

THE  
BAPTIST  
FUNDAMENTALISTS'  
CASE AGAINST  
CARLETON,  
1926-1928

MARK A. GREENE



*Baptist leader William Bell Riley at his pulpit*

**I**N 1926 Christian fundamentalism, as a national movement, was in retreat. Religious liberals had decisively defeated the last major challenge to their control of the Northern Baptist Convention (NBC): a motion to require baptism by immersion for church membership. Fundamentalism's chief national organizer, the Reverend William Bell Riley, the man whom

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William Jennings Bryan had called “the greatest statesman in the American pulpit,” turned his considerable energy and ability from the national scene to winning his own state of Minnesota for “the faith once for all delivered.” His effort to ban the teaching of evolution in the Minnesota schools failed, but his campaign to rid the Minnesota Baptist Convention (MBC) of the “liberal leaven” of Carleton College succeeded fully. Riley’s case against Carleton was really less against the college than against its allies within the MBC. The attack was but the opening move in the fundamentalists’ battle to control the state’s Baptist organization. Ironically, Carleton gained much by losing its case, and the fundamentalists ultimately paid a high price for their triumph. Like the results of the Scopes “monkey trial” a year earlier, in which Riley and his World’s Christian Fundamentals Association (WCFA) had played a significant part, the victory against Carleton, in the end, proved to be a pyrrhic one indeed.<sup>1</sup>

The paths of Carleton College and William Bell Riley converged via a circuitous route. Riley had come to Minnesota in 1897 to take the pulpit of the First

Baptist Church of Minneapolis. In 1903 he turned back a challenge to his ministry by religious liberals within the congregation. His national debut as a formidable critic of religious modernism came in 1909, with the publication of his book, *The Finality of Higher Criticism, or the Theory of Evolution and False Theology*.<sup>2</sup> From that point on, he doggedly tried to wrest from the denomination’s liberals control of the Northern Baptist Convention, with which his own church and the MBC were affiliated and to whose programs they were expected to contribute monetarily.

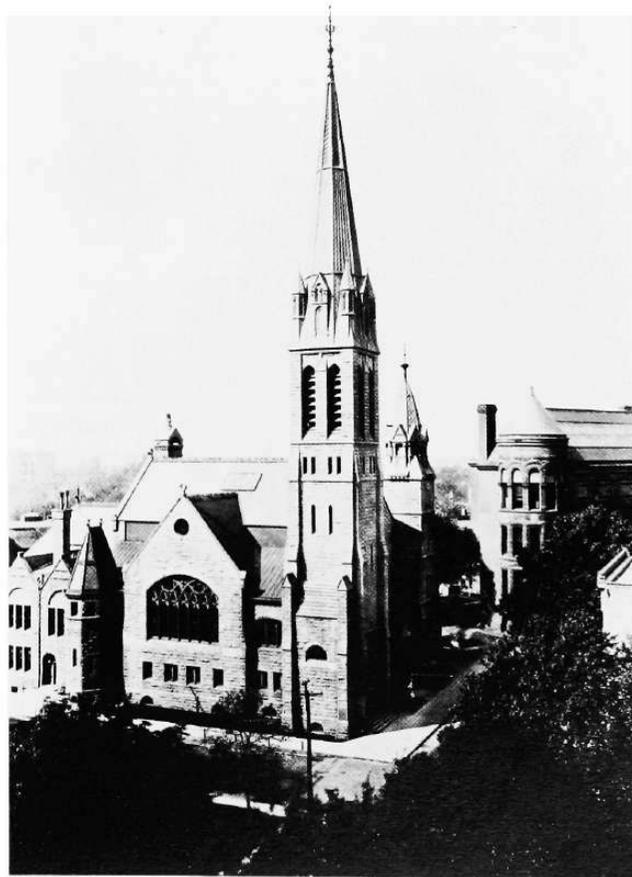
A subset of Protestant evangelicals, fundamentalists such as Riley emphasized the Bible as divine in origin and inerrant in facts; Christ as the literal incarnation of God; the reality of original sin and the possibility of salvation only through faith in Christ and his “substitutionary sacrifice” on the cross; and aggressive “witnessing” for one’s own rebirth in order to save others from eternal damnation. Unlike other evangelicals, fundamentalists were also premillennialists who believed that the thousand years of God’s Kingdom on Earth would begin after Christ’s second coming and who considered

<sup>1</sup> The Scopes trial, in Dayton, Tennessee, quickly came to symbolize the drive to ban the teaching of evolution in tax-supported schools. The WCFA, which had hired William Jennings Bryan to assist the prosecution at the trial, was the first attempt to meld an interdenominational coalition of fundamentalists. By 1926, as a result of the WCFA’s empty victory in Tennessee and its failures to push through the fundamentalist agenda in the NBC, attendance at its national meetings began to drop. (Of the two Baptist conventions in the United States—Northern and Southern—the NBC was the more liberal.) See George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 184–194; Ferenc Morton Szasz, *The Divided Mind of Protestant America, 1880-1930* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1982), 92–106; William Vance Trollinger, Jr., “One Response to Modernity: Northwestern Bible School and the Fundamentalist Empire of William Bell Riley” (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1984), 7.

On Riley, see C. Allyn Russell, *Voices of American Fundamentalism: Seven Biographical Studies* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 80, 99; Trollinger, “Northwestern Bible School”; Robert Sheldon McBirnie, “Basic Issues in the Fundamentalism of W. B. Riley” (Ph.D. diss., State University of Iowa, 1952); Ferenc Morton Szasz, “Three Fundamentalist Leaders: William Jennings Bryan, John Roach Straton, and William Bell Riley” (Ph.D. diss., University of Rochester, 1969). David Becklund, “A History of the Minnesota Baptist Convention,” *Central Bible Quarterly* 10 (Summer, 1967): 44, claims that Riley “began directing his labors toward his home state” only in 1929.

<sup>2</sup> An important part of Riley’s career, this work became a major text of the fundamentalist movement. After the sale of 5,000 copies, it was revised and reissued under the title *Inspiration or Evolution?* (Cleveland, 1926); McBirnie, “Basic Issues,” 80.

*Riley’s First Baptist Church, 1920*



**Present Buildings**

1. Saylor Hill Gymnasium - Men
2. Men's Dormitories
3. Southie Memorial Library
4. Skinner Memorial Chapel
5. Griggs Hall - Main Dormitories for Women
6. Music Hall

Physics Building \$150,000  
 Leachon Hall Chemistry \$160,000  
 Main Building Reception Rooms and Library \$600,000  
 East Hall Biology Remodeling \$100,000  
 Greenhouse \$30,000  
 Winsor Music Hall \$50,000  
 Art & Museum Building \$200,000

History Plant Alterations \$50,000  
 Heating Towers \$80,000

Southie Hall Remodeling for Men's Rooms \$60,000

Inn

**Endowment Required**  
 To cover present annual deficit  
 To provide permanently for students authorized in June, 1920  
 To provide for three hundred students after 1920-21  
 Total Endowment Requirement

Minimum Estimated Cost Buildings Listed in Margin \$2,120,000  
 Required for—  
 Men's Gym Annex, 2nd Floor, Track 40,000  
 Equipment Chemistry, Biology, Physics 50,000  
 Books, Library 20,000  
 Women's Athletic Field 25,000  
 Gauding, Sidewalks, etc. 20,000  
 Total exclusive of new Dormitories, Women's Dining Hall, and Carleton Inn. See "D" etc. opposite \$2,275,000

Young Memorial Hall Administration Offices \$50,000

**The Greater Carleton**  
 CARLETON COLLEGE, NORTHFIELD, MINNESOTA  
 Many of the projected buildings and endowment funds offer suitable opportunities for individuals or families to provide memorials of permanent value and service.  
 Red indicates buildings and improvements required

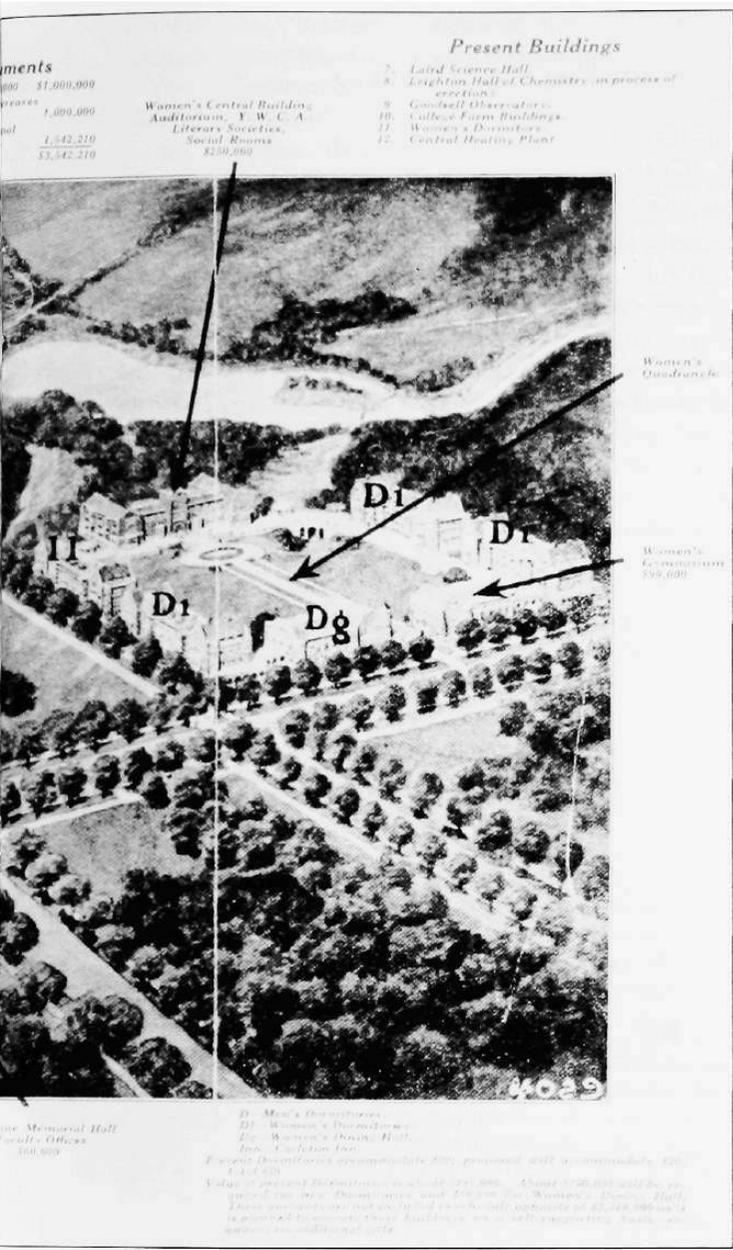
Flyer used for fund raising, about 1920, presenting Cowling's dream of a greater Carleton

it "a chief Christian duty to combat uncompromisingly 'modernist' theology and certain secularizing cultural trends." For Riley, as for many fundamentalists, religious liberals were clearly "apostles of deception," "propagandists of infidelity," and "participants in the Anti-Christ."<sup>3</sup>

Carleton was founded in 1866 by the Congregational Conference of Minnesota. Under its first president, it remained theologically conservative and evangelical. Riley himself once characterized the early Carleton as "a small college famed for its Christian

atmosphere." In 1903, however, religious modernists began to win control. The trustees installed as the new president a graduate of the notoriously modernist Yale Divinity School, who soon faced a revolt by conservative faculty members loyal to the old regime. By 1908 the president had been forced out by the faculty, and most of his critics had resigned under veiled pressure from the board. The trustees promptly hired another Yale Divinity graduate as Carleton's third president: Donald John Cowling.<sup>4</sup>

Cowling's inaugural in 1909 contained a strong ex-



ethical grounds of the universe that is born of ignorance, or a small soul, or lack of faith in God.”<sup>5</sup>

IN 1909 CARLETON was just a fairly obscure, outstate Congregational college and hence of little concern to Riley or any other Baptist. But in 1916 it became the official college of the Minnesota Baptist Convention. President Cowling believed strongly in breaking down denominational barriers, and his ideal of “Christian co-operation” meshed nicely with his desire for a larger, “greater Carleton.” So he proposed an affiliation whereby the Baptists would adopt Carleton as their state college, the Congregationalists would adopt the Baptists’ Pillsbury Seminary in Owatonna, the two schools would have interlocking boards of trustees, and Carleton would host the state Baptist ministers’ summer conference. This affiliation also brought Carleton into the fold of the Board of Education of the Northern Baptist Convention. Cowling promised to help the Northern Baptists solicit money for their developing

<sup>5</sup> George M. Marsden, “Evangelical and Fundamental Christianity,” in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 5:190; Russell, *Voices of American Fundamentalism*, 83–86; “Report of Committee on Resolutions,” and William B. Riley, “The Great Divide, or, Christ and the Present Crisis,” in *God Hath Spoken, Twenty-five Addresses delivered at the World Conference on Christian Fundamentals* (Philadelphia: Bible Conference Committee, 1919), 11–12, 27–45; W. B. Riley, “The Faith of the Fundamentalists,” *Current History* 26 (June, 1927): 434–440; William B. Riley, *The Menace of Modernism* (New York: Christian Alliance Publishing Co., 1917), 33, 43, 49; George M. Marsden, “Fundamentalism,” in *Encyclopedia of the American Religious Experience: Studies of Traditions and Movements*, ed. Charles H. Lippy and Peter W. Williams (New York: Scribner, 1988), 2:947–962; Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800–1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

<sup>6</sup> President’s Reports to the Board of Trustees, Harlan Page Papers, 1873–1924, Carleton College Archives (CCA); Delavan L. Leonard, *The History of Carleton College: Its Origin and Growth, Environment and Builders* (Chicago: F. H. Revell, 1904), 313; Leal A. Headley and Merrill E. Jarchow, *Carleton: The First Century* (Northfield: The College, 1966), 96–98. Riley, *Menace of Modernism*, 102, does not refer to Carleton by name, but is describing the background of the new president of the University of Minnesota, Marion Burton, Carleton class of 1900.

<sup>7</sup> “The President’s Address,” in *The Inauguration of Donald John Cowling, Ph.D., D.D. as President of Carleton College at Northfield, Minnesota, October Eighteenth, MC-MIX* (Northfield, 1909), unpaginated, CCA. For general definitions of religious modernism, see William McGuire King, “Liberalism,” in *Encyclopedia of the American Religious Experience*, 2: 1129–1145; Bernard M. G. Reardon, “Modernism: Christian Modernism,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 10: 7–14; William R. Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), especially 76–110.

plication of Christian liberalism and a challenge to those who opposed it. Like other theological liberals, Cowling anthropomorphized Jesus: Christ was not so much God as “the moral ideal,” and his teachings were not sacrament but “the principles of right character and the essentials of a true philosophy of life.” Cowling also averred—and in this, too, he was following a basic modernist tenet—that whoever disparaged modern biblical scholarship and the primacy of science in matters of nature “must be branded as the greatest skeptic who fears the truth” and “displays a suspicion of the



Donald J.  
Cowling,  
about 1920

New World Movement, which was to raise and distribute funds for Baptist schools, and which would provide money to help support Carleton's expansion.<sup>6</sup>

Riley's fundamentalist journal, *School and Church*, noted that the plan of co-operation "must meet the approval of all," and added that "So far as we have learned, there was not a voice from either body lifted against the union." Such approval was surprising; since at least 1909, Riley's chief modernist targets had been higher criticism (the study of the Bible as a historical text rather than as divine revelation) and biological evolution. Because these two theories were anchored in academe, Riley was especially concerned with the dangers of theological liberals holding sway in the nation's Christian colleges. By 1916 he had been excoriating the divinity schools of the universities of Chicago and Rochester and the Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, Pennsylvania—all strongholds of liberal Baptist theologians—for years. In 1918 he began publishing the journal *Christian Fundamentals in School and Church* to emphasize the interrelationship of the two institutions. (That same year the *Watchman-Examiner*, the fundamentalist Baptists' national organ, began a concerted campaign to investigate and purify the denomination's seminaries and colleges.) Yet Riley approved the affiliation with Carleton, even though the religious conservatives had all retired from the faculty by 1916, Cowling openly and repeatedly avowed his own liberalism, and the Reverend Fred Burnett Hill, the head of the college's biblical literature department, was a modernist. For five years Riley made no public mention of Carleton either favorable or unfavorable.<sup>7</sup>

Riley's failure to make an issue of Carleton's religious modernism becomes even more puzzling in the early 1920s. When the Board of Education of the NBC formally launched the New World Movement in 1920, Riley introduced a resolution at the national convention that all faculty and trustees of Baptist colleges be investigated for commitment to the three cardinal doctrines of the faith—an inspired Bible, the deity of Jesus, and the fact of regeneration—before any convention money was given them. After the defeat of this motion, he remained a bitter critic of the movement. Yet Riley continued to ignore Carleton, still affiliated with the Minnesota Baptists, a partner in the New World Movement, and even more "rankly Liberal" (to use Riley's hindsight description) with the addition of avowed modernist Rev. Ambrose White Vernon as professor of biography in 1919.<sup>8</sup>

IT IS CLEAR that Riley was not entirely ignorant of the changes at Carleton. He served in both 1917 and 1920 on the Minnesota Baptist Educational Society and

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<sup>6</sup> American Baptist Board of Education, Central Records (microfiche copy), and Baptist-Congregational Cooperation, 1916–27, Presidents' Office, 1908–62, both CCA; Merrill Jarchow, *Donald J. Cowling: Educator, Idealist, Humanitarian* (Northfield: Carlton College, 1974), 143–144.

In 1923, in pursuit of further Christian co-operation, Carleton affiliated with the Episcopal dioceses of Minneapolis and Duluth as well. The course of the 47-year relationship with the Episcopalians was relatively untroubled.

<sup>7</sup> *School and Church* 1 (Nov., 1916): 9. The editorial was not quite accurate. Milo B. Price, principal of Pillsbury Academy, and Frank W. Padelford, executive secretary of the Board of Education of the NBC, both reported to Cowling that "there were only two dissenting votes" at the Baptist state convention which approved the plan; Price to Cowling, Oct. 16, 1916, Correspondence, 1908–18, and Padelford to Cowling, Oct. 16, 1916, Baptist Church, both in Presidents' Office, 1908–62, CCA. Riley was not one of the dissenters, however, as he himself admitted later; W.B. Riley, "The Case Against Carleton," *Christian Fundamentalist*, Oct., 1927, p. 3–4; Roland T. Nelson, "Fundamentalism and the Northern Baptist Convention" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1964), 184, 187–188.

For Riley's opinions, see *Finality of Higher Criticism*, 25–48, *The Crisis of the Church* (New York, 1914), 7–26, *Menace of Modernism*, 105–129, *Modernism in Baptist Schools* (Minneapolis: [First Baptist Church?], 1920), and "Corporate Control: The Peril of Christian Education," address delivered at Third Annual Conference on Christian Fundamentals, Denver, Col., June 12, 1921, and published in *Inspiration or Evolution?* 163–179. See also George W. Dollar, *A History of Fundamentalism in America* (Greenville, S.C.: Bob Jones University Press, 1973), 147–148. Riley's private opinion of Carleton during these years is a mystery, because little of his correspondence has survived.

<sup>8</sup> Russell, *Voices of American Fundamentalism*, 96; Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 160–161, 166–167.

so had good opportunity to acquaint himself with the religious character and "evolution" of Carleton. In a 1921 letter to the dean there, Riley finally accused unnamed Carleton professors of teaching that the first five books of the Bible were "mythical" and "denying the actuality of miracles." The next year he refused an invitation from Cowling to preach a Sunday sermon at the college, giving as his reason the "evolutionary hypothesis very generally pertaining with you now." The same charges could have been made with equal validity at least a full decade earlier.<sup>9</sup>

In any case, Riley still was not ready to include Carleton on his public list of modernist institutions, even after Rev. Albert Parker Fitch was hired to teach biblical literature in 1924. Fitch would figure even more prominently than Vernon in Riley's later attack on Carleton, although by that time both men had left the faculty. Apparently, in 1924 and 1925 Riley still had bigger fish to fry on the national scene and was too busy leading the World's Christian Fundamentals Association, the Baptist Bible Union, and the antimodernist fight in the Northern Baptist Convention to pay much attention to Carleton or other local matters (beyond his own church). Even the Minnesota Anti-Evolution League, which he had founded in 1922, remained largely moribund while he battled evolution on the national stage.<sup>10</sup>

Only when the Scopes trial was over and Christian fundamentalism as a national movement was fast expiring did Riley turn back to Minnesota issues. The fight against evolution in Minnesota state schools was renewed in earnest in December of 1925, and the case against Carleton was launched ten months later. On October 12, at the Minnesota Baptist Convention in Rochester, Riley introduced a resolution that the affiliation with Carleton be terminated "because we cannot further contribute either our children or our money until sound Biblical position shall characterize the



*Lotus D. Coffman, about 1924*

teaching of the members of the faculty of Carleton." The resolution charged that "By reason of the change in presidency, board of directors and faculty, the college no longer is an orthodox institution, but is rankly Liberal, with a tendency to Unitarianism." The bulk of the complaint rested upon the content of the lectures of Professors Fitch and Vernon, content derived from the testimony of "faithful, competent and mature students." Some of the quotes taken from student notes with which Riley arraigned the professors and Carleton were: "Facts explode the theory of the Bible's errorlessness"; "The Pillar of Salt story isn't true, but is full of truth"; "It is impossible to explain the origin of evil"; "Deuteronomy was written about 600 years after David lived, by a group of men"; "It is better to be a good Buddhist than a nominal Christian." The state convention appointed a committee to investigate the charges.<sup>11</sup>

DURING the following year, "the work of the Committee was at a practical standstill," due to Riley's refusal to appear before it. The Riley-Carleton conflict, however, was not still. While Cowling refused to make any formal or public statement about the Rochester resolution, he delivered an address a month later condemning religious orthodoxy as "a dam to human thought and human progress" and as essentially un-Christian. Cowling later claimed that the speech was not intended for publication and that the object of his lecture was the conservative Congregationalist group he was addressing directly, but the timing and topic of this speech were probably not coincidental. Riley read the remarks as a counterattack.<sup>12</sup>

The following March, President Lotus D. Coffman of the University of Minnesota prepared to go before

<sup>9</sup> Riley to Dr. Dean, Nov. 29, 1921, and Riley to President Cowling, April 13, 1922, Baptist Church, Presidents' Office, 1908-62, CCA. For Riley's appointments to the Educational Society, see the *Minnesota Baptist Annual* for 1915 and 1917.

<sup>10</sup> Ferenc M. Szasz, "William B. Riley and the Fight Against Teaching of Evolution in Minnesota," *Minnesota History* 41 (Spring, 1969): 201-216.

<sup>11</sup> Riley, "Case Against Carleton," 7-9; *Minneapolis Morning Tribune*, Oct. 13-15, 1926, all p. 1. Among the voices raised against the resolution, none was more vehement than that of Rev. David Bryn-Jones, pastor of the church founded by Riley's liberal opponents in 1903 and former professor at Carleton.

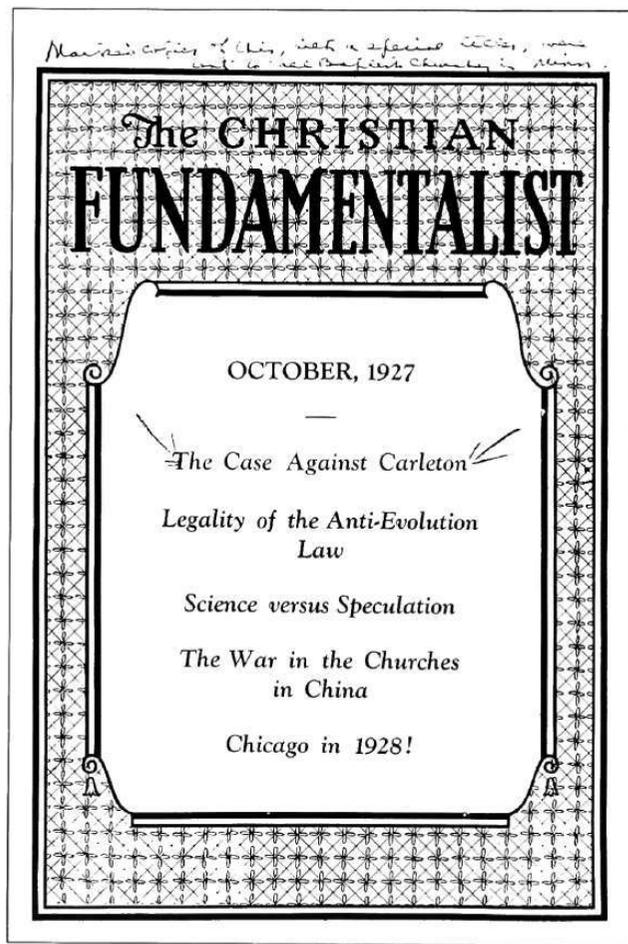
<sup>12</sup> Minnesota Baptist Convention, "Report of Special Carleton Committee," 3-5, Baptist Church, Presidents' Office, 1908-62, CCA; *Minneapolis Morning Tribune*, Nov. 17, 1926, p. 1; Cowling to Leslie S. High, Sept. 29, 1927, Baptist Church, Presidents' Office, 1908-62, CCA.

the state legislature to testify against the bill which Riley's Minnesota Anti-Evolution League had introduced. Back in October of 1926, the *Minnesota Daily*, the university's student newspaper, was the first in the state to criticize Riley's attack on Carleton. Within three days of the *Daily* editorial, Riley promised "a new attack on the University of Minnesota for its policy of teaching the theory of evolution." The antievolution bill in Minnesota thus became, for all intents and purposes, a struggle between Riley and the university. Coffman wrote to the presidents of every other college in the state for support. Cowling was one of only four willing to commit themselves publicly to support the university and oppose Riley. Moreover, both the faculty and student body of Carleton had earlier passed resolutions against the antievolution bill by wide margins.<sup>13</sup>

Meanwhile, in the summer of 1927, Riley prepared his extended "Case Against Carleton" and distributed it throughout Minnesota. In October he published it nationally in his *Christian Fundamentalist* magazine. The case largely mirrored the original Rochester resolu-

tion, with the following exceptions: Carleton's shift from conservatism to liberalism was placed *after* the affiliation with Pillsbury, which exonerated those who favored the 1916 accord. Also, Cowling was cited for his November, 1926, antiorthodoxy speech. In summing up his case, Riley wrote: "If the time has come when the denomination has deliberately decided to be Unitarianized, then it should continue its allegiance to and patronage of colleges of this kind; on the other hand, if it believes, as some of us do, that Unitarianism is a spiritual blight, an utter repudiation of the Bible, a rejection of Jesus Christ, and an extreme antagonist of the Christian faith, then we will of necessity divorce ourselves from this institution from the day on which this report receives righteous consideration."<sup>14</sup>

October, 1927, also saw the Special Carleton Committee of the Baptist State Convention report to its parent assembly that it wished to have another year before submitting its recommendations. A reorganized committee of one liberal, two moderates, and two fundamentalists went to work again. As the case against Carleton continued to unfold, the fundamentalists' purpose and strategy seemed clear. There was no thought of "purifying" Carleton, only of purging the convention of the college's modernist influence. (Since the formation of the national Baptist Bible Union in 1923 and of Riley's Northwestern Bible and Missionary Training School in Minnesota, the fundamentalists had turned from recovering established schools from liberalism to founding schools of their own.) What Riley and his allies had to do was demonstrate that Carleton was not fundamentalist (a point conceded by everyone) and convince the delegates that the state convention should not support a modernist college. So, through the two years of the contest Riley refused to meet with Cowling despite repeated invitations. The only meeting of the president and fundamentalists was a somewhat inquisitorial grilling by Riley's chief ally on the



<sup>13</sup> John Rusinko (*Carletonian*) to Howard Haycraft (*Minnesota Daily*), Mar. 6, 1926, Howard Haycraft Papers, University of Minnesota Archives, Minneapolis (UMA); *Minneapolis Morning Tribune*, Oct. 16, 1926, p. 14, Oct. 18, 1926, p. 7; Cowling to Coffman, Mar. 5, 1927, President's Papers, 1911-45, UMA; *Carletonian*, Mar. 9, 1927, p. 1; Special Faculty Meeting Minutes, Mar. 8, 1927, CCA.

Besides Cowling, the presidents of St. John's, St. Olaf, and Hamline went on record supporting Coffman. The heads of Gustavus Adolphus and Augsburg replied forthrightly that they supported Riley. The president of Macalester wished Coffman well but refused to support the university publicly, and no replies were received from the other seven private colleges or any of the state teachers' colleges; see President's Papers, 1911-45, UMA.

<sup>14</sup> Riley, "Case Against Carleton," 3-10, 20.

special Carleton committee, the published transcript of which Cowling vehemently rejected as inaccurate.<sup>15</sup>

THERE WERE THREE groups that saw *maintaining* Carleton's affiliation with the Minnesota Baptists as a means to three essentially different ends. The outcome of this divergence was a disorganized and somewhat contradictory defense against Riley's charges. Most important to Carleton, the first of the three partners, was "freedom in the search for truth." The ideal of "Christian co-operation," though important, was one to which Cowling was committed more for the sake of the churches than for the college; he was willing to abandon this dream if "it must rest upon a foundation of common theological beliefs." Early in the controversy, Cowling and the trustees believed that Riley was not likely to succeed with his resolution. Hence an active defense was adopted, aimed at maintaining Carleton's integrity first and advancing interdenominational co-operation second. So, shortly after the 1926 convention several Carleton trustees spoke publicly in defense of academic freedom, Cowling gave his speech condemn-

ing orthodoxy as a "dam to human progress," and the one substantive defense of the "Christian character" of Carleton to appear during the entire episode was published in the *North Star Baptist* (the liberal-controlled MBC journal).<sup>16</sup>

By late 1927, however, Cowling allowed privately that he was sure Riley would win. If defeat were certain, Carleton's goals were best advanced by refusing to compromise with Riley but also by refusing to debate him publicly. Cowling did not want to antagonize Baptist moderates in Minnesota by aggressively proclaiming Carleton's liberalism in a lost cause. Should an adverse vote by the Minnesota convention occur, the president hoped that the liberal and moderate Baptist churches in the state might still be inclined to support Carleton individually and that the NBC would continue its affiliation and financial support. As a practical matter, Cowling noted in 1928, the NBC, not the state Baptists, had proven to be the more productive and influential partners in his experiment of co-operation. Moreover, as two trustees suggested, Riley's charges might help the school's popular standing more than damage it: "So far as hurting Carleton goes, the Trustees should vote him [Riley] a salary," one remarked. Turning the other cheek seemed like the most productive course for the college. So Cowling took no active hand in the case. Indeed, he was little given to worrying about the controversy and was out of the country during the five months before the 1928 Baptist state convention.<sup>17</sup>

The second partner in the defense—the Northern Baptist Convention, represented by Frank W. Padelford of the Board of Education—could not look upon a possible Riley victory with such equanimity. Interdenominational co-operation was one of the lynchpins of the NBC agenda but, more importantly, it was from the states that the NBC's financial and other support came and through the states that the organization implemented its programs. Should the fundamentalists take control of the Minnesota convention, the NBC's hold on the state would be seriously jeopardized. Padelford fired off a virtual barrage of panicky letters to Cowling, worrying about defeat and suggesting strategies to avoid it. His most alarming letter suggested that perhaps, as a means of placating the conservatives—if not the fundamentalists—and thus gaining a narrow edge in the convention, "Dr. Fitch would not rather resign if the case were squarely put to him than to allow himself to be the pretext for the breaking down of our policy which has seemed to me to be so exceedingly significant." Cowling replied firmly that "our whole situation would be seriously hurt by this procedure," and politely asked Padelford to butt out. While Padelford had, coincidentally, written an early article for the state Baptist journal giving a liberal definition of "What Makes a

<sup>15</sup> Stewart G. Cole, *The History of Fundamentalism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1931), 94–95; [W. B. Riley], "Carleton College Divorced by Minnesota State Baptist Convention," *Christian Fundamentalist*, Nov., 1928, p. 10–12. The secretary of the committee, Duluth lawyer Leslie S. High, was confident that the resolution could be turned back and was deeply antipathetic to Riley and all that he stood for. His mind was made up from the start. So, too, on the other side, were the minds of Rev. Earle V. Pierce and Rev. C. W. Foley. See High's letters to Cowling, Sept. 21, 1927, to Dorothy Pattee (Cowling's secretary), Mar. 20, May 9, 21, Aug. 14, Oct. 13, Nov. 2, 1928, in Baptist Church, Presidents' Office, 1908–62, CCA.

<sup>16</sup> *Minneapolis Morning Tribune*, Oct. 13, p. 2, Oct. 14, p. 1, Oct. 15, p. 1—all 1926; Cowling to John Gardner, Nov. 1, 1926, Trustees' Records, CCA; *North Star Baptist*, Dec., 1926, p. 10–11. Though controlled by modernists, the journal was in theory representative of the entire MBC and hence was circumspect in its positions. It did continue to publish advertisements for Carleton (even, for a time, after the convention severed its affiliation), and it studiously ignored the resolutions against Carleton (and, for that matter, all other fundamentalist activities in and out of the state).

<sup>17</sup> Cowling to High, Sept. 29, 1927, CCA; George R. Lyman to Cowling, Oct. 17, 1926, H. P. Dewey to [Cowling], Oct. 12, 1928, Cowling to F. S. Bell, Dec. 17, 1927, and to John Gardner, Jan. 22, 1927—all in Trustees' Records, CCA; Cowling to High, Oct. 29, 1927, Baptist Church, Presidents' Office, 1908–62, CCA; Cowling to Frank A. Day, Oct. 19, 1928, Frank W. Padelford to Cowling, Oct. 18, 1928, Cowling to Padelford, Oct. 31, 1928, American Baptist Board of Education, Central Records, CCA. Nelson, "Fundamentalism," 185–186, implies that in this respect Cowling was an astute actor. The generally conservative lay members of the MBC may have been reluctant to repudiate even demonstrably modernist schools at the risk of denominational division.



Frank W. Padelford, 1908



Leslie S. High, about 1940

School Christian?" and made an appearance at the 1928 convention, he apparently had little concrete assistance to offer.<sup>18</sup>

The third part of the defense, the liberal Baptists in Minnesota, personified by attorney Leslie S. High, the Special Carleton Committee's secretary, rightly saw the fight over Carleton as a fight to determine whether fundamentalists or moderates would control the convention. High, as Carleton's chief friend within the committee, was ultimately responsible for turning back Riley's resolution. He was beset with several problems, however. His extreme personal antipathy toward Riley gave a somewhat mean tone to his rebuttal of the fundamentalists, which Riley succeeded in avoiding in his

attacks on Carleton. Moreover, High was not an effective politician. He actually had a majority of three on the five-man committee to recommend continuing the affiliation with Carleton at the state convention in 1928. But instead of working to strengthen the majority report, he insisted upon writing his own.

High's independent "Report of the Special Carleton Committee" argued that Carleton was an excellent Christian educational institution, producing a goodly crop of ministers and missionaries; that its theology in 1928 was the same as it had been in 1916 when the Baptists began the affiliation; that in any case "all of the individuals named in the Rochester Resolution have terminated their connection with Carleton College"; that Baptists had always "stood steadfastly for freedom of conscience" and "against any definite creedal statement" and therefore should not use orthodoxy as a standard for the affiliation; and that no attempt had been made "to understand mutual problems and to adjust any differences which exist." But this report was never seen by the convention because High was bested by the fundamentalists in some parliamentary maneuvering. So in the end only a bland majority report, written by the two moderates, and a fiery fundamentalist minority report, written by Rev. Earle V. Pierce, were issued to the delegates and debated. High's biggest handicaps were, however, not of his own making: Carleton participated only passively in its own defense, the NBC proved ineffectual in its assistance, and fundamentalist strength in the MBC was growing steadily.<sup>19</sup>

THE PROOF was in the pudding. The convention voted 172 to 135 in October, 1928, to accept the minority report and sever its ties with Carleton. The liberals claimed that the vote did not represent the opinions of the Baptist laity, but on this point they were probably

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<sup>18</sup> Padelford to Cowling, June 16, 1927, Cowling to Padelford, July 1, 1927, Padelford to Cowling, July 2, 1928, American Baptist Board of Education, Central Records, CCA; Padelford, "What Makes a School Christian?" *North Star Baptist*, Mar., 1926, p. 8. Fundamentalists and Swedish Baptists had been sniping at the NBC's passive control of the Minnesota state convention since at least 1922, so Padelford had good reason to be worried; see Becklund, "History of the Minnesota Baptist Convention," 37-38. Fitch knew he was causing problems and, after writing an open letter praising Cowling's defense of academic freedom, resigned to take a prestigious pastorate in New York City; Carleton Board of Trustees Minutes, Nov. 5, 1927, p. 2, CCA.

<sup>19</sup> High to Pattee, Aug. 14, Oct. 13, 1928, Baptist Church, Presidents' Office, 1908-62, CCA; High, "Report of the Special Carleton Committee," Baptist Church, Presidents' Office, 1908-62, CCA. For the depth of High's hatred of Riley, see the Leslie S. High folder, Baptist Church, Presidents' Office, 1908-62, CCA. Riley remained anathema to High after this clash; during the 1940s High went so far as to compare Riley and Hitler.

wrong. The graduates of Riley's fundamentalist Northwestern Bible and Missionary Training School were coming to dominate the pulpits of outstate Minnesota, presumably with the approval of their congregations. After eight more years of parliamentary and rhetorical wrangling, in fact, the fundamentalists succeeded in winning complete control of the state convention in 1936. Immediately, they began to reduce drastically their co-operation with and support for the NBC, even though Pierce was elected president of the parent body the following year. Riley, though something of a spiritual leader for the separatists, remained a member of the NBC until 1945, and his friend Pierce, too, "held against the strains of separatist impulses" into the 1940s. In 1946 (exactly 20 years after the introduction of Riley's resolution to disaffiliate with Carleton), all fundamentalist patience was exhausted and the MBC withdrew from the Northern Baptist Convention entirely. But the fundamentalists' victory was ultimately rather hollow.<sup>20</sup>

For separatism bred further separatism. The Swedish Baptists withdrew from the state convention, and so did the German Baptists; liberal Baptist churches left the MBC in 1954 to form the Minnesota Convention of American Baptist Churches; in 1965 the fundamentalists themselves split between moderates (the Fellowship of Minnesota Conservative Baptist Churches, represented for a time by Billy Graham, whom Riley ap-

pointed his successor as president of the Northwestern schools) and radicals (the New Testament Association of Independent Baptist Churches). As one historian put it, "The result of all this striving for purity was that by 1970 one could not distinguish Baptists in Minnesota without a scorecard."<sup>21</sup>

For Carleton, on the other hand, the "defeat" at the convention proved to be a blessing. Cowling's refusal to bow to the pressure of either the fundamentalists or the NBC brought a resounding vote of confidence from the school's faculty and the students. The convention's

*Carleton student Horace Nickels posing with his pet monkey, W. B. Riley, 1927*



<sup>20</sup> The best accounts of what happened at the convention come from the fundamentalists, who were much happier to tell the story than the liberals. See [Riley], "Carleton College Divorced," 9-15; Earle V. Pierce, "Carleton College and the Baptists," *Christian Fundamentalist*, Dec., 1928, 18-20. The *Northwestern Pilot* 9 (Nov., 1928): 17, listed its graduates attending the convention and thanked them "for the beneficial influence" they wielded. By 1942 Riley could count one-tenth of all Minnesota Baptists as members of his Minneapolis congregation, and at least 35 percent of Baptist pastors in Minnesota were graduates of Riley's schools by 1930; Trollinger, "Northwestern Bible School," 39, 205-209; Becklund, "History of the Minnesota Baptist Convention," 41-58. See Nelson, "Fundamentalism," 422, 430 on separatism as a national issue for fundamentalists throughout the NBC in the mid-1940s.

While debates over separatism at the national and regional levels have received much scholarly attention, the importance of that issue at the state level has been ignored. The MBC, which produced two of the most important actors in the 25-year fundamentalist-modernist struggle within the NBC—Riley and Pierce—was the first, and perhaps only, state convention to separate formally from the NBC. The tide of fundamentalism and separation within the Baptist churches of Minnesota was crucial for determining its course throughout the northern states.

<sup>21</sup> Trollinger, "Northwestern Bible School," 240; Becklund, "History of the Minnesota Baptist Convention," 60-61, 67-71. Nelson, "Fundamentalism," has a table which clearly illustrates the national separatist movements.

action did temporarily end NBC financial support of Carleton. But the affiliation with the Northern (later American) Baptists continued until 1970, during which time the school and church co-operated in several important ventures, including an exchange program with two all-black colleges in the South during the early 1960s. Nor was Carleton's general standing and reputation undermined by the case against it. On the contrary, one trustee crowed when the dust had settled that "the action will stimulate the popular favor of the college," and the board ultimately decided there was no need even to issue a statement about the convention's action. Carleton struggled through the Great Depression and emerged to become one of the nation's leading liberal arts colleges. It also carried its nonsectarianism and modernism to what the fundamentalists would have called the ultimate conclusion of secularism.<sup>22</sup>

THE CASE against Carleton was not an example of critics outside the academy trying to conquer or alter the school's curriculum or philosophy. The episode was rooted as much in the Protestant phenomenon of pluralistic doctrine as in the secular principal of academic freedom; the college became a proxy in the battle between liberals and fundamentalists within the Minnesota Baptist Convention. Riley and his supporters wanted to purge Carleton from the Baptist fold in an effort to return to what they defined as the fundamentals of their faith. For Carleton, defending its goals of theological liberalism and academic freedom went hand in hand; this was considered far more important than maintaining an affiliation with the Baptists.

It was a battle that everyone could be said to have won. Riley used the issue to turn the MBC firmly

toward fundamentalism. In this respect, the case against Carleton was a significant episode in the yet-untold story of the role that state organizations played in the fundamentalist-modernist controversy within the NBC. For his part, Cowling seized the opportunity to place Carleton within the emerging mainstream of an increasingly modernist American Christianity, which saw no conflict between religious ethics and rational inquiry. Both the fundamentalists and the college community felt purified by the ordeal. Each could say, with equal fervor, "it is better that we have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Padelford to Cowling, May 20, 1931, American Baptist Board of Education, Central Records, Dewey to [Cowling], Oct. 12, 1928, Trustees' Records, and Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Oct. 27, 1928—all CCA. The trustees at this meeting appointed a committee to frame a reply which would need approval of two-thirds of the board before being released. This is the last mention of a response; apparently, the reply was never written.

Requirements for religious worship were abandoned in 1964, the term "Christian liberalism" was stricken from the mission statement in the catalog in 1970, the year that the school disaffiliated from the American Baptists and Episcopalians. Carleton dropped all but associate status in the United Churches of Christ's Council for Higher Education in 1982 rather than adopt the UCC's proposed creedal statement.

<sup>23</sup> Dewey to [Cowling], Oct. 12, 1928, Trustees' Records, CCA.

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