

may elevate this already excellent work to the status of a classic on the subject.

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Longfield, Bradley J. *The Presbyterian Controversy: Fundamentalists, Modernists, and Moderates*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991. 333 pp. \$34.50.

Bradley Longfield's work on the Presbyterian controversy enters into one of the most intensively studied aspects of 19th- and 20th-century American religion. Perhaps the most comprehensive study up to the present has been Lefferts A. Loetscher's *The Broadening Church: A Study of Theological Issues in the Presbyterian Church since 1869* (1954). Beyond Loetscher's contribution, however, there have been numerous books on the principal contestants and institutions related to the controversy. Beyond strictly Presbyterian concerns, the denomination's dynamic struggle has been chronicled from several perspectives in the rapidly growing literature on the rise of fundamentalism.

In spite of the crowded field on the topic, Longfield makes a major contribution to our understanding of the Presbyterian controversy. Perhaps, we should say, he made a contribution *because of* the many previous studies. Having thoroughly mastered the secondary, and a great deal of the primary literature on the topic, Longfield puts forth insights that both build upon and cut across the findings of previous research. Thus he greatly increases our understanding of a complex phenomenon.

Longfield's study is not merely a serious academic treatise, but a practical case study reinforcing Dean M. Kelley's conclusion in *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing* (1972), that one reason why mainstream churches, including Presbyterianism, have been losing large numbers of members since the 1960s is that they have lost their theological identity.

*The Presbyterian Controversy* validates Kelley's hypothesis from a historical perspective. Longfield points out that in its struggle to adjust to modernity, the Presbyterian Church opted for doctrinal pluralism in an effort to maintain institutional unity. That move, he postulates, has left the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. "devoid of a clear theological voice" (4). The pluralistic solution, while working for a time in encouraging unity and vitality, eventually "contributed to the current identity crisis of the church and helped to undermine the foundation of the church's mission to the world" (234).

Longfield approaches the issue through examining the views and motivations of the leadership of the Presbyterian Church in the 1920s and 1930s, on the assumption that "it is possible to see precisely what factors

encouraged the church to embrace doctrinal inclusiveness as a policy and thereby better understand how the Presbyterian Church, and perhaps other mainstream churches, have arrived at their present situation" (4).

Starting with the seemingly correct assumption that the Presbyterian controversy was largely "a conflict among generals" (5), Longfield examines the cultural backgrounds, theological positions, social viewpoints, and ecclesiological strategies of six of the key players in the conflict: J. Gresham Machen, William Jennings Bryan, Henry Shane Coffin, Clarence E. Macartney, Charles R. Erdman, and Robert E. Speer. Those six men spanned the ranks of the Presbyterian leadership of the time, with Machen, Bryan, and Macartney holding firm to the theological right, Erdman and Speer to the center, and Coffin to the liberal pole of the continuum. Ecclesiological strategy and the vision of the Presbyterian Church's role in a Christian America created a different split, with Machen as the only Southerner holding for succession as the correct move if the theological struggle could not be won. That militant attitude forced the moderates to side with the liberals and to opt for pluralism.

The decision to tolerate pluralism, as noted above, eventually spelled disaster for the Presbyterian Church. But, holds Longfield, Machen's extreme was no better. It also would have led to disaster.

Longfield argues that a moderate solution would have been best, but that moderation is often hard to come by in the heat of controversy. "Perhaps," he concludes, "the contemporary mainstream churches can, in some manner, do what the Presbyterian Church, torn by controversy in the 1920s, would not or could not do, and affirm a normative middle theological position with clear boundaries" (235). Any such recovery of identity, the author goes on to say, must be done on the basis of a biblical faith.

Longfield's sophisticated study not only provides its readers with a lesson in history, but it sets forth a vivid case study for those denominations that are currently facing some of the same issues as Presbyterianism in the 1920s and 1930s. Because of both these contributions, *The Presbyterian Controversy* deserves to be seriously studied.

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Marsden, George M. *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991. 208 pp. Paperback, \$12.95.

*Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* by Marsden is an edited collection of previously published essays which have appeared in