

## “A Short Discussion of Faith and Fundamentalism”

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Fundamentalist leanings in any religion tend to come out of people's feelings of defeatism, alienation, frustration and surprisingly arrogance. One of the oldest mistakes made in the religious world is to mistake power for faith. Fundamentalists feel that the changes in science, or the use of human reason over the use of a sacred book or any of the advances that have been made in our modern world are attacks on their basic beliefs, and therefore have to be eliminated. So, remove the changes and you remove the threat to their understanding of how the world should work. Remember they are working from a framework of hopelessness, isolation, desolation and arrogance.

The first use of fundamentalism as a generic idea was specific to the Protestant culture in the United States in the last part of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Think about who made the trip, perilous at times, across the ocean from the 1600's on, those who were the most religious from Europe, seeking religious freedom yes, but also looking to practice their own religions in a safe place. These people were also the most pious, the most fierce, the most radical in their faiths. So much radical that they would leave their homelands and come to an unknown wilderness. They wanted religious freedom for themselves, but not so much for others.

Then, three main trends happened in America during the 1930's and 40's that directly helped in creating the religious fundamentalism that we are experiencing today. 1. There was a trend within mainline Protestantism called the social gospel, a liberalizing and secularizing trend which tried to water-down the Christian message, according to some, and according to many more conservative Protestants this social gospel liberalized the gospel, and reduced their church to a social and political agenda, rather than keeping the Gospel in the religious world. **Secondly**, Darwinism was embraced by the more liberal Christians in the Protestant world and to many it seemed that the historical truth of books of the Bible like Genesis were being called into question and how could humans have evolved from apes, did the big bang theory really say that God did not create the world in seven days, the whole idea seemed unchristian. And **thirdly**, out of Germany came a new way to look at the Bible called the “historical critical method” and this seemed to many to reduce the Bible from its place of final authority to a collection of stories and myths that could be believed or not.

Some historians say the natural response for many was to go further into their conservative interpretation of the Bible and faith. These people looked to the fundamentals of their faith and began to fight back, by seeking to minimize the distinction between the state and church and take its cues from a sacred text that to them must stand above literary criticism if it is to remain true. They believed one set of principles should operate in sacred and secular life equally. Today, they believe religious truths must be believed before any of the truths of medical science or aeronautical engineering are even considered.

Historic Fundamentalism, like religious fundamentalism reflects several concerns in the area of religion. Some of those concerns stemmed from broad changes in the larger culture such as the growing awareness of world religions, the teaching of human evolution, and above all, the rise of biblical higher criticism. The last proved particularly troubling because it implied that maybe God did not author the scriptures. Could the Bible still be believed as truth if only mere humans wrote it?

Fundamentalists have argued throughout history that everyone must experience a conversion through faith in Jesus Christ alone, that if science and the Bible clash in facts and data, the Bible will and have to, always win, and lastly a deep belief in the return of Christ to earth where he will establish a reign of righteousness by smiting those who do not believe and raising those from the grave who do believe to a status of heavenly peace. They have pursued this battle through the legislatures, courts and denominational machinery. As of Fall, 2000 Kansas City, MO public schools can no longer teach evolution as a theory that disagrees with the Biblical account of creation.

Fundamentalist Christianity, also known as fundamentalist evangelicalism, is a movement that arose mainly within British and American Protestantism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries among conservative evangelical Christians, who, in a reaction to liberal theology, actively affirmed a fundamental set of Christian beliefs: the inerrancy of the Bible, or Sola Scriptura, the virgin birth of Christ, the doctrine of substitutionary atonement, the bodily resurrection of Jesus, and the imminent personal return of Jesus Christ. Some who hold these beliefs reject the label of "fundamentalism", seeing it as a pejorative term for historic Christian doctrine, while for others it has become a banner of pride. Such Christians prefer to use the term fundamental as opposed to fundamentalist.

Some left-leaning, liberal and more moderate Christians since the turn of the twentieth century have taken to the use of the word "extremist" instead, feeling that use of "fundamentalism" provides the views of such groups with an authority they do not deserve. The contemporary

fundamentalist movement has its origins in the 18th century when the First Great Awakening was deeply influencing American religious life. Much of this religious fervor was a reaction to Enlightenment thinking. The chief emphases of the fledgling Methodist movement as well as the Great Awakening were on an individual's conversion, personal piety and Bible study, public morality (often including temperance and family values) and abolitionism, a broadened role for lay people and women in worship, evangelism, and cooperation in evangelism across denominational lines.

Key figures included John Wesley, Anglican priest and originator of the Methodist movement; Jonathan Edwards, American Puritan preacher/theologian; George Whitefield, Anglican priest and chaplain to Selina Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon, founder of many revivalist chapels and promoter of associated causes; Robert Raikes, who established the first Sunday school to prevent children in the slums entering a life of crime; popular hymn writer Charles Wesley, and American Methodist bishop, Francis Asbury.

There was no single founder of fundamentalism. Americans Dwight L. Moody (1837 – 1899), Arthur Tappan Pierson and British preacher John Nelson Darby (1800 – 1882), among others, preached ideas and themes which carried into fundamentalist Christianity.

The term fundamentalist derives from a series of (originally) twelve volumes entitled *The Fundamentals: A Testimony To The Truth*. Among this publication's 94 essays, 27 of them objected to higher criticism of the Bible, by far the largest number addressing any one topic. The essays were written by 64 British and American conservative Protestant theologians between 1910 and 1915. Using a \$250,000 grant from Lyman Stewart, the head of the Union Oil Company of California, about three million sets of these books were distributed to English-speaking Protestant church workers throughout the world.

The first formulation of American fundamentalist beliefs can be traced to the Niagara Bible Conference (1878–1897) and, in 1910, to the *General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church* which distilled these into what became known as the "five fundamentals."

- Inerrancy of the Scriptures
- The virgin birth and the deity of Jesus (Isaiah 7:14)
- The doctrine of substitutionary atonement by God's grace and through human faith (Hebrews 9)
- The bodily resurrection of Jesus (Matthew 28)
- The authenticity of Christ's miracles (or, alternatively, his pre-millennial second coming)<sup>[4]</sup>

In particular, fundamentalists reject the theory held by higher biblical criticism that the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible was composed and shaped by many people over the centuries. Fundamentalists assert that Moses was the primary author of the first five books of the Old Testament. Some fundamentalists, on the other hand, may be willing to consider alternative authorship only where the Biblical text does not specify an author, though maintaining that books in which the author is identified were written by that person.

The original 20th century Fundamentalist Movement broke up along clearly defined lines within conservative Evangelical Protestantism as issues progressed. Many groupings, large and small, were produced. For example, American evangelist Billy Graham came from a fundamentalist background, but parted company with the movement because of his choice, early in his ministry (1950s), to cooperate with other Christians. He represents a movement that arose within fundamentalism, but has increasingly become distinct from it, known as neo-evangelicalism or New Evangelicalism.

The 1960's onwards has witnessed a surge of Christian fundamentalists toward politics. Some attribute this interest to the decisions by the United States Supreme Court in 1962 to prohibit state-sanctioned prayer in public schools in the case of *Engel v. Vitale* and in 1963 to prohibit mandatory Bible reading in public schools in the case of *Abington School District v. Schempp*. By the time Ronald Reagan ran for the presidency in 1980, self-described fundamentalists had become more likely to participate in politics than other Christians were.

Credited with this phenomenon are Rob Grant, Jerry Falwell, and other well-known fundamentalist clergy, who began urging Christians to become involved in politics in the 1970s. Beginning with Grant's *American Christian Cause* in 1974, *Christian Voice* throughout the 1970s and Falwell's *Moral Majority* in the 1980s, the Christian Right began to have a major impact on American politics. By the late 1990s, the Christian Right was influencing elections and policy with groups like *Christian Coalition* and *Family Research Council* helping the Republican Party to gain control of the White House, both houses of Congress, and a more conservative Supreme Court by the mid-1990s.

That may give us a picture of Christian fundamentalism, but what of Islamic fundamentalism? The facts are that the Islamic civilization has been attacked for centuries by an aggressive and racist European civilization. The Palestinians were expelled from Israel where they had lived for 500 years. Totalitarian and exploitative regimes have taken power in nearly every Muslim country. Most importantly, we are told, by Khaled Abou El Fadi, who is professor of law at University of California-Los

Angles, is that a dogmatic, puritanical and ethically oblivious form of Islam has predominated in many places in the world since the 1970's.

Muslim fundamentalism is anchored in profound feelings of, now get this, defeatism, alienation, frustration and arrogance. The same feelings that power Christian fundamentalism. It is a theology that alienated not only the institutions of power in the modern world, but also is isolated from its own heritage and tradition. Extreme displays of power have been shown against non-Muslims and Muslim women. And we need to be reminded that this extreme form of puritanical Islam does not represent most Muslims today.

This is a time in the history of our world that calls for faith. In these last years I have been thinking seriously in what it is that I believe. I have found some simple and yet profound answers in which I easily place my faith. When I checked the dictionary for the meaning of faith I found these words; confidence, assurance, sureness, reliance, trust and credence. Exactly, I thought. In what, in the midst of bombs and terrorist acts, the continued war, the number of the dead more and more every day, and rising fundamentalism in what do I as a Taoist, a liberal, a UU, in what do I put my faith? In what do I believe? I know this to be true; the world is complicated and unpredictable, a place where everything needs everything else to exist. I don't understand it, I often don't like the dependency we have on each other, but I would not change it either. Whenever I meet people who want to put me into a fundamentalist hold of their own, this is what I fall back upon...

I have faith that life will always offer teachers and leaders for me when I need to change my path because it is hurtful to myself or others. Teachers and leaders I believe will come who have faced the dark night of their souls and have come out into the light with a message that can make the difference between despair or trust in my life. I have faith in a world that is as unfair as this one, because within this kind of world is also the potential of courage and bravery and acts from the heart that we have seen manifested in so many in answer in these tragedies.

I have faith in the possibility that because we have the kind of world we have there will someday be peace, prosperity for all and cooperation between people and our national world. This holds credibility for me because it is still possible that I can become a part of the peace and prosperity and cooperation. I know I have the potential within me to work to have good and wonderful things happen in our world. I have faith in the part evolution has played in our world. I have faith in the fact that our world is made up of energy, and that the energy of healing and promise are also a part of the equation that makes up our relationships as individuals. I have faith in the everyday existence I am giving every morning. I don't have to seek after immortality. My faith in this world tells

me I have immortality today. I love the fact that no one knows what will happen to us when we die, it is a mystery.

We don't know why our hearts turn to hate or love. We don't know why certain disasters or certain gifts are given to us or individuals, but I have faith in the way things are, I have faith in the process. In a world that is unfair is also the world full of possibilities and promise. I would not want to live in a world without those present. And who more than Helen Keller could have a reason to complain about the unfairness of life and yet she is quoted as saying, "Life is either a daring adventure or nothing at all. To keep our faces toward change and behave like free spirits in the presence of fate is strength and undefeatable joy."

