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FUNDAMENTALISM AND THE JEW: AN INTERPRETIVE ESSAY

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It is no surprise to Christian scholars that the word "fundamentalist" is used mostly in a derogatory fashion today, so much so that evangelicals have entirely abandoned the term. Currently it is a code word for "narrow," "bigoted," "anti-intellectual," "lacking erudite culture" and "anti-Semitic." These views are expressed in a variety of disciplines, and one is as likely to hear the term in an overt comment in a college English, anthropology or political science class as in a history, theology or philosophy class, regardless of whether the class is in a secular or Christian liberal arts college. It is ironic that within such a liberal tradition we have actually become quite narrow in our interpretation of the fundamentalist. As one professor of history told me about a leading fundamentalist of the 1930s: "I'd believe *any* derogatory comment about him!"

This casual acceptance of the pejorative remark has infiltrated those scholars that touch on the focus of my research—i. e., the historic fundamentalist attitudes toward the Jewish people. I believe that fundamentalists as a whole have been historically very positive toward the Jewish people because of their dispensationalist-premillennialist eschatology and their "literal" (more properly called "normal") interpretation of the Bible. This philo-Semitism is in direct contrast to their historic attitudes toward Catholicism, modernism and communism. Nevertheless the fundamentalist has often been attacked by the Christian community for his support of Zionism, while he at the same time is accused of latent anti-Semitism by the same Christian community. A new book by Timothy P. Weber epitomizes this conception. He declares:

> Yet there was an ironic ambivalence in the premillennialist attitude toward Jews. On the one hand, Jews were God's chosen people and heirs to the promises; but their rejection of Jesus as Messiah placed them in open rebellion against God and ensured their eventual rendezvous with Antichrist during the great tribulation. The glory of Israel was still in the future; in the meantime, Jews were under the power of Satan and were playing their assigned role in the decline of the present age. *From that perspective, Jews deserved the scorn of premillennialists as well as their sympathy. Accordingly, at times premillennialists sounded anti-Semitic. Despite their claims that anti-Semitism was a gross and unexcusable sin against God, some leaders of the movement acted like representatives of American anti-Semitism!*[1]

Note that Weber views the Jews as a people and as a race under vicious anti-Semitic attack from fundamentalists. "Jews [as a race] deserved the scorn"; "Jews [as a race] are in open rebellion" (as if the fundamentalist believed no other race was in rebellion or was responsible for Jesus' death).

Weber's comments are not extreme in relation to other Christian comments. The words are chosen carefully. I feel, however, that one gains a misconception of

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[1]T. P. Weber, *Living In the Shadow of the Second Coming* (New York: Oxford, 1979) 154 (italics mine).

the fundamentalist when such statements are read. Let me note here that I do not have an axe to grind. As an historian I would quickly document the fundamentalist's anti-Semitism if I believed it to be generally true. Fundamentalists were not perfect—their historic attitudes toward Catholics forcefully prove this. Their attitudes toward the Jewish people, however, are quite extraordinary, and I believe they deserve some credit and understanding with respect to these attitudes. Perhaps I am only trying in this essay to ask the Christian scholar to take another look at this complicated fundamentalist movement, to try to view the totality *and* to view the individual without the caricature that past decades have passed down. Why? In order to achieve honesty, integrity and justice in our generalizations about the movement.

At the risk of being accused of not covering a multitude of famous fundamentalists and throwing them into a succinct essay with a few sentences devoted to each, I would like to concentrate on one fundamentalist who has been widely accused of anti-Semitism and to briefly discuss his relationship to the Jewish people.[2] I do not choose him because he is the easiest to defend (for he is not), but rather because I have grown to know him through my research. He died before I was born, and yet within him I understand the complications that surround the caricature of fundamentalist anti-Semitism. His name is Arno C. Gaebelein.

Gaebelein is one of those who "acted like representatives of American anti-Semitism" (Weber). Dwight Wilson is not as kind as Weber. He notes that Gaebelein's book, *The Conflict of the Ages*, seemed to provide legitimacy for the "Nazi attitude."[3] Gaebelein's integrity has been questioned by instructors at such diverse institutions as Calvin College, Moody Bible Institute and Trinity College (to name a few). The accusations are not new. Ralph Lord Roy in his discussion of the anti-Semite Gerald Winrod declared: "Among influential ministers who cooperated with Winrod were the late W. B. Riley, president of the Northwestern Bible Schools in Minneapolis and founder of the World's Christian Fundamentals Association, and the late Arno C. Gaebelein, editor of *Our Hope* and director of Stony Brook School for Boys in Long Island." [4] Thus Roy includes Gaebelein in this "ministry of hate."

Anti-Semitism is hatred of the Jewish people. And it is actions against them as a race or religion, either overtly or covertly. I believe "latent anti-Semitism" is not only possible but surely exists today. Did it exist in Gaebelein, however?

Gaebelein began his ministry in New York in a missionary outreach to the Jewish people in the last decade of the nineteenth century. *Our Hope* magazine itself declared in its second issue that "the apathy, and even antipathy, toward the Jew, into which the church has fallen, must be removed, and a better feeling

[2]For a brief discussion of fundamentalist theology and attitudes note D. A. Rausch, "Paranoia About Fundamentalists?", *Judaism* 28 (summer 1979) 304-308. For a detailed discussion note my book, *Zionism Within Early American Fundamentalism, 1878-1918* (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1979) 1-27; 53-78.

[3]D. Wilson, *Armageddon Now!: The Premillenarian Response to Russia and Israel Since 1917* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977) 97.

[4]R. L. Roy, "Religion and Race," *Christian Century* 70 (April 22, 1953) 474-475. Roy is inaccurate in declaring that Arno C. Gaebelein was director of Stony Brook School. His son, Frank E. Gaebelein, was actually headmaster of that school.

awakened in her toward God's age-lasting people. . . . In *Our Hope* we preach to the Gentile church *in behalf* of the Jew." [5] During that time of ministry, Gaebelein and his partner Ernst F. Stroeter were asked by Christian ministers questions like this: "Did you find any Jews yet that are worth saving?" They were appalled at such "Christian" attitudes.

Gaebelein was so fluent in Yiddish and had such a deep love for the Jewish people that he was more than once accused of being a Jew. While visiting his former hometown in Germany in 1895, he was asked by "one of the best Christians" in the town to lecture to the local anti-Semitic society. Instead he lectured the Christian leader on bigotry and noted that it "seemed to have a good effect." Writing home he sadly stated, "It is only too true that Protestant Germany is Jew-hating, and we fear, from what we have seen and heard, that sooner or later there will come another disgraceful outbreak." [6] During these early years Gaebelein supported fervently the restoration of the Jewish people to Palestine, but also coupled with this Zionism he displayed a sensitivity to the plight of the Jews in New York. He wrote in *Our Hope:* "The thought often came to the writer while passing through certain streets in down-town New York, densely populated by poor Jews, misery, suffering and want on all sides—what a blessing if some refuge could be found for them in the land which the ever faithful God has promised to Abraham's seed for an everlasting inheritance." [7] In fact, until his statements in the 1920s there has been little question of Gaebelein's love for the Jewish people as well as his firm belief in their restoration and right to the "promised land." [8]

Scholars seemed surprised when I pushed back before the 1920s and found a philo-Semitic early fundamentalist movement. Some seemed very surprised to find a lover of the Jewish people in Arno C. Gaebelein. But they accepted the evidence. As one scholar wrote me, "What happened? Why did Gaebelein change in the 1920s?" His reference was directed toward the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion.*

As one who teaches a holocaust course on the college level, I am very sensitive to the *Protocols* or any anti-Semitic propaganda. *The Protocols* are of Russian origin and are the alleged secret proceedings of a group of Jews plotting to destroy Christianity, challenge civil government, and disrupt the international economy in an effort to control the world. This document added to the anti-Semitism prevalent in the world, and when Henry Ford's *Dearborn Independent* published excerpts of the *Protocols* it gave anti-Semites in America another torch in their parade of anti-Jewish propaganda. A fact that I have never seen published by those who criticize fundamentalist ambivalence to the *Protocols* is that William E. Blackstone, a dispensationalist-premillennialist fundamentalist, the author of *Jesus Is Coming*, a book widely read in the Bible institutes and Bible colleges of the nation as well as in fundamentalist households, immediately wrote to the *Dearborn Independent* and also wrote to Henry Ford that he did not believe for a

[5] *Our Hope* 1 (August 1894) 27. See my article, "*Our Hope:* Protofundamentalism's Attitude Toward Zionism, 1894-1897," *Jewish Social Studies* 40 (summer-fall 1978) 239-250. Cf. *Zionism Within*, 225-237.

[6] *Our Hope* 2 (October 1895) 78.

[7] *Ibid.* 1 (July 1894) 13-14.

[8] Note my article, "Arno C. Gaebelein (1861-1945): Fundamentalist Protestant Zionist," *American Jewish History* 68 (September 1978) 43-56. Cf. *Zionism Within*, 237-262.

moment that the *Protocols* were of Jewish origin. Again one finds a shallowness in the research concerning fundamentalist attitudes.

It is significant that during the decade of the 1920s Arno C. Gaebelein mentions the *Protocols* only four times in the thousands of pages he wrote in *Our Hope.* The first reference is less than two pages long and is entitled, "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion." Gaebelein explains: "The book, emanating evidently from the pen of apostate Jews, makes horrible reading. The goal which is to be reached is world-anarchy . . . which corresponds in detail with what the prophetic Word predicts will come to pass when this age closes." Gaebelein is noticeably impressed, however, with an aspect of the *Protocols* that fascinated him the rest of his life. He emphasizes: "Significant it is that this document was published in 1905 and WHAT IS SUGGESTED HAS BEEN LITERALLY CARRIED OUT by the Russian Soviet government in Petrograd." After quoting from the document, Gaebelein concludes: "That all of this comes out of apostate Judaism is of the greatest significance." [9]

While one is certainly saddened that Gaebelein seemed to believe during this period that the origins of the document were Jewish, one must note that to him it was "apostate" Judaism that had produced it—some Jews who had left the traditional Jewish faith and Jewish God. The rise of socialism and communism (in his estimation) thoroughly coincided with this phenomenon. It is not an indictment on the Jewish religion or Jewish race.

The second reference in *Our Hope* is actually in passing during an exposition of the book of Isaiah. While asserting that God will come to the aid of Jewish people, the article declares:

> Our God does not identify Himself with those Jews who are today becoming prominent, and, in some cases, notorious. Perhaps my readers may have heard of what are called "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion," which were given to the public by a Russian named Sergius Nilus, in 1905. These may be genuine, or they may be forgeries (of course the Jews of Great Britain and the United States are vociferous in denouncing them as forgeries) but they certainly laid out a path for the revolutionary Jews that has been strictly and literally followed. That the Jew has been a prominent factor in the revolutionary movements of the day, wherever they may have occurred, cannot truthfully be denied, any more than that it was a Jew who assassinated, with all his family, the former Autocrat of all the Russians; or than that a very large majority (said to be over 80%) of the present Bolshevist government in Moscow, are Jews: while along other lines, in the assembly of the League of Nations, the Jew's voice is heard, and it is by no means a plaintive, timid, or uninfluential one—the Jew is the coming man! [10]

Two months later the same theme is emphasized in the third half-page notice, "Jewish Leadership in Russia." Using the editor of the *London Morning Post* as a source, Gaebelein claims that forty-four out of fifty of the Bolshevik leaders were found to be of Jewish origin. He is careful to clarify that "they are not the God-fearing, law-abiding, peace-loving kind, but are those who have cast off faith in the God of their fathers and are the very opposite of the law and order-loving portion of the Jewish people." That they were hindering the Zionist movement was a crucial prophetic sign to Gaebelein.[11]

[9]*Our Hope* 27 (November 1920) 265-266.

[10]*Ibid.* (April 1921) 601.

[11]*Ibid.* (June 1921) 734-735.

The fourth notice is contained in a short one-half-page note entitled "Aspects of Jewish Power in the United States." This is the one Weber quotes. He neglects the opening sentence in summarizing it for his readers. Gaebelein stated: "The new volume issued by the 'Dearborn Independent' contains a great deal of truth concerning the Jews, especially that part of Jewry which rejects the law and testimony of their fathers." He then notes that "there is nothing so vile on earth as an apostate Jew, who denies God and His Word," a statement with which traditional Jews of the period would have agreed. Gaebelein's easy acceptance of Jewish control of the American liquor trust and bootlegging is certainly suspect, but he ends by declaring: "It is predicted in the Word of God that a large part of the Jews will become apostate, *along with the Gentile masses. But not all Jews are liquor fiends, apostates and immoral. There is another side to this question!*" [12]

Whatever derogatory information one gleans from these few statements, they are abundantly offset by a vast array of positive statements and indications of love for the Jewish people. For example, Gaebelein defends the Jewish people in 1924 against the "blood libel" accusation that historically had caused massive pogroms in Europe and Russia. In an editorial note, "The Same Old Accusation," Gaebelein wrote:

> Recently the blood accusation has broken out again. This time in Hungary. It is almost unbelievable that such a vicious superstition should come to the front again. The accusation is that Jews require and employ the blood of Christians, mostly children, at certain times. The accusation was very common during the Middle Ages.

Gaebelein's strong opposition to the Catholic Church shows forth in his concluding statements: "It is only in Romish night that such gross superstitions can flourish. No intelligent Christian can believe such nonsense for a moment." To Gaebelein, it was a sign that the great tribulation was about to fall heavily on the Jewish people.[13]

During the 1920s anti-Semitic comments still seem to rile Gaebelein as they did in 1895. One excerpt illustrates this. How one can read an excerpt like this and still believe Gaebelein to be anti-Semitic is beyond my comprehension. He editorialized:

> In speaking with a certain nominal Christian about a stranger who had passed, he said, "Oh! He is only a Jew." It was spoken in contempt. In spite of the good feeling which exists in our country toward the Jewish people there is still the same age-long antagonism to the Jew, and contempt for the members of this race. This prejudice is far greater in Europe; Antisemitism there is not on the decrease. Certain persons and societies try to foster it in this land also. No true Christian believer will ever say, "Oh! He is only a Jew" with a sneer on his lips. We owe the greatest debt to that race.[14]

He goes on to declare that the prophets, the apostles, the early Church and Jesus himself were all Jews. "Therefore, the contempt expressed by certain 'Christians' to the Jew, arises from ignorance, and is most ungrateful and ungenerous," he added.

[12]*Ibid.* 29 (August 1922) 103 (italics mine).

[13]*Ibid.* 30 (March 1924) 556.

[14]*Ibid.* 33 (October 1926) 202-203.

What did Gaebelein really believe about the Jewish people? I believe that his innermost feelings on the Jewish people are expressed in an article in *Our Hope* entitled "The Middle Wall of Partition." Space limits me from treating this article in detail, but in it Gaebelein responds to the question, "Who are these people who are set apart by themselves, who are viewed with suspicion as strangers and treated with discrimination as aliens?" His answer: "In spite of peculiarities of race, custom and tradition, just folks like ourselves, resentful of injustice, responsive to kindness, sensitive to disdain. . . . Nor should we forget that to this race—the race of Jesus—we owe our spiritual privileges." [15] During this period in Germany, Adolf Hitler was screaming, "Jesus was not a Jew—Jesus despised the Jews!"

In 1930 Gaebelein celebrated his sixty-fifth birthday. The decade of the thirties would witness the publication of his most "unfortunate" book, *The Conflict of the Ages* (1933), but the decade would also witness what I consider a noble tribute to this man who loved the Jewish people—i. e., his early recognition of Germany's persecution of the Jewish people and the steady publication in *Our Hope* of the facts of the holocaust as they were gleaned.

Gaebelein's invective toward socialism, communism and the "apostate" Jew as portrayed in *The Conflict of the Ages* is not without certain seeds of precedent. Even in 1894 he noted in *Our Hope*, after commenting that Germany was Jew-hating, that "there is fault also on the other side. Hebrews have been associating themselves with the Socialistic party, and by their open and avowed unbelief have made themselves very obnoxious." [16] Gabelein's use of terms such as "the Jew Trotsky" appeared in *Our Hope* in the twenties quite frequently. In fact Gaebelein despised Trotsky and what he stood for. This is all too clear. Gaebelein certainly believed that communism was run by an inordinate number of Jews, and although modern scholars (both Jewish and Gentile) have noted the appeal of communism for the Jew and the influence of Jews on it there is too much emphasis in *The Conflict of the Ages* on this fact. Gaebelein wrote an awesome amount of literature, including *Our Hope*, pamphlets and over forty books in his lifetime. He did this by saying what he thought at the time, with no regard that some scholar might choose to interpret his lifetime attitude on the basis of one book or a selected paragraph.

Gaebelein despised modernistic theology as well, and he was appalled that Reform Jews (among others) would accept such apostasy. That they would deny their rights to the "promised land" and attack the Bible with higher criticism alongside the liberal theologians was equally appalling to Gaebelein. That Bolshevik "apostate" Jews would persecute traditional orthodox Jews as well as Christians incited him to anger. To Gaebelein this was certainly the forerunner of the final apostasy, where he believed that the Antichrist would be a Jew and that this Jew would delude a great group of the Jewish people (as well as apostate Christianity). One cannot understand *The Conflict of the Ages* without understanding these facts. He taunts his readers with the *Protocols* in that book to show them that even if the *Protocols* are not of Jewish origin, Jewish Bolshevik leaders have certainly implemented the plan. How deeply Gaebelein was immersed in the world conspiracy theory or for what period of time is difficult to

[15] *Ibid.* 34 (June 1928) 750.

[16] *Ibid.* 2 (October 1895) 78.

say. It fit perfectly, however, into his eschatology. Though not perfect himself, Arno C. Gaebelein was never an anti-Semite.

No less an expert than Ralph Lord Roy came to this conclusion after being directly challenged by Frank E. Gaebelein as to his statements and after looking at Arno C. Gaebelein's entire life and attitudes toward the Jewish people. In addition, *Christian Century* magazine offered a gracious apology by its editors and for Roy.[17] It is ironic that Gaebelein had written a letter thirteen years earlier about the anti-Semitic E. N. Sanctuary—a man whom Roy had put in the company of Gaebelein and Winrod in his article. Gaebelein stated in part about Sanctuary:

> For some 20 years this man's chief work has been besides Antisemitism, a continual besmearing of the character of a number of persons. . . . When finally Sanctuary issued another Antisemitic book I . . . forced him to resign and threatened him . . . . It was my intention to write a complete answer to his Antisemitic charges about the Talmud . . . . And now he is in the clutches of the Law. He was an admirer and a supporter of the seditious German Bund, a co-laborer with Pelley, Winrod and other secret followers of Hitler.

On the cover of a copy of Sanctuary's anti-Semitic book, *The Talmud Unmasked: The Secret Rabbinical Teachings Concerning Christians* (which Sanctuary republished in 1939 from I. B. Pranaitis' 1892 work), Gaebelein wrote that it was "malicious and slanderous."

Gaebelein had ended his December 1930 editorial notes in *Our Hope* with the question, "Adolf Hitler—Will He be Germany's Dictator?" He concluded: "He [Hitler] seems to have a wild program of leadership. He is adored by thousands of women whom he seems to captivate. He is an outspoken enemy of the Jews—one of the most fanatical anti-Semites of Europe. The near future will show if he will succeed." [18] Although Gaebelein mentioned during these years that he wanted to take a trip back to Germany to visit relatives, it was not until August 16, 1937, that he and his wife sailed for central Europe. He sent home reports for seven issues giving his observations of Hitler, Goebbels, Streicher, Rosenberg, Hitler Youth and others. "But what is this German brand of a New World View?" he declared. "It might be expressed by two sentences, 'We are the people. We are superior to other races.' The hatred of the Jew is its backbone." [19] Unlike Winrod, Gaebelein came back unimpressed with Hitler's philosophy but with the firm conviction that the Jewish people in Europe were in for deep trouble. *Our Hope* published whatever it could gather on the persecution of European Jewry in its "Current Events in the Light of the Bible" section. When a new and capable associate editor, E. Schuyler English, was put in charge of this section in 1939 (with Gaebelein reading the material to be put in each issue), *Our Hope* continued with a coverage of the holocaust that I consider to be unique in Christian publications of the time period. I also feel that Gaebelein's eschatology prepared him to "believe" that a holocaust could occur, though other segments of Christianity minimized its results.[20]

[17]*Christian Century* 70 (May 13, 1953) 579.

[18]*Our Hope* 26 (December 1930) 364.

[19]*Ibid.* 44 (January 1938) 461.

[20]Note H. Fishman's *American Protestantism and a Jewish State* (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1973) 178-183. For a discussion of *Our Hope's* attitude during the holocaust see *Zionism Within*, 327-334.

As the reader can plainly see, the problem with understanding Arno C. Gaebelein is a problem of semantics and of a total view of the man. Both, I believe, are related to a lack of in-depth research. It is appalling to me that neither Timothy Weber, Dwight Wilson nor any of the other authors took time to ask Frank E. Gaebelein, Arno C. Gaebelein's son, or E. Schuyler English about Gaebelein's attitudes. Frank Gaebelein, a respected educator and keen scholar, would have told them that he does not recall a single pejorative statement about the Jewish people in the Gaebelein household. That should have at least allowed for some scholarly questioning. English feels that Arno was not the least bit anti-Semitic but rather loved the Jewish people as he believes the fundamentalists in general did. I also find a lack of searching the records of *Our Hope* for a better understanding of this man—a journal that logs his life for nearly fifty-one years.

I can sympathize with the scholar who wants the total view by choosing and scanning here and there. We are responsible, however, for any unjust smearing of an individual as "anti-Semitic." The problem is that some generalizations are not valid but are accepted and built upon by succeeding generations. These sacred monoliths are difficult to attack even in scholarly publications because the men who guard their facades also hold the key to "acceptable" journal articles and monographs. Fortunately the fundamentalist monolith is guarded by some who are questioning or encouraging questions about generalizations of the past. Jewish scholars are particularly leading the way in redefining anti-Semitic acts. I find this extremely encouraging, and it is my hope that each of us will re-evaluate our respective biases toward the historic fundamentalist. Perhaps the case of Arno C. Gaebelein will help us to maintain an open, truly liberal attitude.