

A REJOINDER TO TIMOTHY WEBER'S REPLY

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It is a unique situation to write a rejoinder to an author who explains that he applauds the main thrust of your article but feels that you chose to make your point at his expense. According to Timothy Weber, the predominant difference between us is that I chose a quotation from his book and was imprecise in presenting his position. This is ironic, because I actually believe that statements in his book distort an accurate portrayal of the fundamentalist movement and disparage men who are no longer alive to clarify their position as Weber has done.

I must confess that I neither intended to review Weber's work nor to attack him personally. In fact, I wanted to soften the blow because my main thrust was to alert the scholar to the casual acceptance of the pejorative remark concerning fundamentalists and to encourage a re-evaluation of our respective biases toward the historic fundamentalist. Thus I stated that "Weber's comments are not extreme," that "the words are chosen carefully" and that "Dwight Wilson is not as kind as Weber." Nevertheless it is apparent that Weber chose to take my words as a personal attack and as a review article of his book. Therefore I have no choice but to elaborate a bit more on his book to provide a more detailed explanation for my brief comment.

Weber's book was brought to my attention by several scholars who wanted to "prove" to me that fundamentalists were anti-Semitic. After reading their selected pages from his book, I read his entire manuscript to gain a bearing on what it was that led these scholars to conclude that he had "documented" fundamentalist anti-Semitism. Weber is upset that I used the word "epitomizes," but I do feel that his statement that I quoted is a perfect example of the casual acceptance of the pejorative remark (that is what my second paragraph is about) and his weak "qualifiers" in my estimation do not rectify the damage that he has done on page 154 of his book.

I did state that Weber's "words are chosen carefully," but only carefully enough to leave him the loophole to claim that he neither overtly attacks fundamentalists or premillennialists for their support of Zionism nor directly accuses them of anti-Semitism. Instead he sets up an ambiguous framework of loaded phrases that naturally leads the reader to that conclusion—that is, that premillennialists "sounded anti-Semitic" and "acted like representatives of American anti-Semitism." They had an "ironic ambivalence" toward the Jews, and they were programmed to think that the "Jews were under the power of Satan." Weber states in his reply, "It is not splitting semantic hairs to point out that 'sounding' and 'acting like' are not the same thing as actually 'being.'" I disagree. The reader is drawn by such statements to conclude that these premillennialists are anti-Semitic or at least imbued with a latent anti-Semitism. If I wrote that "Weber sounded insane" and "acted insane," the reader of a biography on Weber

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would certainly feel that he was questionable in his sanity. In fact, Weber is upset because he feels that I portrayed him as attacking the fundamentalists for their support of Zionism while accusing them of latent anti-Semitism and he wants his true position set straight in all honesty and justice. And yet he has no qualms about his damaging statements that are a hundred times more vicious against men who are dead!

Please note Weber's weak qualifiers on pages 154 and 157 of his book. He does say that premillennialists were "fierce opponents of anti-Semitism in any form" and then he puts one of those question marks into the reader's head: "They frequently called themselves the friends of Israel." Notice that he will not say at this point that they *were* friends of Israel. Then he begins his diatribe: "Yet there was an ironic ambivalence. . . ." The statement that I quoted is found here. The reader feels that he is now going to get the real story about these premillennialists. Weber launches into the *Protocols*, and his treatment is shallow and devastating with regard to these men's reputations. Significant is the placement of this superficial vitiate at the very end of his chapter. He then adds a one-sentence paragraph on page 156: "Although that kind of anti-Semitism was not inherent in the premillennialist position, it seemed compatible with its view of the end of the age." Again Weber leaves one with more questions about his view than he answers. In the next-to-last paragraph of this chapter he begins: "In the last analysis, premillennialists had a somewhat ambivalent attitude toward Jews." In the last paragraph he adds this two-sentence qualifier: "In the end, the premillennialist vision for the Jews was positive, and their support for Israel was uncompromised. Somehow, 'all Israel shall be saved.'" Note this last sentence because Weber attaches a qualifier to his qualifier—that is, the real concern of the fundamentalist for the Jew is viewed only in terms of salvation and the end of the age: "Somehow, 'all Israel shall be saved.'" And even in the sentence that precedes this one we are confounded with an abrupt change of direction. Suddenly in one sentence the "occasionally aggressive supporters of the Zionist cause" (p. 156) become the "uncompromised" supporters of Israel (p. 157); the premillennialist attitude of "scorn" and sympathy" (p. 154) becomes "positive" (p. 157); and those who "sounded anti-Semitic" and "acted like representatives of American anti-Semitism" (p. 154) are now "in the end. . . positive." I am afraid that the only "ambivalence" is in Weber's thinking and writing, and it is no wonder if I (as well as others) have misinterpreted his position.

Weber and I could go around and around replying and rejoinding about what I "thought" he said and what he "meant" to say. There is a basic problem here, however, that underscores the purpose of my article and that I feel is significant in the light of past portrayal of the fundamentalist movement. It is the problem of shallow scholarship with regard to the fundamentalist movement. Weber's statement, "Write a book, take your chances," sounds cute, but it is this lackadaisical attitude that has contributed to misunderstanding and misinformation about the fundamentalist movement for more than fifty years and, more importantly, that damages a reputation with a stroke of a pen. Weber had a golden opportunity to provide a well-researched, well-documented and thorough treatment of the issue of the *Protocols*. It was needed and still is. Instead he provides a few selected quotations that have been used in secondary source material of the past and puts these at the end of his chapter with little original analysis. It certainly bothers me that his one additional quote on Gaebelein in his reply has to cite my

essay as his source on *Our Hope*, and it is interesting that he leaves out the part where Gaebelein notes that the *Protocols* "may be forgeries." Weber has not done his homework on Gaebelein nor on the *Protocols*, and he has certainly missed a main point in my essay. The point is that Gaebelein did not have a lapse in his attitude toward Jewish people nor was he programmed to respond to anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, as Weber's caricature of ethereal premillennialist robots implies. Furthermore I am afraid that I must resign myself to Weber's misinterpretation of my words just as he has misinterpreted Gaebelein.

Weber charges that I "apparently want to overlook" Gaebelein's behavior in light of his lifelong service. My point, however, is that statements side by side in the same issues with the brief *Protocol* passages in thousands of pages by Gaebelein that Weber did not read refute his charges. But then Weber in similar fashion could cite his qualifier "apparently" and say that he did not overtly charge Rausch with such a view. We only thought he did as we read his reply. As for Charles C. Cook, it will be up to some other scholar to spend time trying to know him as a man. The devastating quote in Weber's reply was the only citation on Cook in Weber's book, and Weber co-cites Dwight Wilson's *Armageddon Now!* (1977). Why Weber did not point out the petition Gaebelein and other fundamentalists later signed declaring the *Protocols* to be false I do not know. Perhaps he did not know about it, just as he was not aware of Gaebelein's sources in Bolshevik Russia and his unique insight into the rise and dangers of Communism—a view Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn or Galina Orionova, a recent defector, would certainly applaud. And Weber had better become familiar with the latest Jewish scholarship on the deep involvement of Jews in the Bolshevik revolution and subsequent events, including Jewish Communist persecution of Jewish people.

With regard to Weber's portrayal of the fundamentalist's premillennial eschatology, one also finds a lack of depth and accurate scholarship. Weber's separation of the premillennialist eschatology from the premillennialist character in his reply is not an answer—it is a fantasy. Remember that we are talking about the early fundamentalists for the bulk of Weber's study—men of erudite culture and academic esteem. Their view of the "peoplehood" of the Jewish people and the "chosen people" status in contrast to covenant theology runs contrary to Weber's simplistic assertion that they believed the Jews to be in rebellion against God with no central position until after the great tribulation. Even Weber's title—*Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming*—would seem to link the eschatology with the character, and yet even this misses the heart of the movement. To Arno C. Gaebelein it would be a dreadful title. He and other early fundamentalists viewed the second coming as the glorious hope of the Christian. They lived in joyous expectation that perhaps Christ would come that very day! Weber's portrayal of slinking, premillennial robots who are in the grip of eschatological tension is insensitive and inaccurate. It is interesting that Arno C. Gaebelein made it a policy never to speak on prophecy in a Sunday morning sermon but rather to always devote that message to a topic that would, in his words, "exalt the Lord." Weber's representation of a premillennialist Zionism and support for Jewish people based only on their belief "that the Jewish state will play a major role in prophetic events at the end of the age" (p. 128) misses the intricacies of their theology and personal life. One hates to give Weber an idea like I did in my essay's brief mention about world conspiracy theory (which he did not really deal with in his book), because in his imprecise manner he flies off on a behavioral tangent

that at best is inaccurate and at worst is totally ignorant of the facts. One must ask how he explains premillennialist William Blackstone's denouncement of the *Protocols* as fictitious and why he did not contrast this position in his book.

Such shortcomings in Weber's work are highlighted by the fact that his book uses a behavioral approach—an approach used by his mentor, Martin E. Marty. At the very beginning of his book he asks questions that are vital and questions that need to be answered, including how these people actually lived and how they conducted their personal and corporate lives (p. 8). But Weber is too busy building his pet theory of the "tension" created within the premillennialist system by the "shadow of the second coming" to spend adequate time learning about these men and women. For example, on pages 47 and 48 of his book he quotes three times from Arno C. Gaebelein to show the tension built into the "now/not-yet" shadow of the second coming. Nevertheless, his immediate example of a son brought up in this "tension" is that of Edmund Gosse, the son of Plymouth Brethren Philip Gosse, who rebelled against his father's belief and progressively became more skeptical. Weber begins this illustration with a gratuitous statement: "Most likely, then, experiences like that of Edmund Gosse, the famous British literary critic who lived around the turn of the century, were more common than reported" (p. 49). How does he know that? What proof does he offer us? Weber's psychological fantasy has once again replaced solid research. And then he has the presumption to state: "No one knows how many premillennialists. . . despaired of seeking an education or making the most of their possibilities because of the nearness of the Lord's coming" (p. 49).

One may well question why he did not offer Frank E. Gaebelein (Arno C. Gaebelein's son) as a product of this "tension" since he quotes Arno C. Gaebelein in the preceding paragraphs. There is a good reason for that: Frank E. Gaebelein remembers his home as a reservoir of authentic culture, with "good" books, "good" music (Mendelssohn and Schubert) and "good" art. His father was a man of innate dignity, and the fundamentalist home of the Gaebeleins had a balance of aesthetics and Christianity that was absorbed by their children. Their home radiated a peace and humor that blows Weber's "now/not-yet tension" theory to pieces. Frank E. Gaebelein, a New York University and Harvard graduate and one of the most balanced and respected scholars in the evangelical world today, attributes his sophistication to this home. Weber could have at least contrasted it to his example of Gosse, but then Weber's research is either too shallow to know about the Gaebelein household or too locked into theory to care. What would Weber have done if Frank E. Gaebelein had told him that the Gosse experience was in many ways unique? We shall never know, because this scholar who wanted to nail down how these men "actually lived" was not willing to make the sacrifice required to truly understand their lives. By simply picking up the telephone, Weber could have consulted Frank E. Gaebelein and received authentic information on A. C. Gaebelein, C. I. Scofield, H. A. Ironside, W. H. Griffith Thomas, C. G. Trumbull and a host of others. He may not have trusted this information, but it would have given him leads he could have validated. And there are other individuals, such as E. Schuyler English, who would have been tremendous resource persons. Historians are noting more and more the importance of oral history to complete understanding. Am I being unfair? Are we really too busy being "scholars" to be bothered with a more complete understanding of the movement? Do we applaud shallowness, condone shoddy scholarship and ignore balanced treatment

with the excuse that an historian cannot "know everything about the past" and "even if it is only to justify their monthly paychecks, professional historians keep trying" (p. 6)? Frankly I find this attitude not only in Weber's introduction but also in much of his scholarship throughout his book.

Weber explains indignantly, however, that his book "has been reviewed over twenty times" and that "most reviewers have been overwhelmingly gracious in their remarks." What can I say? If it is true—and I have no reason to doubt it—then I believe it underscores my point about the casual acceptance of the pejorative comment regarding the fundamentalist movement. Nevertheless, I just cannot believe that theologians after a careful reading would not see the lack of theological sophistication in Weber's treatment and explanation of premillennialism (beginning with his Introduction). I cannot believe that historians would not question Weber's "now/not-yet tension" theory. I cannot believe that theologians and historians would accept such statements as the following that inundate his book: "Despite the fact that premillennialists did not agree on every detail of prophetic interpretation, their actions were pretty much the same" (p. 12). And yet I myself am a young scholar with much to learn about how one should find such casual inaccuracies "amusing" and "provoking."

Let me explain my view in Weber's words. I feel that Weber "sounded" as though he were attacking these fundamentalists unjustly, belittling their Zionism with inaccurate elaboration of their eschatology and accusing them of latent anti-Semitism. In this vein I think that Weber "acted like" a representative of shoddy scholarship, one who builds up a shaky theory without proper attention to a broad range of facts. Thus Weber reflected an "ironic ambivalence" toward the premillennial movement, which accounts for the "tension" he builds into his framework (for example, portraying these men as anti-Semites but adding brief qualifiers). Perhaps this trait in Weber's behavior is attributed to his being "programmed" by his educational training and his own premillennial experience. In this way he chose to promote his theory at the "expense" of the reputations of men who were not perfect but deserved an effort to be truly understood.

I feel there is much more of a difference between Weber and myself than he evidently does. We will have to sit down and hash these differences out in person, because these few words of rejoinder do not hold the thoroughness of investigation that complete understanding requires. If I have misrepresented his views, I am sorry. But after careful reflection and re-evaluation I honestly believe what I have stated to be true and factual. Whether the reader agrees with Weber or with me is not the most crucial aspect of this dialogue, however. The most important lesson is that there is an historic early fundamentalist movement, the real picture of which is hidden from us because of our encrusted bias and lack of initiative.