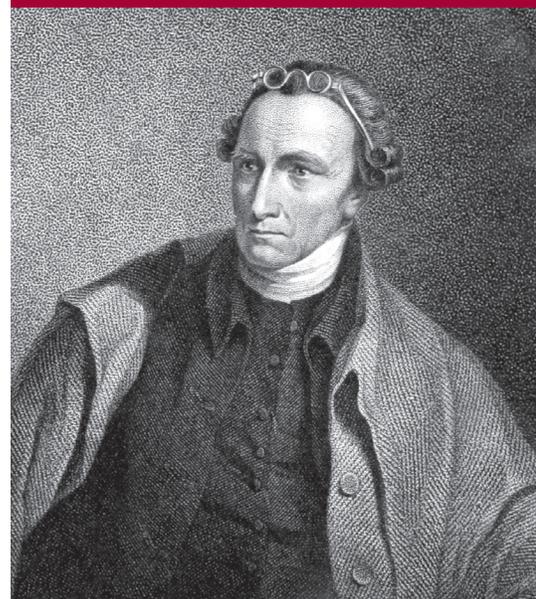
This omission is hugely unfortunate because in this next major epoch of American Church history, the Church will once again miss the biblical way in which it should primarily—and is best suited in terms of its overall equipping and effectiveness—relate to the State!

When Henry makes the charge that “Modern Fundamentalism does not explicitly sketch the social implications of its message for the non-Christian world,” he is correct as it relates to Fundamentalism’s abject withdrawal from the political arena. However what he and his movement are about to do is use the Church without its trump card of evangelism!

**Without its strong suit—the primacy of evangelism—any other play the Church may make to change the State will prove powerless and ineffective.**

Many more voices of founding Neo-Evangelical influence that advocated social-political change via the Church in ways other than its God-commissioned means of evangelism could be cited. Important to

*Patrick Henry*



**“Being a Christian ... is a character which I prize far above all this world has or can boast.”**

— Patrick Henry, Revolutionary War general, legislator, “The Voice of Liberty,” ratifier of the U.S. Constitution, Governor of Virginia.

A.G. Arnold, *The Life of Patrick Henry of Virginia* (Auburn and Buffalo: Miller, Orton and Mulligan, 1854), 250.





James Iredell



“For my part, I am free and ready enough to declare that I think the Christian religion is a Divine institution; and I pray to God that I may never forget the precepts of His religion or suffer the appearance of an inconsistency in my principles and practice.”

— James Iredell, Ratifier of the U.S. Constitution, Attorney General of North Carolina, U.S. Supreme Court Justice appointed by President George Washington.

James Iredell, *The Papers of James Iredell*, Don Higginbotham, editor (Raleigh: North Carolina Division of Archives and History, 1976), Vol. I, 11, from his 1768 essay on religion.

note, however, is this: Even though one of the major tenets of Neo-evangelicalism is social involvement and reform similar to the emphasis of Theological Liberalism (but without its doctrinal heresy), *the leaders provided no scriptural basis as justification for social involvement*. This is evident in what is missing from The Lausanne Covenant itself!<sup>6</sup>—and in doing so, they completely overlook the simple model and instruction of Luke 3!

### III. 1975: THE BIRTH OF THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT

Evangelicals’ attempts to change the cultural direction of America through political involvement perhaps bloom more fully in the mid-1970s than ever before. Fundamentalist Pastor Jerry Falwell founds the Moral Majority.<sup>7</sup> Thereafter televangelist Pat Robertson takes the mantle of leadership via the auspices of his moralizing Christian organization, The Christian Coalition, founded in the mid-1980s and led by Ralph Reed. And then about ten years later, Focus on the Family’s Dr. James Dobson takes that baton. It is the latter’s organization that published the book, *Why You Can’t Stay Silent: A Biblical Mandate to Shape Our Culture*.<sup>8</sup>

I should first couch what I am about to say with this: the late Dr. Falwell was good friend of mine as are Dr. Robertson and Dr. Dobson to this day. I love and respect these men dearly. Focus on the Family’s book (Dr. Dobson is no longer with Focus

on the Family) is the first major attempt to provide a biblical basis for cultural involvement by Evangelicals, but again, unfortunately, little is said about Luke 3 and the simple yet profound three examples of the relationship between evangelism and societal change that are recorded in the passage. Why is it we can’t seem to get this right? Why do we keep missing what Luke 3 says is the way to go about this?

**From one epoch of American Church history to another—we can’t seem to land on the simplicity of what the Bible teaches in this regard.**

### IV. SUMMARY

Those are an encapsulation of the major epochs of American Church history as it relates to this subject. Luke 3 is the way the Church is to engage in culture, but for one reason or another as seen in this study, Luke 3 is missing in each. The best way the Church should relate to the State is via evangelism! The State needs it desperately, but the Church never seems to give the State what it needs!

The Puritans did a lot of evangelism out of necessity, although motivated primarily by Postmillennialism. And because they did, America was founded with a dynamism and power unmatched in world history.

**Today we still ride the wave of their evangelistic success brought about**

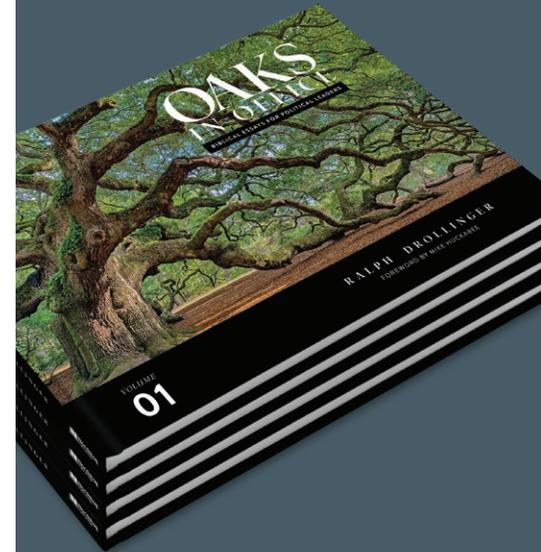


**through the beliefs and actions of our Founding Fathers. The Puritan epoch had it right, even though their eschatological motivation for doing so was incorrect.**

But that tsunami of the Puritan influence has lessened greatly over the years due to all the following epochs of American Church history wherein we have been unable to dial it correctly: Theological liberals abandoned solid, biblical doctrine as they sought to influence America with a gospel of their own manufacture. Fundamentalists had the gospel right but retreated from culture. Neo-evangelicals in their attempt to right the wrong of Fundamental sectarianism still failed in that their solution neglected to include the primacy and simplicity of evangelism. And the

Religious Right movement, although full of sincere passion, also underemphasized the simplicity and focus of evangelism, substituting in its place the complexity of policy change—and though commendable and necessary in a “we the people” nation, such an emphasis is not as powerful as is calling people to repentance and new life in Christ—just like John the Baptist did. When a person repents and receives the indwelling Holy Spirit, he cannot help but become a good citizen and a benefit to society! That is what Luke 3 illustrates!

Will the next epoch of American Church history—one that I think is about to begin—be characterized by the primacy and simplicity of evangelism relative to the State, or will we somehow miss this directive once again with an aberrant emphasis on social justice or some other fad?



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We need Churches and Church members to evangelize political leaders and those in their neighborhoods—just like Jesus tells the apostle Paul to do in Acts 9:15—and Paul instructs Pastor Timothy to do in 1 Timothy 2:1–4! May God give us Luke 3 clarity in the next epoch of American Church history: One that not only builds God’s eternal Kingdom, but best thwarts societal deterioration at the same time.

1. Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 36.
2. *Ibid.*, 11.
3. J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1923).
4. Ned B. Stonehouse, J. Gresham Machen, *A Biographical Memoir* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955).
5. *Christian Life Magazine*, Volume 17, No. 11, March 1956.
6. See *The Lausanne Covenant*, The Lausanne Committee on World Evangelization at [www.lausanne.org](http://www.lausanne.org). One of the takeaways of this historic gathering was the ensuing statement from the convention that the Church needed to possess “two wings on the bird” so to speak. By that they meant one of evangelism and the other of social involvement. The inclusion of this represents perhaps the Neo-evangelical influence present at the convention. The famous British theologian, John Stott, was to write the theology for the second aspect of this statement, to justify its inclusion, but it never materialized beyond a simple listing of scriptural references in supposed support of the previously written summary statement. The wording and organizational outline in the Lausanne Covenant appears to give equal weight to evangelism and social involvement. But these two directives are not biblically on equal ground. Based on Scripture, this is faulty theology. The Bible teaches (cf. Matthew 5:16) that social involvement is a means to an end; it is to be used by the Christian to achieve the ultimate objective of evangelism. Spiritual maturation (Matthew 5:1–12) leads to cultural participation (Matthew 5:13–15), which ultimately leads to the evangelization of others (Matthew 5:16). Personal spiritual maturation will be indicated by one’s cultural participation, which then testifies of God and one’s need for Him in a fallen, onlooking world. This progression reveals the biblical formula for being an effective ambassador for Christ.
7. Jerry Falwell, *Falwell: An Autobiography* (Lynchburg: Liberty House Publishers, 1997).
8. Tom Minney, *Why You Can’t Stay Silent: A Biblical Mandate to Shape Our Culture* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001).

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