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# Mordecai F. Ham: Southern Fundamentalist

Kenneth Russell II  
*Western Kentucky University*

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Russell,

Kenneth W. III

1980



MORDECAI F. HAM: SOUTHERN FUNDAMENTALIST

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of History

Western Kentucky University

Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Kenneth W. Russell II

February, 1980

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Mordecai F. Ham: Southern Fundamentalist

Recommended 2-28-80  
(Date)

F. H. Thompson  
Director of Thesis

Drew Harrington  
Lanell W. Harrison

Approved March 28, 1980  
(Date)

Elmer Gray  
Dean of the Graduate College

## Preface

When I first considered writing about the life of Dr. Mordecai Fowler Ham, Jr., my reaction was one of apprehension. On one hand, I had chosen to consider a personality about whom little is written but one who merits an extensive historical examination. On the other, as a newcomer to historical writing, I felt somewhat inadequate to conduct such a thorough study. However, in the course of writing, I became quite familiar with Ham's career and personality, and believe that the finished product portrays the Kentucky evangelist honestly and realistically.

As a fundamentalist and a prohibitionist, M.F. Ham was a man of extremes. Few individuals simply liked or disliked the evangelist. Most either greatly respected Ham or hated him vehemently. As a result, his ministry was a controversial one. Ham was a sincere Baptist evangelist who truly believed he preached a divine message. His religious zeal was overwhelming and made him a popular contemporary of fellow revivalist, Billy Sunday. However, his righteous enthusiasm also influenced many individuals to label him an overbearing preacher and a misguided moral crusader. In spite of such charges, Ham continued to counter his opposition.

In the preparation of this work, I received much advice and support from many people. First of all, I wish to acknowledge the help of my thesis committee: Dr. Francis H. Thompson, Chairman, Dr. Lowell H.



Harrison, and Dr. J. Drew Harrington. I am also indebted to Dr. Harrington who first suggested M.F. Ham as a possible thesis topic.

Two other members of the History faculty of Western Kentucky University who also deserve my thanks are Drs. James T. Baker and Carol Crowe-Carraco. Dr. Baker's study of Ham's 1924 debate with William Saunders of Elizabeth City, North Carolina influenced my decision to write about Ham; and Dr. Baker's insights and suggestions during my own research and writing were extremely helpful. I wish to thank Carol Crowe for her friendship and generosity, not only during the preparation of my thesis, but throughout my graduate work.

Finally, I would like to thank all of those numerous friends and associates, graduate, undergraduate, and otherwise, for their support, patience, and positive criticisms during one of my first serious efforts at writing.

Presently Mordecai Ham is an obscure southern revivalist. Hopefully this work and many others to follow will give the evangelist his proper place in American religious history.

Kenneth Russell  
February, 1980



PARCHMENT DEED

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MORDECAI F. HAM: SOUTHERN FUNDAMENTALIST

Kenneth W. Russell II

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65 pages

Directed by: F.H. Thompson, L.H. Harrison, and J.D. Harrington

Department of History

Western Kentucky University

Mordecai Fowler Ham, Jr. (1877-1961), a Kentucky bred, Southern Baptist evangelist, was an active participant in both the prohibition and fundamentalist movements. His career was characterized by disagreement and conflict due to Ham's defiance toward anyone who did not profess his style of Christianity.

A true product of the period in which he lived, Ham fought modernism and evolution zealously. He also preached against the use and sale of alcohol and dared liquor supporters to challenge his position. He was convinced as well that Jews, blacks, and Roman Catholics posed a potential threat to Christian America, and he monitored their activities cautiously for the majority of his sixty-year ministry.

Ultimately Ham's Southern audiences grew tired of the evangelist's allegations and stopped listening to him. Ham, however, continued to preach against his opposition until his death in 1961.



## Chapter I

Several religious historians have recognized Mordecai F. Ham's effect on American Protestantism. One of them calls attention to Ham's fiery denunciations of sin and immorality, while another mentions the Kentucky evangelist's use of racial smears from the revival pulpit.<sup>1</sup> Even so, most historians have confined their interest to Ham's role in the conversion of Billy Graham, one of America's most prominent evangelists. While little research exists on the life and career of Ham, a study of his evangelical work brings new insight to the Fundamentalist Movement, one of Protestantism's most conservative reactions. It also contributes to a proper understanding of Southern religious thought.

Born the eldest son of Tobias J. and Ollie McElroy Ham on April 2, 1877, in Allen County, Kentucky, Ham grew up in an environment conducive to the development of a Southern preacher. Reverend Tobias, and his father, Mordecai Ham, Sr., pastored in the South Central Kentucky area for almost one hundred years of combined service. Mordecai, Sr. served three Allen County churches simultaneously for over twenty-five years and some two thousand persons reportedly joined those churches during his tenure. Active in the organization of the Bays Fork Baptist Association, Mordecai, Sr. provided advice and suggestions to area churches.

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<sup>1</sup> Louis Gasper, The Fundamentalist Movement (The Hague, 1963), 168; William G. McLoughlin, Modern Revivalism: from Charles G. Finney to Billy Graham (New York, 1959), 471-72.

Although he received little formal education, Mordecai Sr. taught himself Greek and was familiar with several English classics. The preacher also collected a library for the use of younger ministers. J.H. Spenser cites the elder Ham for his long years of pastoral service: "He seems to have left nothing undone that perpetually serious thought could suggest to advance the cause of Christ."<sup>2</sup>

The old preacher's death in 1899 was the turning point in young Ham's life. After hearing his grandfather's final words of praise for his ministerial calling, Ham began a period of inner searching, which culminated in his acceptance of a call to preach in 1900.

Tobias Ham also influenced his son. According to his daughter, T.J. Ham seldom spoke harshly to his children and never held ill feelings toward others. In spite of this kindness, the elder Ham was a stern father who raised his children very strictly. Ham learned from experience that his father "believed in the dignity of work." When the young Ham asked his father if he could play football, Tobias gave his son extra chores. Pastor Ham and his wife also taught their children a firm moral code. The father quoted scripture "until he and the good Lord left no question whether something was wrong or right."<sup>3</sup>

Tobias Ham led his family in daily evening devotionals, where each member of the household read the Bible and asked forgiveness for wrong-

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<sup>2</sup>J.H. Spenser, History of Kentucky Baptists (2 vols., Cincinnati, 1885), II, 537; William Carthcart, ed., Baptist Encyclopedia, a Dictionary of the Doctrines, Ordinances, Usages, Confessions of Faith, Sufferings, Labors, and Successes, and of the General History of the Baptist Denomination in All Lands (2nd ed., rev., Philadelphia, 1883), 491.

<sup>3</sup>Interview with Kathryn Ham Duncan, Oct. 31, 1978; Edward E. Ham, 50 Years on the Battle Front with Christ: a Biography of Mordecai F. Ham (Nashville, 1950), 8-13. Hereinafter cited as 50 Years.



doings. Ham later claimed that this experience was responsible for his close walk with God. The evangelist also credited his staunch moral upbringing as influential in his refusal to indulge in many of the pleasures common to young men. In one incident that occurred before he entered the ministry, Ham refused to attend a vaudeville show, when he thought about what his mother would say if she knew his intentions. As an evangelist, he had little patience with those who refused to forsake what he considered characteristics of immoral lifestyle.

While proud of his family history, Ham also believed that he was related to Roger Williams, a champion of American religious liberty. Ham's family members traced the relationship back to Jennett Williams who married William Ham, Mordecai's great grandfather, before 1803. Although Ham claimed Williams as an ancestor, he felt a stronger spiritual relationship with the colonial leader. Like the early non-conformist, Ham saw himself as a spokesman for religious equality and spiritual integrity. As a Baptist, the evangelist did not believe in government involvement in church affairs, nor did he feel that religious bodies should interfere in civil matters. As a Southern Baptist, Ham did reserve the right of personal involvement if a moral or ethical issue was in question.

Ham's background characterized his evangelism. Baptist doctrine stated that personal regeneration was the primary purpose of the church and the evangelist Ham went to great lengths to convince his audiences of the necessity of conversion.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Ham, 50 Years, 9-11; interview with Kathryn Ham Duncan; John Lee Eighmy, "The Social Conscience of Southern Baptists from 1900 to the Present as Reflected in their Organized Life," (doctoral dissertation, University of Missouri, 1959), 9-15.



His Baptist background also influenced his rugged individualism. His Kentucky childhood fostered a Christianity where sawdust floors and wooden chairs characterized the meeting house and where fiery preachers persuaded sinners and wayward Christians to respond to God's message. Consequently Ham seemed to prefer the tabernacle or the revival tent rather than stained glass auditoriums as more suitable for his evangelism. His direct and simple style of preaching always seemed more effective in an unadorned atmosphere.

In many ways Tobias Ham trained his son for the ministry, and Mordecai appeared destined at an early age to enter his father's revered profession. A neighbor reportedly found the nine-year-old Ham baptizing some of the local dogs and cats. When one of the cats refused to submit to the dunking, the over-zealous Baptist youngster told the animal to "get sprinkled, and go to hell."<sup>5</sup> In spite of this earlier inclination to preach, Ham rebelled from what he later perceived as divine will and pursued a business career. Seeing how hard his father worked both as a pastor and as a farmer, Ham decided around 1897 that he could financially do better outside the ministry.

After graduation from Ogden College in Bowling Green, Kentucky, Ham joined a grocery concern as a salesman in 1897. This profession took him to Chicago where he made his fortune, soon acquiring the ownership of a prosperous picture-processing company. During this time, young Mordecai also had the chance to join an acting troupe. He had a special desire to perform and others seemed convinced of his abilities.

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<sup>5</sup>James T. Baker, "The Battle of Elizabeth City: Christ and Anti-Christ in North Carolina," North Carolina Historical Review, LIV (Autumn 1977), 397-98; Ham, 50 Years, 12, 200-01.

But Tobias Ham intercepted a letter from a Chicago theatrical agency promising his son a role in a new production. Apparently because of his father's wrath, Ham turned down the request, for he never pursued an acting career. However, after Ham had become an evangelist, his ministry gave him a chance to perform. Southern revivals had often served as entertainment as well as for religious purposes, and Ham's services were no exception. One characteristic sermon that Ham preached was his "Pink Sermon for Tenderfoots." During this sermon the evangelist donned kid gloves and clerical collar which he dramatically removed in the middle of the sermon to begin preaching "hog jowl and turnip greens," his brand of rural revivalism.

A year after his grandfather's death, Mordecai Ham preached his first sermon at an associational meeting near Scottsville, Kentucky. While speaking to a crowd that knew his family and background, he felt that his God wanted him to be a Baptist preacher whatever the cost. Soon afterwards, he sold his Chicago business, and returned to Kentucky to begin his ministry. In 1901, the preacher married his first wife, Bessie Simpson of Bowling Green, whose influence in his ministry, Ham claimed, was significant. The evangelist credited her Christian support and patience as being invaluable in critical periods during his early ministry.

While living in Bowling Green, the Reverend Ham began preaching at various churches in the area. His 1901 preaching experience in Mt. Gilead, Kentucky, was characteristic of his entire career. During this meeting, he sought out a man "reputed to be the biggest infidel



in the county." Ham himself tells the story:

I went to the spot of the field where I had seen him, but failed to find him. I knew he could't have been 'translated'; so I searched. Next I heard a noise from under a corn shock ... and I grabbed his leg and pulled him out.

He hollered, "Oh, you have got me!"

"Yes, I have," I returned.

"What are you going to do with me?"

"Ask God to kill you."<sup>6</sup>

In this way, Ham usually convinced rebellious individuals of the necessity of living a proper Christian life and of setting the right example for their children. After that experience, Ham often began new revivals with an attempt to convert the worst sinner in the community.

In 1903, Ham ceased his itinerate preaching by accepting an invitation to conduct an evangelistic crusade in New Orleans, Louisiana. His revival meeting conflicted with the Mardi Gras celebration, and those Christians who missed the meeting to participate in the frivolity risked ridicule. In spite of the tension he had caused in his first revival there, the evangelist scheduled another New Orleans meeting at the same time in 1908.

Another significant meeting that took place in 1903 occurred in Garland, Texas. His services there added one hundred members to area churches.<sup>7</sup> By 1905, M.F. Ham had preached in six Southern states, and had held one meeting in Ohio. For his efforts, he claimed some 7,874 decisions for Christ.

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<sup>6</sup> Ham, 50 Years, 12-15, 17, 20-27; "Radio Evangelist Mordecai Ham, Preacher 60 Years, Dies at 84," Louisville Courier-Journal, Nov. 2, 1961.

<sup>7</sup> Baker, "The Battle of Elizabeth City," Ham, 50 Years, 27-28, 37-39.

With such apparent success, the evangelist felt that God was pleased with his work and that more conversions were sure to follow. Such optimism faded in December, 1905, however, with the death of his wife. Mordecai was shaken by her death and left his revival work for a six-month trip to the Holy Land. After he had completed this soul-searching vacation, Ham confined himself to evangelism. The evangelist did not remain a bachelor very long though, for in 1908, he married Annie Laurie Smith.

Ham met Annie Laurie while he boarded with her parents during a revival meeting in Eminence, Kentucky. Although the Ham service was reportedly one of the largest to be held in the town, Annie Laurie, a girl of fifteen, initially found M.F. Ham, almost thirty, dull and uninteresting. Eventually Ham became enamored with the girl and married her in 1908. Like her predecessor, the new Mrs. Ham proved an asset to her husband's work. She often played the piano for Ham's meetings and she also kept the books for the Ham Radio Program. She was known for her lively personality and for her constant smile.<sup>8</sup> Often in an effort to make sure that her husband got the sleep he needed, Mrs. Ham tied the bottom of her night gown to Ham's pajamas. If he then attempted to study or to read, the movement would wake his wife, and the evangelist would be forced to rest.<sup>9</sup>

After Mordecai and Annie Laurie Ham returned from a European honeymoon, he resumed an active preaching schedule. Edward Everett

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<sup>8</sup> Ham, 50 Years, 285-88, 290-91, 60-61; J.R. Johnson, "Letter to the Editor," Western Recorder, LXXI (Oct. 3, 1907), 13; interview with Kathryn Ham Duncan.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Annie Laurie Ham, Oct. 13, 1978.



Ham, the evangelist's nephew and selected biographer, divided the years 1906 to 1959 into three distinct periods of controversy between Ham and his adversaries. Each conflict portrayed Ham's fiery seriousness in dealing with his opposition. The first years (1906-1920) were characteristic of Ham's battle with the liquor interests in Kentucky, Texas, and North Carolina. In the middle period (1920-1940), the evangelist fought against modernism and evolution. Finally, in the third portion of Ham's career (1940-1959), his radio ministry, the evangelist denounced religious apostasy. During this latter period, Ham claimed that an alliance of infidel Jews and Communists was working to destroy Christianity. A significant part of his effort to reveal this plot was portrayed in his dispute with the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) of B'nai B'rith.

Many of the controversies that occurred during M.F. Ham's ministry were due to his biased opinions. Like many Southerners of his day, the evangelist was outspoken in his opposition to Negroes, Roman Catholics, and Jews in American society. While he believed the Negro to be inferior to whites, he also apparently felt that many whites took advantage of the black. One way in which he tried to correct this manipulation was by holding special services for Negroes during this crusade. Ham also recognized the dangers that the blacks' ignorance could produce. For example, in the 1950's, the evangelist thought he saw Communists at work in the Civil Rights Movement:

Every conviction, by the defenders of this Republic, against the Communistic enemies have been reversed by the Warren Court. The Civil Rights propaganda is not just to obtain the vote of the Negro, he has had that ever since it was granted him by this Republic...



All this is just another way to bring about race confusion in this Republic. It is being brought about by communistic enemies of this republic.<sup>10</sup>

In other ways, Ham seemed to favor the status quo arrangement of whites and blacks, or he failed to notice the presence of racial inequality. William Ramsey, Ham's music director, told a Negro congregation in Elizabeth City, North Carolina, that the Ku Klux Klan had the best interests of the black in mind. He justified the Klan's actions as an effort to improve morals. Ham apparently felt as well that a "good" negro would accept his position in society and work within the role established for him.<sup>11</sup>

Ham also had very strong ideas concerning Roman Catholics. Traditionally many Protestants had been skeptical of the Catholics since the Reformation. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, numerous immigrants entered the United States from Italy and other European countries where Catholicism was the dominant religion. Several of these ethnic groups became associated with strong political machines in the metropolitan areas of the Northeast. Nativist feelings ran high in the South despite the fact that few immigrants, and fewer Catholics, resided there. In addition, misinformed Protestants believed Catholics encouraged intemperance which also contributed to anti-Catholicism in the South.

The lack of proper communication and understanding between Catholics and Protestants was also responsible for much of the

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<sup>10</sup>Ham, 50 Years, 67-68; Mordecai F. Ham, "To Every Friend of Christ," Old Kentucky Home Revivalist, [n.v.] (Aug., 1957), 1. Hereafter cited as O.K.H.R.

<sup>11</sup>Elizabeth City, [N.C.] Independent, Oct. 24, 1924; Ham, 50 Years, 265.

anti-Catholic hysteria among Southern Baptists. One rumor circulating in Protestant circles said that the Pope wanted to add American wealth to his Vatican treasury. Other stories concerned the alleged relationship of some prominent Catholics to political corruption. Despite the fallacy of such notions, many Protestants accepted them as fact.<sup>12</sup>

Ham himself was guilty of anti-Catholic statements. Although he denied ever referring to the Catholic church as "the Great Whore" of Revelation 17-18, he made similar statements. During his 1908 New Orleans crusade, Ham charged that Catholic leaders had ordered their members to boycott the Ham rallies and to burn copies of the Gospel of John which revival workers had circulated throughout the city. In a January 3, 1928, letter to a prominent Texas pastor, he claimed that Roman Catholicism had nurtured a "pagan heirarchy" in American education, but his most openly anti-Catholic attacks came in the 1928 presidential campaign of Democrat Al Smith.<sup>13</sup>

While Ham expressed prejudice toward Roman Catholics, his most severe criticism was reserved for American Jews. In many ways, the evangelist possessed contradictory feelings toward the Jewish people. On one hand, he gave the Jews credit for carrying the monotheistic tradition throughout history. On the other, he condemned the actions of modern Judaism as subversive and diabolical. Perhaps the paradox can be partially explained by an examination of Ham's spiritual and political points of view.

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Ira Vinson Birdwhistle, "Southern Baptist Perceptions of, and responses to Roman Catholicism, 1917-1972," (doctoral dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1975), 15-35.

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Ham, 50 Years, 95-96, 138; Mordecai Ham to J. Frank Norris, Jan. 3, 1928, John Franklyn Norris Collection (Dargan-Carver Library, Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, Nashville, Tenn.).



In the Biblical Jew, Ham found the proof of God's promises to modern Christianity. The Jewish people professed a belief in one God. Jews were the recipients of divine messages, and they preserved much of the scriptures that Christians read in their Bibles. Most importantly, Jesus Christ, the cornerstone of Christianity, was from Jewish stock. Ham also believed that a state of Israel would be a pivotal point in future world history. In 1945, the evangelist warned that any nation that opposed the proposed Jewish state would be in danger of divine retribution. In this respect, he predicted that Germany could expect the punishment of Almighty God for her actions against Jews during the Second World War. He also criticized the Soviet Union for its cruel treatment of Jews.<sup>14</sup> Although Ham also prophesied that Israel would soon recognize Jesus Christ as her promised Messiah, he had little hope for the salvation of those Jews who had died in their unbelief.

Despite the rather high esteem in which he placed the nation of Israel, Ham had very harsh words for American Jews. He felt that several Jewish organizations had schemed to undermine the American government and Christianity with it. In his thinking, such plots signalled the presence of a more determined effort by international agents of apostasy. The goal of such agencies was a world-wide government in which the Christian religion would be abandoned as archaic and unnecessary. In some respects, Ham believed that Jewish involvement in this anti-Christian plot could trigger the Battle of Armageddon. He felt that if Christians did not act immediately the agents of Satan would soon triumph.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Interview with Annie Laurie Ham.

<sup>15</sup>Mordecai F. Ham, The Jew (Louisville [n.d.]), 6-9; Mordecai F. Ham, The Second Coming of Jesus Christ, What the Old and New Testaments Teach About the Return of Christ (Louisville, [n.d.]), 5-12; M.F. Ham, "The Hidden Hand," O.K.H.R., [n.v.] (Jan., 1957), 1-3.

Ham's racial overtones and his rural revivalism made the evangelist quite popular throughout the South. From 1911 to 1919, Ham conducted a series of meetings in Texas, in which he gained a reputation as a fighter who seldom retreated. When Ham spoke, he attracted large crowds of both admirers and adversaries, and often local bootleggers threatened him. One even tried to run Ham and his songleader out of town. Twice the evangelist suffered personal injury at the hands of unfriendly mobs. In spite of these assaults, he usually continued to preach, but with more zeal than before. After a fierce contest in Houston in 1906, Ham did not retreat, but moved his revival to another city and continued to denounce those unsympathetic to his evangelism. He also persisted in denouncing the traditional Protestant vices of dancing, attending the theatre, and drinking.

In several ways, Ham seemed to prosper from persecution. The threats upon his life and ministry often brought larger audiences to his meetings. The evangelist's obstinance in dealing with the unchurched element apparently encouraged local church members and awakened many sleeping congregations. Several churches influenced by Ham's evangelism added new names to their membership rolls. Although Ham fostered some apparent growth, he sometimes alienated churches when his duties overlapped with those of the local minister. Ham thought that some pastors despised the power and prestige of a revival preacher because an evangelist seldom had to work through deacon boards or through established programs. Ham also conducted union meetings so that all Protestant churches could work together to promote the revival and forget denominational differences; and some ministers did not approve of that approach. For such reasons, Ham thought that ministers felt



evangelism could best be handled within the church rather than in the revival tent. In response, the evangelist said:

In the Ephesian Epistle we are told that Christ has given some to be Apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors, and some teachers. If it had not been for these God-given evangelists many pastors wouldn't have any churches.

Assuming a defensive stance, Ham also remarked:

It is obvious that it is far easier to get by with public disparagement of our evangelists than of our pastors...The evangelist is obviously not in as good a position to 'hit back' at official criticism as is the pastor.<sup>16</sup>

During Ham's first Texas campaign, William Ramsey became the evangelist's music director. Originally from Chattanooga, Tennessee, Ramsey met Ham in Waco in 1912 and worked with the evangelist for over thirty years. While the evangelist brought a serious quality to the meetings, Ramsey gave it humor. Ham-Ramsey services featured the songster's jovial music and the evangelist's somber sermons. In spite of the contrast, or perhaps because of it, the partnership worked. Ramsey worked alongside his associate and had to deal with the same opposition that Ham faced.

In 1919, Ham and Ramsey took their revival crusade east of the Mississippi River for a second time. Returning briefly to Kentucky, they conducted meetings in such towns as Hickman, New Castle, Pineville, and Lebanon. During the Lebanon revival, an area resident attributed the success of the meeting to Ham's sincere love for the gospel and for people. Ham also carried his message into Tennessee, spending one

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<sup>16</sup>Interview with Annie Laurie Ham; Ham, 50 Years, 116-18, 99-101; Mordecai F. Ham, "The Evangelist and his Problems," Western Recorder, CXIV (April 11, 1940), 6-7.



year in the Nashville area. During that time, some 3,050 individuals made decisions, but before 1920, the evangelist had not yet attained the peak of his popularity.<sup>17</sup>

In the early twenties, Ham traveled to North Carolina and found the state in the midst of change and ripe for his brand of gospel revival. Ham believed that indifference present in many churches had allowed modernism to creep into many religious and academic institutions. One Carolina liberal that disagreed with Ham was William O. Saunders, a self-proclaimed religious skeptic. When Ham arrived in Saunders' home town, Elizabeth City, to conduct a revival in October, 1924, conflict erupted. Saunders, editor of a local newspaper, The Independent, had a jaundiced opinion of revival preachers and Ham was no exception. In the October 3rd issue of his paper, Saunders remarked:

Make no mistake about it: there will be a world of excitement in the old town from 3 [sic] PM Sunday and on, so long as the town stands for it. The Ham-Ramsey company camps on a town until the last soul says it has been saved and the evangelist, satisfied with his result, pockets the bushels of loose change, and leaves town.

The Ham-Saunders battle was a verbal war launched from both the evangelist's pulpit and the editor's press. The possibilities of converting Saunders must have made Ham more intent on attracting the editor to his meetings. When the journalist refused the evangelist's initial congeniality, Ham declared holy war. Calling Saunders to task, Ham alleged that the editor was a free-thinking infidel intent on undermining the influence of Christian people in the community. From that

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<sup>17</sup>Ham, 50 Years, 98, 113-114, 290-91; James T. Baker, "Christ and anti-Christ; Reciprocal Excommunication in North Carolina," (unpublished manuscript, Western Kentucky University, 1975), 60-61.

<sup>18</sup>Elizabeth City Independent, Oct. 3, 1924.

point, the two men fought until the evangelist left Elizabeth City for another meeting.

Saunders countered Ham's charges by criticizing Ham's method of soul-winning. He condemned what he considered the practice of bullying an individual into conversion. He denounced Ham's condemnations of social events, particularly dances, and liberalism. Saunders also had some words for the local Christians who saw the necessity of asking an outsider to revive religion in the town:

Why did you have to bring the Evangelist M.F. Ham and his crowd to town? I'll tell you and you can get just as mad as hell if you must get mad: BECAUSE YOU HAVE NEGLECTED FOR YEARS TO LIVE THE LIFE YOU PRETEND TO LIVE. THE GREAT RANK AND FILE OF PEOPLE OUTSIDE THE CHURCH HAD LOST RESPECT FOR AND INTEREST IN YOUR CHURCHES.<sup>19</sup>

The evangelist replied to the editor's scolding with a rather outlandish charge that Saunders was financed by Bolsheviks and apostate Jewish organizations that wished to damage his ministry. Such allegations probably had their origins in Saunders' defense of Julius Rosenwald, a prominent Jewish businessman, whom Ham had named as a director of an international agency established to undermine the American government. The evangelist also claimed that Rosenwald had developed a flourishing white slave trade in Chicago.

In an effort to refute Ham's statements, Saunders reproduced in The Independent letters from Rosenwald's personal secretary and from prominent Chicago citizens, including the mayor and several clergymen. Each correspondent spoke of Rosenwald's benevolence and affirmed his irreproachable reputation. Saunders sought to prove Mordecai Ham "an outright liar" by publishing the Book of Ham, a small pamphlet that

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., Nov. 28, 1924.



contained most of the major arguments expressed during the controversy. Not to be outdone, Ham charged that the Book of Ham contained false information which Saunders had merely invented for revenge.

As both sides waged the Elizabeth City debate, the evangelist predicted a great spiritual renewal for the community. The mayor also agreed with Ham and foresaw a religious awakening due to the Ham-Ramsey rallies. Ham did not admit that Saunders was a tough adversary against whom he fought harder than any other enemy. Since he felt that the editor represented an anti-Christian element, the evangelist had no regrets for his actions against Saunders. During the final days of the controversy, Ham wrote in his prayer diary:

Dear Father: Do not let me say or do anything that will embarrass you, especially about Saunders. Lord, convict and save that man. May his reign of evil cease in this community.<sup>20</sup>

On the other hand, Saunders was just as convinced of the righteousness of his position. He believed that Ham's narrow-mindedness and his opinionated gospel were detrimental to religious liberty. Saunders also accused the evangelist of spiritual bigotry.

I am more than convinced that he is an insolent mounteback, a ruthless demagog [sic], a preacher of hate, a joy-killer, a tyrant playing upon the fears, the prejudices, and the weaknesses of unthoughtful humans.<sup>21</sup>

Although he later apologized to the citizens of Elizabeth City for the ill feelings he might have created toward them during the heat of the controversy, Saunders never expressed anything but contempt for M.F. Ham.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., Nov. 11, 7, 1924; W.O. Saunders, Book of Ham (Elizabeth City, N.C., 1924), 25; Ham, 50 Years, 174.

<sup>21</sup>Saunders, Book of Ham, 23-24.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

After the Elizabeth City debate, the evangelist continued his meetings throughout 1925 in North and South Carolina and also in Virginia. The following year, the Ham-Ramsey team returned to Oklahoma and Texas. Those series of meetings ended in August, 1927, when Ham assumed his first and only pastorate, at the First Baptist Church of Oklahoma City. Although he had not previously planned to restrict his evangelistic work, Ham accepted the pastorate after a unanimous vote of the congregation to call him as minister. While he felt God wanted him in Oklahoma City, Ham also recognized the necessity of a centralized location from which to launch his revival efforts. Although he agreed to accept pastoral duties, Ham had no intention of leaving the revival circuit.<sup>23</sup>

Soon after he began his tenure at First Baptist, Reverend Ham's plans were altered somewhat. While crossing a busy Oklahoma City street, he was hit by an automobile and seriously injured. He then spent six weeks recovering in an Oklahoma City hospital and in a Battle Creek, Michigan, sanitarium. Although he returned to his pulpit in November, 1928, he was never quite the same after the accident. Once he had resumed an active schedule, Ham claimed that the American Association for the Advancement of Atheism was responsible for his near-fatal injury. The AAAA had recently opened an Oklahoma City office, and Ham believed that the organization had declared war upon his ministry. He also charged that the driver of the automobile was from the same hometown as the national President of the AAAA, and such a coincidence was too timely to be ignored. Although nothing was actually proven, Ham spent the rest of his evangelistic career battling the AAAA and other organizations he classified as anti-Christian.

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 31-32; Ham, 50 Years, 169-71.



Ham resumed his pastorate in time to take an active role in the presidential campaign of 1928. Because Democratic candidate Al Smith was a devout Roman Catholic who disliked prohibition and had the support of New York City's infamous Tammany Hall, many Southern Baptists such as M.F. Ham felt that he lacked the moral fiber necessary for a United States president. Many Southern Baptist ministers worked against Smith, and Ham did his part by conducting a speaking tour in Oklahoma, Texas, and North Carolina. In a March 16 letter, he told Dr. J. Frank Norris that he had discussed the Smith campaign with the Oklahoma anti-Smith Chairman and had assured him of victory. Reverend Ham also denounced Smith from the pulpit. The pastor told his congregation that a vote for Al Smith was a vote against Jesus Christ and that those who voted for him risked eternal damnation. When Republican Herbert Hoover defeated Smith in the upper Southern states, Baptists took credit for the victory.<sup>24</sup> Because of his intense campaigning, Ham created some problems within his own congregation that eventually persuaded him to resign the pastorate in July, 1929.

Apparently Ham had not only angered some of the wealthier members of his church by his adamant opposition to Al Smith, but also his whole evangelistic attitude came into question soon after the beginning of the new year in 1929. Due to such controversy, Ham had decided to leave the pastorate and resume an active career as an evangelist. As he told a friend in a letter written before his resignation:

I am being drawn very strongly to the evangelistic field. The Boards have so thoroughly organized our churches today that it makes no difference which

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<sup>24</sup>Ham, 50 Years, 195-97; Ethel Moss to Norris, Aug. 15, 1927, Ham to Norris, Nov. 26, 1927, March 16, 1928, Norris Collection; Richard Oulahan, "Oklahoma Stirred by Religious Issue," New York Times, Oct. 3, 1928; Albert J. Menendez, Religion at the Polls (Philadelphia, 1977), 49-65.

way a man turns, he rams his head into a wall that has been put up around him by these Boards.<sup>25</sup>

Ham probably left First Baptist at a time when several of his flock felt that their shepherd had neglected his pastoral duties. At the time that Ham resigned, the church was in a very unhealthy situation due to its pastor's long absences attributed to hospitalization, revivals, and campaign rallies. In spite of the controversial questions that Ham's resignation left unanswered, Mrs. Ham remembered only the kindness and the generosity of the members of First Baptist and the pleasant life that she and her husband had in Oklahoma City.<sup>26</sup>

Even before his resignation had taken effect, Ham had resumed full-time evangelistic work. By August, 1929, he was sure that his decision to leave the pastorate was a wise one because he believed that people were more ready for revival than ever before. In 1930, the Hams were again moved to Louisville, joined the Walnut Street Baptist Church, and Ham initiated meetings in Kentucky and Tennessee. John Freeman, editor of the Tennessee Baptist and Reflector, commented on the evangelist's 1930 Nashville revival:

Dr. Ham seemingly knows no such thing as fatigue. He is able to speak from three to six times each day and to travel long distances as well. His new plan of holding union revivals is to have a central place for the evening services, and go to churches, one by one, for other services.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Ham to Norris, June 9, 1929, Norris Collection.

<sup>26</sup>Baker, "Christ and anti-Christ," 19-20; interview with Annie Laurie Ham.

<sup>27</sup>John D. Freeman, "Editorial," Baptist and Reflector [n.v.] (Oct., 1930), 3. Ham did not receive an honorary Doctorate of Divinity until 1935.



Since Kentucky was his birthplace and boyhood home, Ham always dreamed of winning the entire state to his Lord. With this in mind, he conducted a "Bluegrass Crusade" during 1935 using Lexington as his headquarters. He conducted a large revival in Louisville in 1937, beginning the meetings in a large tent. Soon volunteers constructed more permanent tabernacles in at least two different locations in the "Falls City." During these services Ham probably relied upon his Oklahoma City pastorate to support the doubts he expressed concerning the authentic salvation experience of many church members. The evangelist told his Louisville audience that he believed that almost ninety-nine percent of all church members were unsaved. Overall, he claimed some 6,700 additions during those Kentucky meetings.<sup>28</sup>

During the thirties, Ham also had the opportunity to preach in North Carolina for a third time. Of particular interest was an October, 1934, meeting held in Charlotte. At the request of a local Christian Men's Club that wanted a religious revival and in spite of some opposition from several pastors in Charlotte, Ham arrived in town and began to conduct services. On one evening when local teen-agers chose to go to the movies instead of the meeting, the evangelist condemned the laxness of their morals. The following night, several adolescents were on hand to picket the services. In the crowd to watch the confrontation was a young athlete named William F. Graham. Graham had little use for evangelical religion, which he felt was primarily suited for "sissies." This feeling soon changed for, when Graham heard Ham's fiery sermon

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<sup>28</sup>"Radio Evangelist Mordecai Ham, Dies at 84," Courier-Journal, Nov. 2, 1961; interview with David Nat Livingston, May 26, 1979; M.F. Ham to J. Frank Norris, Nov. 15, 1935, Norris Collection; Ham, 50 Years, 251-52, 287.

and faced the evangelist's piercing eyes, he began to consider his spiritual condition. Soon afterwards, Billy Graham had surrendered his life to Jesus Christ.

When Graham later considered the choice of a career, Ham advised his spiritual son to seek God's will. With that in mind, the evangelist prayed: "O Lord, here is a young man, Billy Graham, who was saved in our meeting in 1934, and wants to know Your will. I am asking You to put Your mantle on him, and send him to the battlefront." Whenever Graham needed advice, Ham stood by to offer him the benefit of almost fifty years of experience. Once Graham began an evangelistic career, Ham recognized him as his successor and made several appearances at Graham rallies in the 1950's.

In the mid-thirties, Ham received two significant honors that recognized his qualities as an evangelist. Bob Jones College in Cleveland, Tennessee, awarded him an honorary Doctorate of Divinity degree in 1935. The following year the International Association of Christian Evangelists elected Ham its president. Still a controversial personality at fifty-nine, he told his fellow evangelists that Jesus Christ "stands out as the world's only Universal Figure." Throughout the rest of the decade, Ham continued to conduct revival meetings and to attract moderate crowds to his services.<sup>29</sup>

By 1940, radio had become a standard household item for almost every American home, and at sixty-four, Ham's active schedule had

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<sup>29</sup>Edward E. Ham, Battlefront Messages (Nashville, 1950), 90-91; William G. McLoughlin, Billy Graham, Revivalist in a Secular Age (New York, 1960), 27-29; John Charles Pollock, Billy Graham: The Authorized Biography (New York, 1961), 5-8; Edward E. Ham, The Revival When Billy Graham Found Christ (Wheaton, Ill., 1955), 25; interview with Annie Laurie Ham; "Dr. Ham's Talk Opens Session of Evangelists," Louisville Courier-Journal, Dec. 28, 1936.



begun to damage his health. As a result, in 1941 the evangelist left the revival circuit and launched a radio ministry. Broadcasting on the Southern Mutual Broadcasting Network from his own studio in Louisville, by 1945 Ham had almost fifty stations carrying his radio program. Ham seemed convinced of the effectiveness of his radio show and initially had the support of many listeners. When one listener heard that the evangelist might be forced off the air, she wrote:

Dr. Ham, please do not go off the air. Just the other Sunday morning I was listening to you, and my husband came into the room and growled, 'Turn that d... radio off. I don't want to hear that d... preacher!' I said, 'Darling, I don't care what you want; I am going to listen to Dr. Ham! He was so surprised that he sat down and listened... The next thing I saw him on the floor and heard him crying, 'Forgive me dear'... I was going to shoot you and the children; then shoot myself.<sup>30</sup>

Ham commented in retrospect that the man later became a Christian.<sup>31</sup>

The radio preacher also circulated copies of his sermons. Initially these were issued in pamphlet form, but after 1947 the Ham Evangelistic Association published the Old Kentucky Home Revivalist. This booklet contained many of Ham's sermons and also his comments about current events and their relationship with prophecy. Often he warned his readers of the dangers in store for non-Christians. Ham felt threatened by apostate Jews and by Communism. He believed all of these agents would bring about "the end of the world". As the evangelist told his readers:

Now we think we are at war with nations; but actually the great warfare is now already revealed to be a 'war against God'... Soon you are

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<sup>30</sup>Ham, 50 Years, 269-70.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

to be placed in a most embarrassing position in which an 'anti-Christ' alliance shall be met in a great world conflict by an anti-God group of nations... It will end in a great destructive war, in which God shall destroy all His enemies who are now fighting each other.<sup>32</sup>

During his radio ministry, Ham faced charges of anti-Semitism and slander. The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) of B'nai B'rith claimed that the radio preacher had made libelous statements against Jews. In a 1941 effort to stop his allegations, the ADL filed a petition with the Federal Communications Commission to have Ham's radio program banned from the airways. The FCC reviewed the case, but "due to a lack of evidence" eventually dismissed the charge. Ham remained unconvinced that the court action would stop the attacks against him:

The Anti-Defamation League, A.D.L., was first organized for the published reason of guarding Jewry from abuse by the American press, radio, and pulpit. It has far exceeded any justifiable function it might have exercised and has sought to throttle all expressions of public opinion which are unfavorable to atheistic communism and international Semitism.<sup>33</sup>

Such controversy prompted several of Ham's friends and associates to urge that he abandon the radio ministry and return to active revival crusades. However, Ham did not leave the airways until after 1957.<sup>34</sup>

Perhaps due in part to his outlandish allegations against Jews and to his prophetic warnings, the Ham radio program did not do well financially. Depending mostly on the contributions from his listeners, the evangelist was at their mercy. When those sources did not meet his

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<sup>32</sup>Ham, "The Hidden Hand," 2.

<sup>33</sup>Ham, 50 Years, 261.

<sup>34</sup>J. Frank Norris to M.F. Ham, March 26, 1951; M.F. Ham to J. Frank Norris, May 11, 1951, Norris Collection. Among these were J. Frank Norris and Billy Graham.



financial obligations, Ham had to drop certain stations from his network. In December, 1952, only eighteen stations carried the program. By September, 1954, Ham only had four stations on his network, two of those being in Louisville. In an effort to help the ailing ministry, the recently organized M.F. Ham Evangelistic Association developed "Christ's Messengers," a non-profit organization. For a twenty-five cent contribution to M.F. Ham's radio program, a listener could receive a copy of Ham's latest sermon, a copy of his biography, or a booklet detailing the conversion story of Billy Graham. Despite this effort, the radio program still did not succeed financially. Although Ham had hopes of converting his radio broadcasts into a television ministry, age and chronic illness forced him into semi-retirement in 1959.

While he produced his radio programs, Ham still continued a moderate speaking schedule. In 1957, his last two engagements included greeting the crowds at Billy Graham rallies in San Francisco and New York. During the New York service, Graham introduced the eighty-year-old Ham as one whom "I can't keep up with." Even then, the Kentucky evangelist was said to have stirred the audience in a way that Graham could not do.<sup>35</sup>

Whatever else could be said about Mordecai F. Ham, his ministry was a sincere and constant battle against what he considered unfriendly forces. On one hand, many thought Ham represented a holy warrior locked into serious conflict with Satan. To others he was a rural preacher trying desperately to preserve his brand of religion. Characteristic of that struggle was Ham's dogmatic fundamentalism.

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<sup>35</sup>Mordecai F. Ham, O.K.H.R., [n.v.] (Dec., 1952, 2; Mordecai F. Ham, O.K.H.R. [n.v.] (Sept., 1954), 2; Mordecai F. Ham, O.K.H.R., [n.v.] (Feb., 1955), 2; Mordecai F. Ham, Miscellaneous Sermons, 1947, Mordecai F. Ham Papers (Special Collections, M.I. King Library, University of Kentucky, Lexington); Ham, "to Every Friend of Christ," 1; Baker, "Christ and anti-Christ," 50-51.

## Chapter II

Mordecai Ham belonged to one of Protestantism's most controversial and yet most misunderstood movements--fundamentalism. The fundamentalist controversy made Ham a Southern institution; and in order to understand the evangelist, one must determine what fundamentalism was and whom it affected. In general terms, a fundamentalist believes and promotes acceptance of The Fundamentals, a series of pamphlets published between 1909 and 1914 by individuals concerned about what they saw as the declining influence of fundamental Protestantism. Basically these tenets were simplified into five essential points of beliefs which came to be the battle cry for the fundamentalist cause:

- (1) infallibility of the scripture
- (2) the virgin birth
- (3) deity of Jesus Christ
- (4) Christ's substitutionary atonement
- (5) the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ and His second Coming.<sup>1</sup>

It would appear that a fundamentalist, then, is an individual who prefers a religion very closely related to a traditional interpretation of the Bible and theology. He is skeptical of change and is attached to orthodoxy. Early fundamentalists were ultra conservatives that predicted the soon return of Jesus Christ. They were primarily concerned with Biblical authenticity and developed their whole movement around

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<sup>1</sup>Louis Gaspar, The Fundamentalist Movement (The Hague, 1963), 11-12.



its preservation.<sup>2</sup> Ham was this type of Fundamentalist.

Because many fundamentalists like Ham were self-proclaimed judges on the evils of modernism, they acquired a less than complimentary reputation during the 1920's. Many Americans have come to view fundamentalism as a rural, anti-intellectual movement bent on saving American society for a narrow, righteous existence. In many ways, the personality of several fundamentalists justified the unfavorable judgement of such individuals.

The conflict that developed between fundamentalists and modernists had its roots in the reaction to change that occurred in the later nineteenth century. During the 1870's, America began to feel the effects of rapid industrialization. The United States was swiftly becoming an urban society where people lived and worked in crowded conditions and where business often manipulated its subjects. Many religious leaders thought if Christianity did not adequately prepare itself to deal with the urban dilemma, the faith would simply be left behind. Still others saw the importance of clinging to older spiritual values and of teaching their converts to protect those doctrines when the rest of society was running amuck. As a result, two prominent extremes developed within Protestantism. The liberal wing wanted to minister to a hungry and confused humanity through a Social Gospel that would feed both the spiritual and physical needs of the masses. On the other hand, a more conservative element was concerned with the salvation of those same

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<sup>2</sup>Martin Marty, The Righteous Empire, The Protestant Experience (New York, 1970), 215; Ernest R. Sandeen, The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism 1800-1930 (Chicago, 1970), 232, 246-47; Williard B. Gatewood, Jr., Controversy in the Twenties; Fundamentalism, Modernism, and Evolution (Nashville, 1969), 12-13.

masses. Fundamentalists like Ham believed that the church was spiritual, and for it to concentrate on social Christianity would endanger religious liberty. The evangelist once told his radio audience in 1947: "With all of your programs and your social and ethical teaching you are just preparing the way for Communism."<sup>3</sup>

The growing fundamentalist effort and the First World War destroyed a large element of moderate Protestant ranks. Through these changes, fundamentalists saw an opportunity to seize control of the Protestant ranks. In 1919 several prominent fundamentalists formed the World's Christian Fundamentals Association (WCFA) and initiated a new battle against liberal Christianity.<sup>4</sup>

Much of the fury that Ham and his fellow fundamentalists launched was against violators of Biblical infallibility. Its most prominent offenders appeared to be evolutionists. Fundamentalists like Ham lacked the education to understand that Darwin's law did not necessarily do away with a Creator who designed the world, but tried to describe life in a systematic, orderly pattern. Because most anti-evolutionists had little respect for "the Christian evolutionist," they thought evolution was one of the worst elements of scientific investigation. They believed evolution could lead to rank unbelief and to rampant immorality, and fundamentalists felt that it needed to be stopped at any cost.<sup>5</sup>

Fundamentalists were convinced that evolution had made its way into textbooks and consequently into the classroom where it contaminated

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<sup>3</sup>William G. McLoughlin, Modern Revivalism: from Charles G. Finney to Billy Graham (New York, 1959), 400-33, C.S. Cole History of Fundamentalism (2nd ed., Westport, Conn., 1971), 53-54; Gaspar, Fundamentalist Movement, 12-15; M.F. Ham, Sermon: "Christ and Social Service," Louisville, [n.d.], 1947, Mordecai F. Ham Papers (Special Collections, M.A. King Library, University of Kentucky, Lexington).

<sup>4</sup>Gatewood, Controversy in the Twenties, 17-18.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 18-21.



school children. Like his contemporaries, Billy Sunday, J. Frank Norris, John Roach Straton, and William Bell Riley, Mordecai Ham questioned whether schools actually revered the Bible. In a sermon illustration, the evangelist demonstrated his skepticism toward American public education:

I was riding through the streets of a Western Texas town one day with a young man who was home from the university for a week end. He said to me, "Since I have been to the university, I have discovered where our Bible came from... it has come from those old myths and fables... because there is some similarity between them."<sup>6</sup>

Ham proceeded to correct the student.

Do you see that big bone-yard of discarded automobiles? Well, I can go over there, and find every part of your car is similar to some part of those old discarded cars, and so therefore your car must have come out of that old pile of junk.<sup>7</sup>

In many ways, Ham believed that evolution was the devil's greatest instrument against Christianity. He charged that the University of Oklahoma was teaching evolution with funds financed by the Soviet Union. The evangelist also told a Minneapolis crowd that "the devil and his preachers were rationalists and evolutionists." He had little doubt as to what he believed was the origin of man: "The evolutionists claim that man is the climax of a progressive evolution...but the Bible says that when man existed in 'unformed substance in the lower parts of

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<sup>6</sup>Cole, History of Fundamentalism, 61-62; M.F. Ham, The Second Coming of Jesus Christ, What the Old and New Testaments Teach about the Return of Christ (Louisville, [n.d.]), 18.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

the earth," God saw him as he now is, just as the architect sees his building before it is built."<sup>8</sup>

Most of the time, Ham had receptive crowds who usually accepted his beliefs without question, but one individual who disagreed with him was William O. Saunders. During their 1924 debate, Saunders claimed that Ham denounced the electricity that lit his tabernacle, the printing press that produced his revival leaflets, and the factory that made his clothing. The editor ultimately charged Ham with being a reactionary who preferred a society of "morons sitting on the shores of Time, twaddling [sic] their thumbs, singing hallelujahs to a bloody Jehovah, and waiting for ravens to feed them."

Saunders had more than his personal reputation on the line during his debate with Ham. In 1924, the North Carolina legislature was heatedly considering the evolution question. Earlier in the year, Governor Cameron Morrison had outlawed the use of certain textbooks in the public schools on the grounds that the books discussed evolution. The governor's action had prompted fundamentalists to flock to the state in an effort to initiate a new anti-evolution drive. On the other hand, educators such as the presidents of Wake Forest University and the University of North Carolina charged that any anti-evolution legislation would deny academic freedom. Consequently, Ham's visit to Elizabeth City and his crusade in North Carolina was timely. Although he left the city a bit worn from his struggle with Saunders, the evangelist returned to the state in 1925 to continue his attack upon evolution and its presence in public education. Even so, his influence was not enough to convince

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<sup>8</sup> Gatewood, Controversy in the Twenties, 24; Edward E. Ham, Battle Front Messages (Nashville, 1950), 15.



the legislature to vote for an anti-evolution provision.<sup>9</sup>

When the evangelist went to Oklahoma City in 1927, he renewed a friendship with the adamant fundamentalist, John Franklyn Norris, whom he had met in 1911 during a revival in Fort Worth, Texas. Ham never had the relationship with fundamentalists John Roach Straton and William Bell Riley that he did with Norris. In defending their friendship against a critic who charged that he was a Norrisite, Ham responded that he would much rather be a Norrisite than a devilite.<sup>10</sup>

Due to their concern that the Southern Baptist Convention maintain an anti-evolution program in its colleges and missionary endeavors, Norris and his band of extremists, including Ham, C.P. Stealey from Oklahoma, Selsus Tull of Arkansas, and, to some extent, Victor I. Masters of Kentucky, were a thorn in the side of the SBC throughout the 1920's. Even though the SBC was considered one of America's most conservative denominations, Norris' group thought that the SBC had not acted strongly enough in its opposition to evolution. As a result, Norris' band often took their complaints to the floor of the annual conventions and turned several of the regular business sessions into shouting matches. Because of these debates, Norris and his associates

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<sup>9</sup>W.O. Saunders, Book of Ham (Elizabeth City, N.C., 1924), 15; Norman F. Furniss, The Fundamentalist Controversy, 1918-1932 (Hamden, Conn., 1963), 84-85; Maynard Shipley, "Growth of the Anti-Evolution Movement," Current History, XXXII (May, 1930), 330-32.

<sup>10</sup>Gatewood, Controversy in the Twenties, 298; James T. Baker, "The Battle of Elizabeth City: Christ and Anti-Christ in North Carolina," The North Carolina Historical Review, LIV (Autumn, 1977), 407-08; Edward E. Ham, 50 Years on the Battle Front with Christ, a Biography of Mordecai F. Ham (Nashville, 1950), 100; M.F. Ham to J. Frank Norris, Nov. 13, 1927, John Franklyn Norris Collection (Dargan-Carver Library, Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, Nashville, Tenn.); J. Thomas Meigs, "Southern Baptists and the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy of the 1920's." The Quarterly Review, A Survey of Southern Baptist Progress, XXXVIII (Oct.-Dec., 1977), 65; interview with Annie Laurie Ham, Oct. 13, 1978; Ham to Norris, March 5, Jan. 3, 1928, Norris Collection.

acquired a well-known reputation throughout the South. Although Ham seemingly did not participate as actively as the others, he probably knew about their plans and endorsed them whole heartedly. Earlier he had expressed his fears that the SBC was filled with unsaved Baptists and that they needed to be exposed. He also told Norris in an April 13, 1927, letter that he hoped "to put in some telling licks for the cause" in his revival campaign in Texas.<sup>11</sup>

Due to the tension caused by Norris and the anti-evolution campaign, the SBC took significant action in 1925 and in 1926. Following discussions held during the 1922 and 1923 conventions, the SBC in 1925 approved a statement of "Baptist Faith and Message," which defended Southern Baptist doctrine. In reference to evolution, the statement said:

The evolutionary doctrine has long been a working hypothesis of science and will probably continue to be, because of its apparent simplification in explaining the universe. But its best opponents freely admit that causes of the origin of species have not been traced, nor has any proof been forthcoming that man is not the direct creation of God as recorded in Genesis.<sup>12</sup>

Not all the delegates were pleased with the resolution. C.P. Stealy, a Norris supporter, questioned the wording in the Creation and Fall of Man section of the statement. He proposed an amendment to read that man was a direct creation of God, and not a product of

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<sup>11</sup>Meigs, "Baptists and the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy"; Norris to Ham, Sept. 12, 1927, Norris Collection; "Report of the Committee of the Baptist Faith and Message," SBC Annual, 1925 (Nashville, 1925), 11; Ham to Norris, April 13, 1927, Norris Collection.

\* \* <sup>12</sup>Meigs, "Baptists and the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy," 60-61; SBC Annual, 1925, 72.



evolution. Although the convention defeated Stealey's motion after an extended debate, it did denounce any effort to teach evolution as anything other than scientific theory. The delegates passed a resolution stating that Darwinism was no different than any other theory and that it needed to be tested and validated before it was presented as fact.<sup>13</sup>

Norris forces regrouped themselves and returned to the 1926 convention to battle what they recognized as modernism within the SBC. Although the SBC had earlier decided to accept the Genesis account of creation and to forego any further discussion of evolution, Selsus Tull, a delegate from Arkansas, presented a motion that would require all Baptist institutions and missionary organizations to affirm the statements included in the "Baptist Faith and Message." Reluctantly, the SBC approved Tull's motion, and many fundamentalists used the opportunity to force many Baptist organizations into compliance with it. Eventually, the SBC, tired of conflict, turned to other matters besides evolution and left Norris to battle whom he wished. Norris, out of disgust with the convention, withdrew from it in 1931, but continued to hold revival meetings in the same cities simultaneously as the conventions for several years afterwards.<sup>14</sup>

Although Norris was not successful in the SBC, he and Mordecai Ham were more victorious in Texas and Oklahoma respectively. Both states were strongholds for fundamentalists, and the actions of anti-evolu-

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<sup>13</sup>Meigs, "Baptists and the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy," 60-61.

<sup>14</sup>SBC Annual, 1926 (Nashville, 1926), 18, 98; Furniss, Fundamentalist Controversy, 123-125; Charles Allyn Russell, Voices of American Fundamentalism: Seven Biographical Studies (Philadelphia, 1925), 40; J. Frank Norris to M.F. Ham, Feb. 21, 1930, Norris Collection.

tionists there were recognized nationally. The Oklahoma legislature was the first state legislature in the country to pass a ruling against textbooks that discussed Darwinism. Due to the work of Norris, the Texas legislature soon followed suit. Norris and Ham also worked to keep Southern Baptist educational institutions free of the Darwinian influence. Ham seemed to be more concerned with the effect of atheism and evolution upon private Christian schools rather than with its influence upon public education: "It is far more dangerous to have a goodless [sic] man in the guise of Christian employed by your church colleges, where he sits up and makes fun of the Word of God, the [sic] to have a downright atheist teaching openly in an avowed institution."<sup>15</sup> Norris worked to keep evolution from being taught at Baylor University, and this activity made him the enemy of many prominent Baptists in the state.

Among Southern Baptists who faced the fire of Mordecai Ham and J. Frank Norris were E.Y. Mullins, L.R. Scarborough, and George W. Truett. Mullins, the President of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, and a former SBC President, was concerned about the influence of evolution upon public education. Mullins also had doubts about enforcing Baptist beliefs upon a secular institution. He felt that strong Baptist action in the anti-evolution campaign could damage the delicate balance between church and state as well as violate Baptist policy by attempting to control opinion through legislation.<sup>16</sup> Fundamentalists denounced his opinion as cowardly and compromising. Because

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<sup>15</sup>Kenneth K. Bailey, Southern White Protestantism in the Twentieth Century (New York, 1964), 80-81; Russell, Voices of Fundamentalism, 29-40; Ham, "Christ and Social Service."

<sup>16</sup>E.Y. Mullins, "Control of Teaching in the Public Schools," Alabama Baptist, LIII (April 27, 1922) 5; Meigs, "Baptists and the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy," 64-65.



Mullins refused to support a strong fundamentalist drive in the SBC, Ham criticized him vehemently. When the deacon board of First Baptist (Oklahoma City) unknowingly invited a friend of Mullins to speak in their pulpit while Ham was hospitalized in 1927, Norris wrote the pastor reassuring him that the deacons and the church were "one-hundred percent for the fundamentalists." Soon afterwards First Baptist retracted its invitation, and Norris felt that the threat against Ham was over. In that same letter the Fort Worth pastor warned that the Oklahoma legislature might reverse its anti-evolution position enacted a year before. Norris cautioned his colleague that such action might trigger a dramatic resurgence of modernism throughout the SBC. To these warnings, Ham replied, "I will die before I compromise."<sup>17</sup>

L.R. Scarborough was another individual whom Norris and Ham considered dangerous. Norris disliked Scarborough because he was an influential member of what he and Ham called "the Texas machine." A self-proclaimed conservative, Scarborough affirmed that the SBC stood solidly against modernism in every facet of its denominational life; but he also warned his fellow Southern Baptists to avoid resorting to negative criticisms of SBC policy and practices. A prominent Texas Baptist himself, Norris possibly was jealous of Scarborough's prestige and sought any method to limit Scarborough's influence in an effort to increase his own power.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>J. Frank Norris to Ham, Oct. 2, 1927, Ham to Norris, Oct. 10, 1927, Norris Collection.

<sup>18</sup>Meigs, "Baptists and the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy," 64; L.R. Scarborough, "A Four-Fold Answer to Modernism," Western Recorder, XCIX (June 11, 1925), 6-7.

The third individual against whom Norris and Ham worked was George W. Truett, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas, Norris' rival church. Norris once labeled Truett as "the Infallible Baptist Pope," "His all highness," and "the Great all-I am." Since their churches were so close together, Norris and Truett undoubtedly had worked together. However, when Truett did not approve of the Fort Worth pastor's tactics and his politics, Norris, out of jealousy and hatred, apparently began a campaign against him. When Ham planned a revival meeting in Dallas during 1930, Norris, believing that the revival would not succeed without Truett's support, advised Mordecai to work with him. Ham recognized Norris' logic, but he warned Norris that Truett would not like what he would preach. Believing Texas Baptists needed a lesson in humility, he told Norris, "I don't care how Baptistic it may sound. The Gospel is the Good News to be realized in the next world, and when you institutionalize the Lord's work, it's Judaized."<sup>19</sup> When Ham's final Dallas meeting was not as successful as he had expected, he wrote Norris, promising never to conduct a revival with the support of only one denomination, especially Southern Baptists. The evangelist blamed his lack of success on the Texas machine and warned Norris that if Scarborough and Truett remained as powerful Baptist leaders much longer, liberals would control the SBC.<sup>20</sup>

After 1930 Ham and Norris refused to support the Southern Baptist Convention, but the two men continued a moderate correspondence. In the 1930's Ham also spoke in the pulpits of Norris' churches in Fort

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<sup>19</sup>Russell, *Voices of Fundamentalism*, 37; Norris to Ham, Nov. 21, 1927, Ham to Norris, Nov. 15, 1927, June 1, 1930, Norris Collection.

<sup>20</sup>Ham to Norris, Feb. 12, 1930, Norris Collection.



Worth and in Detroit, positions that Norris held simultaneously. Although Ham and Norris conducted a widely publicized tent revival in Detroit in 1935, their friendship was cooled following a misunderstanding during a 1940 meeting in Fort Worth. According to Ham, Norris had not kept a promise to pay for the tabernacle that Ham had used during his Fort Worth revival, and the evangelist was forced to pay the unpaid bills himself. Apparently, Norris had also allowed the bank in which the revival funds had been deposited to release the receipts for public inspection. This action surprised Ham, and he wrote the Fort Worth pastor, "I can't understand Norris, how after my long years of friendship with you, and standing by you in every battle you have ever fought, that you could pull a thing like this on me."<sup>21</sup>

After this incident, Norris remained aloof from the evangelist. In December, 1944, he advised Ham to postpone a planned Fort Worth meeting until an understanding could be reached between the two of them. When Ham wanted to arrange for the First Baptist radio station in Fort Worth to carry his radio program, Norris repeated his demand. By 1951 the correspondence had practically ceased, as had the friendship. After Ham declined an offer to serve as president of Norris' Fort Worth seminary, Norris seemed to lose any interest in Ham. Finally, when a misunderstanding developed between Ham and Norris over who was in charge of paying the evangelist for copies of his biography sold in a First Baptist bookstore, Ham decided to look elsewhere for support. Norris, anxious

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<sup>21</sup>Ham to Norris, Nov. 15, 1935, Norris to Ham, Feb. 9, Sept. 30, Oct. 9, March 5, 1935, Norris Collection; Mordecai Ham, untitled sermon, Fort Worth, Tex., May 6, 1940; Ham to Norris, May 24, 1944, Norris Collection.

over the condition of his war-injured son and his own ill health, told Ham that he could no longer be responsible for the actions of under-studies.<sup>22</sup>

One factor that had fostered the Ham-Norris friendship was that both men preached the immediate return of Jesus Christ. Ham's concern with the scriptures most readily appear in his prophetic statements. Often comparing himself with several Old Testament prophets, the evangelist believed he told the truth in spite of persecution he faced. In many ways, Ham claimed that his ministry was quite similar to that of the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah was called to his prophetic mission as a child and reputedly took what he believed as God's message to what he saw as a perverted and corrupt nation. Ham, who first felt the call to the ministry as an adolescent, often felt that he preached to a society as wicked as the one that heard Jeremiah's warnings. Even though he experienced hardships, Ham felt that the reward for divine service would far outweigh the wrath of any opposition.

Ham also saw a relationship between himself and the prophets Jonah and Job. Jonah was given the command to warn the wicked citizens of Nineveh of judgment; but being Jewish, he rebelled against the command to preach to a national enemy. Ham, too, fought the call to preach, for he believed it would not be financially profitable; but after his grandfather's death, he eventually decided to enter the ministry. In Job's experience, Ham believed he had discovered how to respond to adversity. Often the victim of misunderstanding, the evangelist was

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<sup>22</sup>Norris to Ham, May [n.d.], Dec. 14, 1944, March 26, 1957, Ham to Norris, Oct. 15, Oct. [n.d.], 1951, Norris to Ham, Oct. 16, Oct. 24, 1951, Norris Collection.



scorned by opponents, who ridiculed and attacked both him and his ministry. During the 1940's when his radio program was in debt, Ham appealed to friends, such as Norris, who turned a deaf ear to his pleas for financial support. Even so, comparing himself to Job, Ham refused to compromise his beliefs throughout the crisis.<sup>23</sup>

Because he believed in the relevancy of Biblical prophecies, Ham was known for the predictions he made during his ministry. During a revival in Mineral Wells, Texas, in 1914, two days before World War I began, he declared that conditions were "ripe for such a war as the world had never seen."<sup>24</sup> Blaming the war upon German Rationalism, French immorality, and English Darwinism, the evangelist also warned that if the United States continued to "sow seeds to the flesh," she could expect similar results. Prior to the Second World War, Ham again predicted that another major world conflict would erupt. While criticizing Aryanism, Ham urged that Adolph Hitler be carefully watched as should Italian Premier Benito Mussolini. After the war, the evangelist described Germany's prewar government as ruthless and ungodly, the result of taking some philosophers too seriously. He also declared that Hitler was only the beginning of many dictators who would attempt to assume worldwide dominion. The last and the only successful one would be the Anti-Christ.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Ham to Mrs. M.A. Crittenden, Jan. 16, 1951, Norris Collection; Mordecai F. Ham, "Palestine and the Middle East," O.K.H.R., [n.v.] (Aug., 1957), 2.

<sup>24</sup>Ham, 50 Years, 152-53.

<sup>25</sup>Mordecai Ham, Sermon: "The Battle of Armageddon," Minneapolis, June 9, 1940, Sermon: "Samson Asleep on Deliah's Lap," Minneapolis, June 11, 1940, Ham Papers; M.F. Ham, "The Hidden Hand," O.K.H.R., [n.v.] (Jan., 1957), 2.

In addition to Germany and Italy, the Soviet Union was another nation whose actions Ham sharply criticized. Using the Old Testament books of Daniel and Ezekiel as proof, the evangelist predicted in 1921 that Russia would overcome its internal dissension and rise to prominence as a world power. He felt that Russia's role in the persecution of Jews was also significant and that God would deal fiercely with the Soviets for their actions. Overall, Ham's primary interest in the Soviet Union lay in its apparent relationship to apostate Jews. According to the evangelist, such an alliance was predicted in the Book of Revelation and needed to occur before the Anti-Christ could secure control over the world:

The Lord is warning us against these evil spirits, the mystery of iniquity. He has warned us against the lie that they will preach that will deceive the great multitudes. He tells us how they will even go so far as to rebuild the temple and the apostate religions of all sects, both Christian and anti-Christian will come together under the banner of Satan, the man of sin who will be the counterfeit Christ and also the man of sin and the old mother that is going to be the bride of the man of sin.<sup>26</sup>

Ham's fears concerning the U.S.S.R. doubtlessly prompted him to write President Franklin Roosevelt to criticize the decision to recognize what the evangelist labeled as the "most blatant and militant enemy of God since the creation of man." Ham was so concerned with Russia's role in world affairs that even Norris advised him to refrain from making anti-Communist remarks in his sermons or risk being branded a fanatic and losing the respect of both his radio and revival audiences.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Ham, Infidelity, 21-22; Ham, 50 Years, 149-50; Ham, "Palestine and the Middle East," 1-2.

.. <sup>27</sup>Ham to Franklin D. Roosevelt, Sept. 28, 1935, Norris to Ham, March 26, 1951, Norris Collection.



Although Ham attempted to relate current events with Biblical prophecies, he was primarily concerned with the Second Coming; and most of his sermons and writings dealt with his Lord's return. He declared, "Every passage in the Bible is related to one of the three great truths: He is coming; He has come; and He will come again. His incarnation as Prophet, His ministry as Priest, and His coming again as King are the framework of the temple of truth". In concentrating on Christ's return the evangelist seemingly had two purposes: (1) to warn those not spiritually prepared for Jesus' return, and (2) to comfort those Christians already awaiting his return. Ham constantly reminded readers of the Old Kentucky Home Revivalist that they were living near the end of time and that Christ's return was imminent.

Since "no man knows" when the Lord will return, the evangelist emphasized the importance of an immediate salvation. For Christians, Ham perceived the Second Coming as a time for rejoicing since it represented God's ultimate victory over Satan. For those who had not accepted Christ as their Saviour, the evangelist saw only eternal damnation and suffering.<sup>29</sup>

The Fundamentalist controversy of the 1920's helped establish Mordecai Ham as a prominent Southern evangelist. Like his friend, J. Frank Norris, the evangelist was either revered as a man of God or denounced as a religious eccentric. In spite of this, Ham remained true to his fundamental beliefs, which he believed promoted the best interests of Protestantism and of the Kingdom of God.

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<sup>28</sup>Interview with Annie Laurie Ham; interview with David Nat Livingston, May 26, 1979; Ham, Second Coming, 14-15.

\* \* <sup>29</sup>"Radio Evangelist Mordecai Ham, Preacher, 60 Years, Dies at 84," Louisville Courier-Journal, Nov. 2, 1961; Ham, "Palestine and the Middle East," 4; Ham, 50 Years, 46-47.

### Chapter III

Evangelist Mordecai Ham was not only a fiery fundamentalist, he was also an ardent Prohibitionist. In the years before nationwide prohibition, Ham mixed anti-liquor statements with his message of salvation. He battled the liquor industry from the sidewalk as well as from the pulpit. Ham's staunch opposition against the liquor traffic throughout the South often made him an object of both ridicule and physical abuse. The evangelist hardened under the pressure; and, as in other controversies, he fought his adversaries all the more fiercely. As a Southern Baptist, Ham was convinced of the evil nature of liquor and of the urgency to abolish it.

The Southern Baptist Convention entered the Prohibition campaign rather late, when it condemned the use, manufacture, sale, and transportation of liquor in 1884. The temperance movement had developed in the United States during the 1830's, and many mid-nineteenth century reformers, including abolitionists, also carried anti-liquor provisions along with other more primary objectives. After the end of the Civil War, anti-liquor forces hoped to launch a temperance campaign as successful as those that abolished slavery. With this in mind, most agencies began to promote total abstinence or Prohibition as its goal. Before its 1884 resolution the SBC had not taken an active role in any social movement, much less the anti-liquor crusade. Some Baptist newspapers, particularly ones in Virginia and Kentucky, actually condoned



the use of liquor, especially wine, in moderation. By the 1880's though, the majority of Baptist newspapers and pastors had decided to support prohibition.<sup>1</sup>

Undoubtedly one reason that the SBC was cautious in its reaction to liquor was the fear that a strong anti-liquor position by a prominent Protestant group would cause a clash of religious and social issues. Because many Baptists also believed that the mission of the church was spiritual regeneration, they thought an active role in the prohibition movement would detract from that function. For the most part, Baptists had refrained from involvement in the anti-liquor effort due to the number of partisan factions that worked for prohibition. Once the Anti-Saloon League had united those agencies, Southern Baptists decided to vigorously support total abstinence. State Baptist conventions led the way. In 1883 the Alabama Baptist Convention voted to support prohibition as a final answer to the liquor problem. Similar motions were passed by Baptist conventions in Mississippi and Tennessee before 1900, and other state conventions followed suit. The Anti-Saloon League (A.S.L.) showed the SBC the importance of an immediate anti-liquor campaign. In 1908, Southern Baptists proved their seriousness in their opposition to liquor by establishing a standing committee of temperance, which in 1915 led the

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<sup>1</sup>Rufus B. Spain, At Ease in Zion; a Social History of Southern Baptists, 1865-1900 (Nashville, 1967), 175-76; Ernest R. Cherrington, The Evolution of Prohibition in the United States of America - a Chronological History of the Liquor Problem and the Temperance Reform in the United States from the Earliest Settlement to the Consumation of National Prohibition (Westerfield, Ohio, 1920), 219-20.

convention in drafting a motion which John Eighmy claims led to the National Prohibition amendment.<sup>2</sup>

Most Southern Baptists realized that nationwide prohibition would come only after an extended period of time, and after local, regional, and state prohibition had been achieved. They considered any anti-liquor legislation or the election of any Prohibitionist as a significant victory. Characteristic of that struggle were local option laws, county unit bills, and state-wide prohibition legislation. Of these, the editor of the Tennessee Baptist and Reflector noted that, "for our part, we prefer the complete prohibition of the traffic, but still half a loaf is better than no loaf."<sup>3</sup> Many Baptists also opposed liquor because they believed that refusal to drink was in direct response to the divine call to "come out [of the world] and be separate." They felt that they should not be drunk with wine, but "filled with the Spirit" of God.<sup>4</sup> Many were influenced by their Calvinist ancestors, who denounced drunkenness as behavior unbecoming to a Christian. Rural Protestants also were probably aware of the activities and tactics of numerous bootleggers and with the dangers of drinking moonshine whiskey, or other homemade "brews".

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<sup>2</sup>George D. Kelsey, "The Social Thought of Contemporary Southern Baptists" (doctoral dissertation, Yale University, 1946), 142; John Lee Eighmy, "The Social Conscience of Southern Baptists from 1900 to the Present as Reflected in their Organized Life" (doctoral dissertation, University of Missouri, 1959), 21-24; Spain, At Ease in Zion, 178; Alabama Baptist State Convention Minutes 1883 (Selma, Ala., 1883), 14; Proceedings of the 57th session of the Mississippi Baptist Convention (Winona, Miss., 1895), 24-25; Tennessee Baptist Convention, Proceedings, 1897 (Nashville, 1897), 25.

<sup>3</sup>Spain, At Ease in Zion, 190-192; "Current Topics," Tennessee Baptist and Reflector, [n.v.] (Dec. 6, 1894), 1.

<sup>4</sup>Corinthians 6:17; Ephesians 5:18.



As a Baptist and as a rural evangelist, Mordecai Ham vehemently denounced the sale or use of liquor and used the revival meeting as a sounding board for his opposition. The evangelist's primary objections to liquor were due to (1) its effect on the morality of the individual and upon the welfare of the community and (2) its detrimental influence upon the spiritual life and the eternal destiny of the soul. The evangelist felt that alcohol had contributed to the downfall of many individuals who had used money to buy alcohol that might have been spent for necessities. Liquor could also ruin a person's reputation. Ham warned his revival audiences, "If a man takes to drinking, the first thing you know he will take to lying."<sup>5</sup> The use of alcohol also might hinder an individual from obtaining and keeping a stable job, because many businessmen would not hire persons who drank. Furthermore, Ham thought that liquor usage was unhealthy. He claimed it caused both physical and mental damage to the human body. To illustrate this point, Ham told his radio audience that insurance companies required policy-holders to report not only their own drinking habits, but also those of their father and grandfather.<sup>6</sup>

Ham believed alcohol consumption also damaged the community. He said, "Liquor is a lecher that feeds on the communities that tolerate it."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>M.F. Ham, "Christians Don't Drink - Eight Reasons Why Christians Could Not Drink," O.K.H.R. [n.v.] (June 29, 1953), 4; M.F. Ham, Sermon: "Booze," Minneapolis, July 2, 1940, Mordecai F. Ham Papers, Special Collections (M.I. King Library, University of Kentucky, Lexington).

<sup>6</sup>Oscar Lee Gibson, "The Anti-Liquor Agitation as a Social Movement" (doctoral dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1916), 13-18; Ham, "Booze."

<sup>7</sup>Edward Ham, 50 Years on the Battle Front with Christ, A Biography of Mordecai F. Ham (Nashville, 1950), 160.

Not only did drinking destroy an individual's influence with his family, it also ruined his effectiveness as a member of the working force. When an individual fell victim to liquor, often he and his family had to be supported by society. The evangelist thought that intoxicated people were more likely to commit crime or to indulge in other vices, for which society again was required to pay the bill. In short, in Ham's opinion, alcoholism was a vicious cycle in which both the family and society suffered. Much of the evangelist's wrath was directed at those individuals who engaged in the sale of liquor. For such individuals, Ham had few complimentary remarks: "Some folk may wonder, why I have always had so little use for liquor and the saloon crowd. I have seen the bunch at its worst, and whoever supposes that it is possible to temporize with that gang and keep it respectably regulated is badly fooled."<sup>8</sup> Because of the many confrontations he had with liquor dealers, Ham felt justified in saying, "You will find out quickly how lawless the whiskey devils really are the moment you start opposing their business."<sup>9</sup>

Ham was critical of liquor dealers because of the devastating effect that he felt liquor had on those who purchased it. He told a revival audience, "A man who puts a bottle to his neighbor's lips is a murderer and God will deal with him in judgement for his crime."<sup>10</sup> The evangelist went further in his warning to liquor producers and dealers when he

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<sup>8</sup>Ham, "Christians Don't Drink," 4; Ham, 50 Years, 160-61.

<sup>9</sup>Ham, 50 Years, 160.

<sup>10</sup>M.F. Ham, Sermon: "Am I My Brother's Keeper," Minneapolis, July 15, 1940, Ham Papers.



said, "Men who make and distribute liquor are as sure to pay as there is a God in heaven and many of them will pay dearly before they ever get to eternity."<sup>11</sup>

Finally, Ham despised liquor because he felt it caused individuals to lose their desire for conversion. Ham felt that those dependent on liquor could not recognize the saving effect of Christianity and would spend eternity in hell. For these reasons, the evangelist was positive that "drink was the greatest hinderance to the salvation of men."<sup>12</sup> He was also convinced of the danger individuals faced when they continued to drink or to make or to sell liquor. During one revival meeting, a saloon keeper seemed willing to close his business, if he could obtain enough money to pay his debts. Ham advised the man to forego getting the necessary money and to sell his saloon immediately. The man refused and later was murdered by his bartender. Through such incidents, Ham believed he had sufficient evidence to denounce liquor and its manifestations "as faithfully as against any other sin." To do otherwise, he felt, would be to desert his call to preach the gospel.<sup>13</sup>

Because Ham was so adamant in his anti-liquor stance, his career was characterized by several anti-liquor crusades. Five of the most prominent were these: in Houston and Corpus Christi, Texas (1906); in Bowling Green, Kentucky (1905 and 1910); and in Salisbury, North Carolina (1908). Initially the Houston campaign began as a Baptist revival but soon developed into a non-denominational city-wide rally. Ham claimed during

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ham, 50 Years, 104.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

these meetings that liquor forces controlled the Houston city government. The evangelist called the mayor a "brewer in office" and declared that his administration was full of graft and corruption, the profits of which went into the coffers of Houston's liquor syndicate. One individual who criticized Ham's allegations was the editor of the Houston Post. He denounced Ham's condemnation of a municipal government that actively supported many charitable organizations and expressed indignation that Ham as an outsider had the nerve to criticize Houston's civil officials simply because they did not overwhelmingly promote his revivals. Ham did have a significant influence in Houston by initiating an effort by local churches to ensure enforcement of local Sunday closing laws. Because of the success of his Houston campaign, the evangelist remained there a month longer than he had originally planned.<sup>14</sup>

During meetings in Corpus Christi, the evangelist again tackled what he believed was corrupt city government. Because of his claims, Ham was called by a grand jury to testify and give grounds for his allegations. If Ham had not satisfied the court with his testimony he might have been jailed for contempt of court charges. The day before his appearance in court the evangelist was assaulted by a man brandishing a riding whip. Although he was uninjured, Ham criticized the jury's apparent lack of concern for the safety of private citizens. During his testimony he declared, "If you are after justice, why don't you do something about that... fellow that attacked me or about that bunch that fired shots into our meeting."<sup>15</sup> The evangelist, believing that the attack as well as his court summons was due to his anti-liquor position, denounced the

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 123-24; Mordecai F. Ham Scrapbook, Ham Papers; "Ham's Rot," Houston Daily Post, Jan. 10, 1907.

<sup>15</sup>Ham, 50 Years, 104, 110.



jury as worthless: "As a grand jury you are a joke, and no wonder, with an old hog-jowl liquor head as your foreman."<sup>16</sup> Although Ham's remarks were harsh, the grand jury decided not to prosecute him. Ham later claimed that it had decided in his favor because there were some 3,000 people outside the courtroom ready to react "if any attempt of foul play were made" against him.<sup>17</sup>

The evangelist waged a more intense anti-liquor campaign in Bowling Green, Kentucky, first in 1905 and again in 1910. During the first campaign, J.T. Ragsdale, an agent of a St. Louis liquor concern, began to circulate pamphlets charging that the evangelist had written an article in which he denounced the Methodist and Presbyterian churches, as well as condemning Roman Catholicism. Ragsdale also alleged that Ham had murdered his first wife. Ham countered the charges by saying that they were slanderous and that Ragsdale was using such propaganda in order to detract the people's attention from the liquor issue. Ragsdale did not limit his attacks on Ham to Bowling Green but followed the evangelist wherever he conducted revivals until 1923. The liquor agent's continued assaults against Ham's reputation led the Main Street Baptist Church (First Baptist, Bowling Green) in 1916 to pass a resolution of support for Ham:

We want the public to know that Mr. Ham's life is above suspicion, and that he enjoys the confidence and love of all good people in the community where he was born and reared.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 110.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 95-96; Hayward Brown, Charles Bryant, Julia Neal, eds., History of the First Baptist Church, Bowling Green, Kentucky 1818-1968, 150 Years, in Faith Conceived, by Faith Achieved (Bowling Green, Ky., 1974), 150-51.

In 1910, while the voters of Bowling Green and of Warren County were preparing to vote in a local liquor referendum, Ham conducted a second series of meetings in the city. Invited to preach by the dry forces of the city, Ham held a revival throughout the crucial election month of June. Although Kentucky had approved local option in 1873, the state legislature did not provide for elections in towns and counties the size of Bowling Green and Warren until 1906. At that time, both city and county voted dry by large majorities. In 1910 the Kentucky legislature provided for a referendum in which the voters of the state could decide on the question of statewide prohibition. A victory for prohibitionists in Bowling Green would be significant, for in 1910 no Kentucky city of comparable size had voted dry.

Ham was a leading anti-liquor spokesman during the campaign. While preaching the dedication sermon for the tent that he would use for his services, he accused the liquor trade of attempting to organize public gatherings to compete with his services. The evangelist also denounced those individuals who favored drinking in moderation by his claiming that if prohibitionists left the city, churches would not meet on the next Sunday.<sup>19</sup> Staunchly supporting Ham in his battle against liquor were many Protestant groups who participated in a parade through the town's downtown district and faithfully attended the evangelist's services. One prominent group that supported Ham was the Southern

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<sup>19</sup>Cherrington, The Evolution of Prohibition, 207; "Bowling Green Storm Center," The Glasgow [Ky.] Times, June 14, 1910; "Bowling Green Goes Wet by 107 Majority," Lexington Herald, June 29, 1910; "Statewide Prohibition," The Glasgow Times, Feb. 18, 1910; Mordecai F. Ham, Untitled Sermon, Fort Worth, Tex., May 6, 1940; Ham, "Booze"; Bowling Green Messenger, June 1, 1910.



Baptists. The Warren County Baptist Association had expressed opposition to liquor in a 1909 report:

The people of the South are making wonderful progress along the line of temperance, as regards the manufacture and sale of intoxicants, yet there is a great deal to be accomplished in our own state. In our own county of Warren there are conditions existing that are deplorable, and yet we think we can see progress. In Kentucky there is great agitation over the statewide movement, and may God hasten the time when the liquor traffic will be a thing of the past in our state and nation.<sup>20</sup>

Several members of the Main Street Baptist Church (First Baptist), the largest Baptist congregation in the city, were active members of the "Committee of Fifty," an organization of prominent businessmen who led the prohibition forces. During the election campaign, the committee released a statement affirming its belief that the best interests of the community would be preserved if the saloons of the city remained closed. The committee also said, "We therefore, call upon all Home-loving, God-fearing, and law abiding citizens, regardless of politics, religion or color to stand with us in this crusade."<sup>21</sup>

As in previous campaigns, Ham claimed that liquor agents threatened his life; he later claimed that he had to move from his home to a hotel for his personal safety. Even so, Ham continued his attacks upon both liquor and social drinkers. During a revival meeting the evangelist offered a five dollar bill to anyone who could sincerely claim that he had "benefitted" by doing business with a saloon; he also criticized

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<sup>20</sup>Interview with Kathryn Ham Duncan, Oct. 31, 1978; Warren County, Kentucky Baptist Association, Annual Meeting, 1909 (Smith's Grove, Ky. 1909), 9.

<sup>21</sup>Brown, History of the First Baptist Church, 128-43; "Committee of Fifty who are Leading Dry Campaign," Bowling Green Times-Journal, May 5, 1910.

the remarks of a Bowling Green official who questioned the involvement of ministers in political matters. Ham, believing that the comments were directed at him, denounced the magistrate as a tool of the Bowling Green whiskey machine and called him a viper ready to pounce upon any gullible victim. However, the editor of the Bowling Green Messenger defended the magistrate's observations and criticized Ham for conducting a hate campaign against an incorruptible civil servant. When the smoke of controversy cleared, the Prohibitionists won a bittersweet victory: while Warren County voted to remain dry, Bowling Green voted to approve a license system by one hundred seven votes.<sup>22</sup>

Another meeting where Ham faced the scorn of liquor forces was in Salisbury, North Carolina. As in Kentucky, the evangelist conducted his meeting during the month that North Carolina was voting on the question of statewide prohibition. Ham claimed that in Salisbury, as in previous cities, the "saloon crowd" taunted and ridiculed him throughout his stay in the city. He told about signs denouncing him that hung all over Salisbury and about liquor agents who promised victory for their side. On election day the liquor crowd was "madder than ever" according to Ham, because "the overwhelming number of decent citizens had voted liquor out of business," as did the whole state. The liquor forces threatened the evangelist so fiercely that Ham left Salisbury under armed guard.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Ham, "Booze"; Bowling Green Messenger, June 1, June 8, June 15, 1910; "Bowling Green Goes Wet," Lexington Herald, June 29, 1910.

<sup>23</sup>Ham, 50 Years, 158-160. The evangelist also confronted liquor forces in Asheville, Raleigh, and Wilmington, N.C. (1907); in Cameron (1914), San Antonio (1916), and San Benito, Tx. (1918); and in Augusta, Ga. (1934). Ham also held Prohibition rallies in Kentucky in Cynthiana (1907), Central City (1908 and 1909), and Princeton (1909).



Ham took any opportunity to fight the liquor industry. If liquor advocates fought fiercely, the evangelist believed that he and other Christians should battle harder. As a man of God, Ham was confident that he could not compromise with liquor agents. In his mind they were immoral men who trampled down the laws of God and, like infidel Jews, must be fought and denounced adamantly by genuine Christians. During a 1908 meeting in New Orleans, Ham supporters distributed cards which announced the day and time of the services. Included on the card was the following advertisement, which left little doubt what Ham thought about alcohol, the saloon, and those who indulged in drinking:

T.H.E. Devil, Pres.  
 Al Cohol, Vice-Pres.  
 L. Beer, Recording Secy.  
 W. Hiskey, Traffic Agent

The S.A. Loon Company  
 (unlimited)

Makers and Dealers in All  
 Kinds of Drunkards, Criminals,  
 Murderers, Libertines, and  
 Harlots<sup>24</sup>

During the course of Ham's battle against alcohol, he managed to convert a number of saloon keepers and liquor dealers to his gospel. Several of these new Christians dramatically promised to abandon their former lifestyles and learn to walk in a more respectable path. Two of these individuals were Jim Barkley and Dick Dowling. Before his apparent conversion, Barkley was the most infamous bootlegger in Elizabeth City, North Carolina. When some of his customers and agents confessed their wrongdoings during the Ham-Ramsey meetings in October, 1924, they named

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<sup>24</sup>Ham, 50 Years, 136.

Barkley as their supplier. With this evidence, Ham sought him out with the firm intent of converting him. Although the evangelist initially threatened to expose Barkley's profession, using the testimonies of several Christian citizens to support his findings, Barkley laughed in Ham's face. In order to put additional pressure on the bootlegger, Ham told Barkley that his "kept woman" was ready to renounce publicly her past activities. Upon hearing this threat, Barkley submitted to the evangelist and surrendered to Christ during a morning prayer service. Asked whether he "had gotten religion," Barkley remarked, "Hell no, religion's got me."<sup>25</sup> Within six months of his "salvation experience," the converted Barkley had returned to his former business and had a more prosperous trade than before.<sup>26</sup>

On the other hand, Dick Dowling's conversion was more permanent. Formerly a wealthy Texas cotton buyer, Dowling had become an alcoholic who patronized bars in Houston's "red light" district. Hearing about Ham's 1906 rallies in that city, he felt compelled to talk to the evangelist. Soon afterwards, Dowling made a profession of faith and resolved to stop his drinking. At that point he told the revival audience, "I never got sobered so quickly in my life."<sup>27</sup> Within a week, Dowling not only had given up his former habit, he had also organized the development of the "Star of Hope," a rescue mission in downtown Houston. Dowling explained that he wanted to take the gospel message to those who otherwise

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<sup>25</sup>W.O. Saunders, "Hell on Earth" (unpublished manuscript, in possession of Keith Saunders, Washington, D.C.); "King of the Bowery Hauled over to Ham," Elizabeth City Independent, Nov. 21, 1924.

<sup>26</sup>Saunders, "Hell on Earth".

<sup>27</sup>"Crowds Rejoiced", Houston Daily Post, Dec. 11, 1906; Ham, 50 Years, 88.



would not attend church services. He recognized that many of the patrons of the mission would not be accepted in many churches due to their lack of proper clothing and social etiquette, and he believed that the "Star of Hope" would provide those individuals a rare opportunity to hear the message of salvation and to become a Christian. Even though the "Star of Hope" was proclaimed an overwhelming success by Evangelist Ham, it also received the support of Houston's saloon interest.<sup>28</sup>

When National Prohibition became law on January 19, 1919, Ham, like other prohibitionists, probably rejoiced in the anti-liquor triumph and even saw the beginnings of "God's Kingdom" within the borders of the United States. On the other hand, others recognized that prohibition was only a start in an effort to improve social morality, and they knew that other unfriendly agents still worked to undermine any opposition. In addition, national prohibition had not destroyed the liquor industry; many religious groups such as the SBC warned that the liquor interest would stop at nothing to get prohibition repealed.<sup>29</sup>

Although prohibition was a "Noble Experiment," social and moral problems did not evaporate during the years that America remained legally dry. In many ways, prohibition caused more problems than it solved. For one, it contributed to an increase in organized crime and to a breakdown of law enforcement, especially in metropolitan areas. Even though national prohibition was abolished in 1933, anti-liquor advocates like Mordecai Ham never changed their position against alcohol. In a 1935 letter to President Franklin Roosevelt, the evangelist repeated his

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<sup>28</sup>Scrapbook, Ham Papers.

<sup>29</sup>Cherrington, The Evolution of Prohibition, 380-400; SBC Annual, 1920 (Nashville, 1920), 94-97.

opposition to liquor by reminding the President of the increase in the number of broken homes caused by the use of alcohol.<sup>30</sup>

In retrospect, Ham's victories against liquor were short-lived. Although Salisbury remained legally dry until 1977, most of the other Southern cities where he had preached granted liquor licenses after prohibition was repealed in 1933. Anti-liquor forces in Bowling Green did try once again in 1958 to rid the city of liquor, but their efforts were futile.

Despite these setbacks, Ham continued to battle bootleggers, uncooperative city leaders, and non-abstinent Christians throughout the rest of his ministry. Because he believed they challenged proper morality, the Kentucky evangelist worked fiercely against them all until the day that he died.

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<sup>30</sup>F.H. Thompson, class lecture, History 527, Western Kentucky University, Oct. 9, 1978; M.F. Ham to Franklin D. Roosevelt, Sept. 28, 1935, John Franklyn Norris Collection (Dargan-Carver Library, Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, Nashville, Tenn.).



#### Chapter IV

Mordecai F. Ham died in Louisville, Kentucky, on November 1, 1961.

Although his sixty-year ministry was impressive in that over 300,000 individuals reportedly made decisions for Christ during his meetings, it was characterized by controversy and sensationalism. Not one to compromise his beliefs, Ham created publicity when he conducted fiery revival meetings and denounced those who did not attend such meetings by calling them ungodly and immoral.<sup>1</sup>

In their efforts, Ham and other pugnacious fundamentalists went to extraordinary extremes to insure fundamental theology a vital place in twentieth-century Christianity. Many of their actions were more detrimental than helpful. Ham and other fundamentalists with similar beliefs adamantly fought for a primary role in the battle against modernism and other signs of what they recognized as infidelity. Norman F. Furniss developed six general qualities to describe the motivation for the wrath of fundamentalists like Ham against liberals and other supposed enemies of right-wing Protestants: (1) a sense of uneasiness caused by modernism; (2) a feeling of bewilderment among fundamentalists, and an effort to restore security; (3) the show of violent overtones in right-wing thought and action; (4) an overwhelming amount of abuse against modernists

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<sup>1</sup>"Radio Evangelist Mordecai Ham Preacher 60 Years, Dies at 84," Louisville Courier-Journal, Nov. 2, 1961; Billy Graham, Eulogy of Mordecai F. Ham, Walnut Street Baptist Church, Louisville, Nov. 4, 1961 (recording, in possession of Neal P. Cooke, Anchorage, Ky.).

and evolutionists; (5) narrow interpretation caused by the lack of education and experience; and (6) conceitedness, especially in the form of literary productivity.<sup>2</sup>

Mordecai Ham had little doubt as to what he believed. He hated modernism. Ham felt it was a doctrine that would destroy the Christian church. His scorn for individuals who were not fundamentalists knew no bounds. They were simply enemies and must be stopped immediately. In this effort, the evangelist preached in any town to anyone who would agree to listen to him; he also wrote numerous sermons, articles, and pamphlets defending his fundamental beliefs. He was convinced that as God's messenger he spoke Biblical truths and divine rules for proper living. Although opposition developed, Ham felt he had withstood it and that his Lord had rewarded him for his service.<sup>3</sup>

Accordingly, the evangelist easily denounced anyone who did not support him and fought what he saw as modernism and the liquor industry fiercely. Since he felt that he was right in this cause, Ham believed his God would defeat any opposition; and the evangelist continued to condemn his adversaries. Furthermore, Ham viewed any individual who questioned his motives as an enemy and believed that such a person should be exposed immediately and mercilessly. The evangelist's Elizabeth City debate with W.O. Saunders and his scathing repudiation of a Bowling Green magistrate who was critical of Ham's involvement in Kentucky's prohibition campaign were characteristic of that point of view.

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<sup>2</sup>Edward E. Ham, 50 Years on the Battle Front with Christ, a Biography of Mordecai F. Ham (Nashville, 1950), 161-62; Norman F. Furniss, The Fundamentalist Controversy 1918-1932 (Hamden, Conn., 1963), 35-45.

• • <sup>3</sup>Ham, 50 Years, 10.



Ham acted against his alleged enemies harshly due to his belief in the immediacy of the Second Coming of Christ. As a fundamentalist, he believed that his Lord could return at any moment and that lost souls needed to be reclaimed regardless of the consequences. He felt it was very important that both Christians and sinners be warned. If controversy developed, Ham claimed that it was the result of his having told the truth.<sup>4</sup>

Among others that Ham denounced with righteous indignation were Catholics and Jews. He felt threatened by these two groups; and, as with his personal opponents, he attempted to discredit them totally. While Biblical Jews had received God's blessing, Ham believed that modern Jews had rejected that honor and had joined with Soviet Communists to destroy Christianity and democracy. Ham was convinced the Jews were behind the FCC investigation initiated against his radio program in 1941. The evangelist also charged that Jews had influenced American Negroes to challenge their social status and to demand equality with whites. Ham claimed during the 1950's that blacks had been jolted into action by Jewish and Communist promises of racial equality.<sup>5</sup>

Ham denounced Roman Catholics for many of the same reasons that he did American Jews. Basing his opinion of contemporary Catholics upon

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 165-75, 75-76; Bowling Green Messenger, June 15, 1910; interview with Annie Laurie Ham, Oct. 13, 1978; interview with David Nat Livingston, May 26, 1979; Mordecai Ham, The Second Coming of Jesus Christ (Louisville, [n.d.]), 5-15.

<sup>5</sup>Mordecai F. Ham, The Jew (Louisville, [n.d.]), 6-12; Ham, 50 Years, 165-66, 136-38; Elizabeth City Independent, Nov. 7, 1924; Albert J. Menendez, Religion at the Polls (Philadelphia, 1977), 36-56; Mordecai F. Ham to J. Frank Norris, March 5, 1928, John Franklyn Norris Collection (Dargan-Carver Library, Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, Nashville, Tenn.).

the medieval church and upon exaggerated legends and reports, Ham, like many other Protestants, feared that Catholics were compelled by religious vows to destroy Protestantism. Stories about the questionable lifestyles of some Catholics were amplified by zealous anti-Catholics; and many rural Southerners were likely to believe such accounts as fact, especially if preachers used them as sermon illustrations. The same misinformation abounded among Protestants concerning Roman Catholic doctrine, particularly that relating to the Virgin Mary and to the practice of indulgences. Despite the falsity of such beliefs, Ham accepted many of the circulated stories; due to his experience with Catholic leaders like those in New Orleans, the evangelist severely denounced Catholics, especially Al Smith during the Democratic nominee's 1928 presidential campaign.<sup>6</sup>

Overall Mordecai Ham's opposition to apostate Jews, Roman Catholics, and most of the individuals he claimed as enemies was caused by misunderstanding. Such prejudices were the result not only of his lack of education but also of his failure to understand and tolerate morals different from traditional Southern Protestantism. Ham was not an intentional anti-intellectual, but he became one due to his opposition to church-supported schools and his association with anti-intellectual fundamentalists such as J. Frank Norris. Ham allowed his feelings about church-supported institutions of education to influence his opposition to E.Y. Mullins in the latter's efforts to moderate factions in the SBC during the 1920's. Because Mullins was at that time President of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Ham was certain that the Louisville School had lost its regard for fundamental Christianity. The evangelist also did not read

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<sup>6</sup> Ham, 50 Years, 12-13, 280-81; Ham to Norris, Nov. 15, 1927, Norris Collection.



extensively. Ham's biographer lists several books used by the evangelist; most were published before 1877, the year of Ham's birth. The majority of the books discussed either Baptist history or some aspect of the Second Coming.<sup>7</sup>

Although Ham's ministry was characterized by racism and religious bigotry, the evangelist attracted record crowds to his meetings and triggered increases in church memberships. Before 1940, Ham was apparently preaching what Southerners wanted to hear, and this religious approach made him a popular and well-known speaker. However, the very qualities that had made the evangelist a household word in the South, his adamant fundamentalism and his dedication to evangelism, were also his downfall. After the end of the Second World War, the South was no longer an isolated region; many Southerners, influenced by the effects of industrialization, became more moderate in their religious views. Ham, trained in the brush arbors of rural Kentucky and convinced of the righteousness of his brand of religion, refused to relax his fundamentalist position.

The evangelist also refused to retire from evangelistic work when he recognized that circuit revivals had outlived their usefulness. Instead, believing God still wanted him to preach, Ham developed a radio ministry. The ministry was characterized by Ham's obsession with plots against himself and Christianity. When such fears dominated his preaching, many Southerners began to believe that Ham was an extremist and they started looking elsewhere for spiritual nourishment. In short, as an older evangelist, Ham misjudged his influence. Due to his defiant refusal to support the prevailing Protestant trends in the South after 1939, Mordecai Ham's influence had all but evaporated by the time of his death in 1961.

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<sup>7</sup>Interview with David Livingston; Ham, 50 Years, 259; M.F. Ham, "The Hidden Hand", OKHR, [n.v.] (Jan., 1957), 1-2.

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