

Chapter Four
Authoritarian Followers and Religious Fundamentalism ¹

Care to try your hand at another scale? Answer the one below, responding to each item with anything from a -4 to a +4.

- ___ 1. God has given humanity a complete, unfailing guide to happiness and salvation, which must be totally followed.
- ___ 2. No single book of religious teachings contains all the intrinsic, fundamental truths about life.
- ___ 3. The basic cause of evil in this world is Satan, who is still constantly and ferociously fighting against God.
- ___ 4. It is more important to be a good person than to believe in God and the right religion.
- ___ 5. There is a particular set of religious teachings in this world that are so true, you can't go any "deeper" because they are the basic, bedrock message that God has given humanity.
- ___ 6. When you get right down to it, there are basically only two kinds of people in the world: the Righteous, who will be rewarded by God, and the rest, who will not.
- ___ 7. Scriptures may contain general truths, but they should NOT be considered completely, literally true from beginning to end.
- ___ 8. To lead the best, most meaningful life, one must belong to the one, fundamentally true religion.
- ___ 9. "Satan" is just the name people give to their own bad impulses. There really is *no such thing* as a diabolical "Prince of Darkness" who tempts us.
- ___ 10. Whenever science and sacred scripture conflict, *science* is probably right.
- ___ 11. The fundamentals of God's religion should never be tampered with, or compromised with others' beliefs.
- ___ 12. *All* of the religions in the world have flaws and wrong teachings. There is *no* perfectly true, right religion.

Here are the same instructions for scoring your responses that you encountered in chapter 1 when you answered the RWA scale. For items 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, and 11:

If you wrote down a “-4” that’s scored as a 1.

If you wrote down a “-3” that’s scored as a 2.

If you wrote down a “-2” that’s scored as a 3.

If you wrote down a “-1” that’s scored as a 4.

If you wrote down a “0” or left the item unanswered, that’s scored a 5.

If you wrote down a “+1” that’s scored as a 6.

If you wrote down a “+2” that’s scored as a 7.

If you wrote down a “+3” that’s scored as an 8.

If you wrote down a “+4” that’s scored as a 9.

For Items 2, 4, 7, 9, 10 and 12:

If you wrote down a “-4” that’s scored as a 9.

If you wrote down a “-3” that’s scored as an 8.

If you wrote down a “-2” that’s scored as a 7.

If you wrote down a “-1” that’s scored as a 6.

If you wrote down a “0” or left the item unanswered, that’s scored a 5.

If you wrote down a “+1” that’s scored as a 4.

If you wrote down a “+2” that’s scored as a 3.

If you wrote down a “+3” that’s scored as a 2.

If you wrote down a “+4” that’s scored as a 1.

Add up your twelve scores. Unless I have the all-time *worst* score on the SAT-Math test, you can’t score lower than 12, or higher than 108, no matter how you try. Intro psychology students at my Canadian university average about 50, while their

parents usually land a few points higher. A nationwide sample of some 300 members of an unnamed fundamentalist Protestant church in the United States, gathered by Ted Witzig, thumped out a 93.1--the highest group score I have yet seen.²

Your famous intuition probably led you to suspect this scale has something to do with religious conservatism (especially if you read the title of this chapter). So you were wised up and should not view your score with much faith (or hope, or charity).

Bruce Hunsberger and I called this the Religious Fundamentalism scale when we developed it some years ago. We did *not* mean by “fundamentalism” a particular set of religious beliefs, a creed. It was clear that the mind-set of fundamentalism could be found in many faiths. Instead we tried to measure a person’s *attitudes toward* whatever beliefs she had, trying to identify the common underlying psychological elements in the thinking of people who were commonly called Christian fundamentalists, Hindu fundamentalists, Jewish fundamentalists, and Muslim fundamentalists.

We thought a fundamentalist in any of these major faiths would feel that her religious beliefs contained the fundamental, basic, intrinsic, inerrant truth about humanity and the Divine--fundamentally speaking. She would also believe this essential truth is fundamentally opposed by forces of evil that must be vigorously fought, and that this truth must be followed today according to the fundamental, unchangeable practices of the past. Finally, those who follow these fundamental beliefs would have a special relationship with the deity.³

Research has confirmed that the Religious Fundamentalism scale has validity in all the religions named. You can find some high scorers in all of them who fit the description just given. More to the point, the scale may give us a way to study the psychology of the “Religious Right” in America today.⁴

The Plan for This Chapter

So here's the trip map for another seven-stop chapter. First we'll square up the terms "fundamentalists" and "evangelicals." Then we'll bring the discussion into the context of this book, authoritarianism. We'll analyze the ethnocentrism you often find in fundamentalists. We'll see how some of the mental missteps we covered in the last chapter appear in them. We'll appreciate the positive things people get from being fundamentalists. Then we'll come up against the intriguing fact that, despite these benefits, so many people raised in Christian fundamentalist homes leave the religion. We'll close our discussion with some data on shortfalls in fundamentalists' behavior, including a surprising fact or two about their practices and beliefs. By the time we have ended, we'll have learned many disturbing things about these people who believe, to the contrary, that they are the very best among us.

1. Fundamentalists and Evangelicals in America

"Fundamentalism" has a particular meaning in the United States. It refers to a movement that grew within Protestantism nearly a century ago in reaction to developments in the then modern world, most particularly to scholarly analyses of the Bible that cast strong doubt on its supposed divine origins. To refute these analyses a series of pamphlets called "The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth" was widely distributed. At first they dealt mainly with scriptural issues, rebutting the charges that the Bible was man-made, rewritten as time passed, and laced with myths, biases and inaccurate history. Instead, the pamphlets claimed, the Bible has no error in it whatsoever; it is the original word of God, exactly as God wanted things put.⁵ But the focus shifted by the end of the series, and essays came out against "The Decadence of Darwinism," "Romanism," Christian Science, Mormonism, and socialism. A Baptist editor in 1920 termed those who stood ready "to do battle royal for The Fundamentals" the "fundamentalists," and the label stuck.

Protestant fundamentalism suffered so much public ridicule after the famous “Scopes Monkey Trial” in Dayton, Tennessee in 1925 that its influence waned for many years. In the late 1940s it reappeared as (or was transformed into) the evangelical movement, with the Rev. Billy Graham its most famous leader.⁶ Evangelicals had a different “take” on the role of religion in society in some respects. In particular, they believed they had a responsibility not just to defend Christianity, but to evangelize, to preach the Gospel to others. The following seven items were developed by George Barna, an admirable evangelical pollster who closely follows religious development in the United States, to identify evangelicals.

Do you believe Jesus Christ lived a sinless life?

Do you believe eternal salvation is possible only through grace, not works?

Do you believe Christians have a personal responsibility to share their religious beliefs about Christ with non-Christians?

Is your faith very important to your life today?

Do you believe Satan is a real, living entity?

Do you believe God is the all-knowing, all-powerful, perfect deity who created the universe and still rules it today?

Do you believe the Bible is totally accurate in all that it teaches?

If you say yes to *all* seven of these questions, you would be an evangelical by Barna’s definition.

The word “fundamentalists” has gotten a lot of bad press lately, so conservative Protestants today tend to say they are evangelicals. But evangelicals score highly on the Religious Fundamentalism scale you just answered. In a 2005 survey I conducted of over six hundred *parents* of students at my university, which I shall refer to frequently in this chapter,⁷ 85 percent of the one hundred and thirty-nine parents who answered yes to all of George Barna’s seven questions were High fundamentalists (i.e. they landed in the top 25 percent of the scores on the Religious Fundamentalism

scale). They racked up an average score of 86.6 on the measure--discernibly lower but still in the same ballpark as the American fundamentalists' 93.1 in Witzig's study.

Looked at the other way, 72 percent of the Christians who scored highly on the fundamentalism measure qualified as "Barna evangelicals."⁸ So call them what you will, most evangelicals are fundamentalists according to our measure, and most Christian fundamentalists are evangelicals.⁹ Whether you are talking about evangelicals or talking about Christian fundamentalists, you are largely talking about the same people.

Some high religious fundamentalists turn up in all the faiths represented in my samples, including Hinduism, Islam and Judaism. Within Christianity, I always find some Catholics scoring highly on the Religious Fundamentalism scale, a few Anglicans post big numbers, some Lutherans ring the bell, and so on. But in study after study the high scores pile up far more often in the conservative Protestant denominations than anywhere else, among Baptists, Mennonites, Pentecostals, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Alliance Church, and so on. It bears repeating that this is a generalization, and some Baptists, etcetera score quite low in fundamentalism. But if you want to make a safe wager, see what odds you can get betting that these conservative sects will score higher on the Religious Fundamentalism scale than the other major Christian groups.

2. Fundamentalism and Right-Wing Authoritarianism

The first thing you need to know about religious fundamentalists, in case you haven't inferred it already, is that they usually score very highly on the RWA scale.^{10, 11} A solid majority of them are authoritarian followers. The two traits, authoritarianism and fundamentalism, go together so well that nearly everything I have said about high RWAs in the previous chapters also applies to high Religious Fundamentalists.

Since authoritarianism can *produce* fundamentalism if one grows up submissively in a religiously conservative family, and (conversely), fundamentalism can *promote* authoritarianism with its emphases on submission to religious authority, dislike of out-groups, sticking to the straight and narrow, and so on, one immediately wonders which is the chicken and which is the egg.

The evidence indicates authoritarianism is more basic. The RWA scale correlates *better* than the Religious Fundamentalism scale does with acceptance of government injustices, hostility toward homosexuals, willingness to persecute whomever the government targets, and most other things. (The big exception naturally comes when one raises distinctly religious issues.) So the problem's not so much that some people are fundamentalists, but that fundamentalists so definitely tend to be authoritarian followers. But as I just said, religious fundamentalism *does* promote authoritarianism in some ways. And you can certainly see the influence of right-wing authoritarianism in many things that religious fundamentalists do.

3. Fundamentalism as a Template for Prejudice

Let me ask you a personal question: Who are you? What makes up your identity? How would you describe yourself?

You would probably list your gender fairly quickly, your age, your nationality, marital status and your job--unless you are a student, in which case you'd say you're poor and going deeply into debt. Would you mention a religious affiliation? You almost certainly would if you are a high fundamentalist. Furthermore, except for converts, this has probably been true of fundamentalists for all of their lives. They report that their parents placed a lot of emphasis on their religious identification as they were growing up. For example, "You are a Baptist," or "We belong to the Assembly of God." It would have become one of the main ways they thought of themselves. By comparison, they say their gender and race were stressed much less.

What's the effect of *emphasizing* the family's religious affiliation to a child? Well, by creating this category of what the family *is*, you instantly create the category of people who are *not* that, who are different. You're laying down an in-group versus out-group distinction. Even if you never say a nasty word about other religions, the enormous human tendency to think in ethnocentric terms will create a preference for "people like me." Throw in some gratuitous nasty words about Jews, Muslims, Methodists, atheists, and so on, and you've likely sown the seeds of religious prejudice in a four-year old. Perhaps more importantly in the long run, you've given your child early training in the wonderful world of "Us versus Them"--training that may make it easier for him to acquire racial, sexual, and ethnic prejudices later on.¹²

There can be little doubt that, as adults, Christian fundamentalists harbor a pointed dislike of other religions. Here are some items from my Religious Ethnocentrism scale that fundamentalists tend to agree with.

Our country should always be a Christian country, and other beliefs should be ignored in our public institutions.

Nonchristian religions have a lot of weird beliefs and pagan ways that Christians should avoid having any contact with.

All people may be entitled to their own religious beliefs, but I don't want to associate with people whose views are quite different from my own.

At the same time, fundamentalists tend to *disagree* with:

If there is a heaven, good people will go to it no matter what religion they belong to, if any.

You can trust members of all religions equally; no one religion produces better people than any other does.

People who belong to different religions are probably just as nice and moral as those who belong to mine.

Yep, it's Us versus Them. Religious prejudice does not draw as much attention or produce as much hatred in North America as it does in (say) the Middle East and southern Asia, but it's still dynamite looking for a place to explode because it's so often accompanied by the self-righteousness that releases aggression. And it runs deep in Christian fundamentalists because religion is so important to them.

News that they score relatively high on *racial* prejudice scales often stuns white fundamentalists. They will usually reply, "You must be mistaken. We're not prejudiced. Why, we accept black people in our church." And indeed, if you ask a white fundamentalist if he'd rather spend an evening with a black member of his church or a white atheist, he will almost certainly choose the former.

But fundamentalists still hold more racial prejudices than most people--a fact known to social scientists for over fifty years. White churches were open to just white folks for generations in America, and many pastors found justification in the Bible for both slavery and the segregation that followed the demise of slavery. Vestiges of this remain in fundamentalist religions. Bill McCartney, the founder of the evangelical men's movement called Promise Keepers, tells the story of what happened on a nation-wide speaking tour when he finished up his stock speech with a call for racial reconciliation:

"There was no response--nothing...In city after city, in church after church, it was the same story--wild enthusiasm while I was being introduced, followed by a morgue-like chill as I stepped away from the microphone."¹³

Ironically, most fundamentalists *say* they believe in "the brotherhood of all mankind." "We are all God's children." "Jesus loves you"--whoever you are. It says so in their mental boxes. But they still like best, by a long shot, the people who are most exactly like themselves. Where did this crushing rejection of others come from? Its earliest roots appear buried in the person's religious training.¹⁴

4. *The Mental Life of Fundamentalists*

Mark Noll, an evangelical history professor at evangelical Wheaton College, begins his book, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, with a pithy thought: “The scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is not much of an evangelical mind.” Noll observes that “American evangelicals are not exemplary for their thinking, and they have not been so for several generations.” He points out that evangelicals support dozens of theological seminaries, scores of colleges, and hundreds of radio stations, but not a single research university. “In the United States he writes, it is simply impossible to be, with integrity, both evangelical and intellectual.” “Modern American evangelicals have failed notably in sustaining serious intellectual life.”¹⁵

I have found nothing in my research that disagrees with this assessment. Indeed almost all of the findings in the last chapter about the authoritarian follower’s penchants for illogical thinking, compartmentalized minds, double standards, hypocrisy and dogmatism apply to religious fundamentalists as well. For example, David Winter at the University of Michigan recently found that fundamentalist students, when evaluating the war in Iraq, *rejected* a series of statements that were based on the Sermon on the Mount--which is arguably the core of Jesus’ teachings. Fundamentalists may believe they follow Jesus more than anyone else does, but it turns out to depend a lot on where Jesus said we should go. And we can augment such findings by considering the thinking behind three of the fundamentalist’s favorite issues: school prayer, opposition to evolution, and the infallibility of the Bible.

A. School Prayer: Majority Rights, Unless... Suppose a law were passed requiring the strenuous teaching of religion in public schools. Beginning in kindergarten, all children would be taught to believe in God, pray together in school several times each day, memorize the Ten Commandments and other parts of the Bible, learn the principles of Christian morality, and eventually be encouraged to accept Jesus Christ as their personal savior. How would you react to such a law?

The great majority of people in my samples who answered this question, including most of the Christians, said this would be a bad law. But most fundamentalists liked the idea, for this is exactly the kind of education they would like to see public schools give to everyone's children. When I asked fundamentalists about the morality of imposing this learning on the children of Hindus, Jews, atheists, etcetera, they responded along the lines of, "This is a Christian country, and the majority rules. If others don't like it, they can pay for private education or leave." (As I said, most people do *not* favor this proposal, but since the days of the "Moral Majority" fundamentalists have tended to overestimate their numbers in society.)

What do you think happened when I asked people to respond to this parallel scenario?

Suppose you were living in a modern Arab democracy, whose constitution stated there could be NO state religion--even though the vast majority of the people were Muslims. Then a fundamentalist Islamic movement was elected to power, and passed a law requiring the strenuous teaching of religion in public schools. Beginning in kindergarten, all children would be taught to believe in Allah, pray together facing Mecca several times each day, memorize important parts of the Koran, learn the principles of Islamic morality, and eventually be encouraged to declare their allegiance to Muhammad and become a Muslim. How would you react to such a law?

Again, a great majority of my samples thought this would be quite wrong, but this time so did a solid majority of Christian fundamentalists. When you asked them why, they said that obviously this would be unfair to people who help pay for public schools but who want their children raised in some other religion. If you ask them if the majority in an Arab country has a right to have its religion taught in public schools, they say no, that the minority has rights too that must be respected. Nobody's kids should have another religion forced upon them in the classroom, they say.

So do fundamentalists believe in majority rights or minority rights? The answer is, apparently, neither. They'll pull whichever argument suits them out of its file when necessary, but basically they are *unprincipled* on the issue of school prayer. They have a big double standard that basically says, "Whatever I want is right." The rest is rationalization, and as flexible and multi-directional as a reed blowing in the wind.

My two contrasting scenarios slide fundamentalists under the microscope, but they do not put others to similar scrutiny, do they? What about those on the opposite extreme of the religious belief continuum, atheists? They always oppose school prayer, but wouldn't they like to have atheism taught if they could? I thus have asked atheists to respond to the following proposal:

Suppose a law were passed requiring strenuous teaching in public schools *against* belief in God and religion. Beginning in kindergarten, all children would be taught that belief in God is unsupported by logic and science, and that traditional religions are based on unreliable scriptures and outdated principles. All children would eventually be encouraged to become atheists or agnostics. How would you react to such a law?

This would seem to be "right down the atheists' alley," and you frequently hear fundamentalists say this is precisely what nonbelievers are ultimately trying to accomplish in their court challenges to school prayer. But 100% of a sample of Manitoba parents who were atheists said this would be a bad law; so did 70% of a sample of the active American atheists whose organizations often launch those court challenges. Atheists typically hold that religious beliefs/practice have no place in public schools, and that includes their own point of view. No double standard there.

(It would be interesting to know how fundamentalists react to the news that, when put to the test, atheists showed more integrity than fundamentalists did on this matter. They often say morality cannot exist without belief in God, but the atheists seem much more principled than the fundamentalists do on this issue.¹⁶)

B. Opposition to Evolution. If fundamentalists have added one thing to the authoritarian follower's armor of compartmentalized thinking, double standards, rationalization, and so on, it is a preference for selective ignorance. You can see this most clearly in their rejection of evolution.

Instead of learning about one of the major scientific advances of all time, with all its explanatory power and steady flow of amazing discoveries, fundamentalists embrace "creation science" or "intelligent design." As many a court has ruled, these are "science" in name only since they lack a clear statement of propositions, make no predictions, cannot be tested, and are usually just a back-door attempt to teach the Bible as part of the public school curriculum. Still fundamentalists work tirelessly to give creation science or intelligent design "equal time" with evolution in public schools--which would mean cutting in half the time devoted to real science instruction--hoping to accomplish by zeal, clamor and pressure what is unjustified by scientific accomplishment.¹⁷

How does this connect to "selective ignorance"? If you ask fundamentalists about evolution, it becomes clear that they seldom understand what they are opposing. Instead they seem to be repeating things they have heard from the leaders of their in-groups, such as "Darwin's theory of evolution says that humans descended from monkeys," and "There is a crucial 'missing link' in the fossil evidence that shows humans could not have descended from apes," and "It's just a theory."¹⁸ They will sometimes tell you evolution violates the laws of thermodynamics, but when you ask them what those laws are, the conditions under which the featured Second Law applies, and what it has to do with evolution, they stumble all over themselves.

As well, they will say most scientists today have rejected Darwin's theory, when evolution is probably the most widely accepted explanation of things in the biological, geological, and astronomical sciences. (Debates certainly arise in science about *how* evolution takes place but not, anymore, whether it occurs.) They will tell

you “many famous scientists” don’t believe in evolution at all, but they seldom know any names. They will give you the famous “A watch, therefore a watchmaker” argument-from-design that introductory philosophy students tear to shreds year after year. But when you point out the logical fallacy in this argument it becomes clear they never thought about it, they just stored the argument. They will tell you, mistakenly again, that evolution has never been observed happening. They know well the arguments against evolution that they have heard from their trusted sources, but they know almost nothing about the theory of evolution itself or the overwhelming amount of evidence from all the relevant fields that support it.

As a consequence I have had fundamentalist university students in my classes who had apparently managed to avoid all instruction in genetics in their lives, and who did not know what a gene, or a mutation was. Others, almost as extreme, have heard the human genetic code “can never be broken” and so doubt the value of learning anything about it. Or else that research should be forbidden on DNA because it is the “secret of life” that humanity was not meant to have. Or else everything that science has discovered fits in perfectly with the story of the Great Flood, which is part of the explanation most fundamentalists want everybody to have to learn in school instead of biological science. Adam walked with dinosaurs, they insist.

One *can* believe in a divinity and also believe that life appeared and developed on earth through evolution. It may look like an accident, you can say, but it’s really God’s plan. Many theists take that position, and eventually religious fundamentalists may come around to it. After all, the Catholic Church eventually came to accept the “theory” that the earth goes around the sun. But that might take centuries and in the meantime, as the rest of the world makes ever-increasing advances in knowledge, the anti-evolutionists will be busting a gut to make sure all of America’s children remain as ignorant as theirs. And one can seriously question whether evolution would get even 10% of the relevant instruction time in public schools that fundamentalists control. Remember how much authoritarians love to censor ideas?¹⁹

C. The Bible Is Always Right, Unless... As we saw in chapter 3, you frequently find dogmatism in religion. Still, I have been amazed at how rigid religious fundamentalists can be--even to the point of dismissing what they say is the cornerstone of their lives, the Bible. I have twice given students who insisted the Bible was both a) divinely inspired and b) free of errors, contradictions and inconsistencies, the four Gospel accounts of Easter morning, laid out side by side. You never see them that way. Most people just hear one account, in church on Easter. Those who set out to read the New Testament go through the Gospels in the order Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and may well have forgotten what Matthew said when they get to Mark's starkly different version. Thus I suspect none of my "true believers" had ever seen the narratives printed alongside one another before. I asked them to read the (literally) Gospel accounts of this, the central, defining event in their religion. Then they read the following summary I had prepared:

"There appear to be many **direct contradictions** in these four descriptions of the tomb scene. Who actually encountered the risen Jesus in the garden? John says it was just Mary Magdalen. Matthew says it was Mary Magdalen and "the other Mary," and according to Mark and Luke, neither Mary Magdalen nor any other person actually saw Jesus in the garden. Did Mary Magdalen recognize Jesus when she encountered him? John says no, but Matthew says yes. Did the women tell anyone what happened in the garden? Mark explicitly says they did *not*; Luke and John explicitly say they told the apostles. Was it light when Mary Magdalen came to the tomb (as Mark, Matthew and Luke say), or dark (as John says)? How many "men in white"/angels were there: one (Mark and Matthew) or two (Luke and John)? Did Jesus let people hold onto him? Matthew says yes, John says no.

"As well there are numerous **inconsistencies**. Who actually went to the tomb? (All four accounts disagree.) Which apostles went to the garden? According to Luke, only Peter went; but John says Peter and the "beloved disciple" both went; and Mark and Matthew make no mention of Peter (or any other apostle) going to the garden. Was there a great earthquake, as Matthew says? How could Mark, Luke and John all ignore "a great earthquake"? Were there Roman guards? Matthew says yes, but the others do not mention them at all."

I then offered each subject space to explain her position on the Bible under various headings. The first possibility was “There are, in fact, no contradictions or inconsistencies in the four accounts.” Other possibilities attributed the contradictions and inconsistencies to human error in translation, etcetera, or to some of the evangelists getting details wrong, or to the whole thing being a myth.

Most of the fundamentalists stuck by their guns and insisted no contradictions or inconsistencies existed in the Gospel accounts of the Resurrection, no matter what one might point out. I call that dogmatism. Furthermore a curious analogy kept popping up in their defense of this seemingly indefensible stand. Many of them said the evangelists were like witnesses to an automobile accident, each of whom saw the event from a different place, and therefore gave a slightly different account of what had happened. I’m ready to bet they picked up this “analysis-by-analogy” in Sunday school, or some such place. Like the arguments against evolution, you can tell they just swallowed this “explanation” without thinking because it is, in fact, an admission that contradictions and inconsistencies *do exist*. The “different angles” story just explains how the contradictions got there.

Ultimately the true believers were saying, “I believe so strongly that the Bible is perfect that there’s nothing, *not even the Bible itself*, that can change my mind.” If that seems like an enormous self-contradiction, put it on the list. We are dealing with very compartmentalized minds. They’re not really interested in coming to grips with what’s actually *in* the Bible so much as mounting a defense of what they want to believe *about* the Bible--come Hell or Noah’s high water.²⁰

We shouldn’t underestimate the importance of dogmatism to the fundamentalist, even though it sometimes seems to surpass understanding. As noted in the last chapter, it takes no effort to be dogmatic, and you don’t need to know very much to insist you’re right and nothing can possibly change your mind. As well, dogmatism gives the joy and comfort of certainty, which fundamentalists cherish.

Faith and Science. You will sometimes hear fundamentalists dismiss science because of its apparent *uncertainty*. They observe that today's scientific explanation of something will sooner or later be replaced by a different one, so why invest anything in it? Their religion already has the Final Word, they say, the perfect explanation of everything.

This view is three players short of a trio. First, it does not grasp that future theories in science will be accepted because they make superior explanations and predictions--which is progress you could not make if you insisted the old theory was perfect. As well, science energetically corrects itself. If a finding is misleading, say due to methodological error, other scientists will discover that and set things straight. Every year a new batch of scientists graduates, and many of them take dead aim--as they were trained to do--on the scientific Establishment. In religion you might get branded a heretic, or worse, for challenging dogma. In science you'll get promoted and gather research grants as ye may if you knock an established explanation off its perch. Orthodoxy has a big bulls-eye painted on it in science. A scientist who can come up with a better account of things than evolution will become immortal.

Dogmatic Christians also slide quietly around the fact that there's no real test that what they believe is right. They simply believe it, on faith. They are the faith-full, just as dogmatic Hindus, dogmatic Jews, and dogmatic Muslims all insist they each have the real deal. Unfortunately there's no way to determine if any of them does, which may be one of the reasons the passionately devoted sometimes resort to the sword, and the car bomb, instead.

Once dogmatism turns out the lights, you might as well close up shop as a civilization and pull up the covers as a sentient life form. You get nowhere with unquestioning certainty. It's thinking with your mind wide shut. But that would not faze most fundamentalists, because they know that their beliefs will get them exactly where they want to go.

5. *Happiness, Joy and Comfort*

Fundamentalists get their joy in life much more from standing firm and believing what they stand for than from exploring and discovering. I once asked a large sample of parents how much happiness, joy or comfort they got, in various ways, from science, and how much they got from religion. For most people, religion proved a lot more satisfying than science did. (This ought not knock us off our horses. Pure science is “head stuff,” not intended to satisfy any human want except our desire to understand.)

But the religion-versus-science comparison proved especially striking among fundamentalists. They said religion brought them *enormous* amounts of happiness. It brought them the joy of God’s love. It showed how they could spend all eternity in heaven. It assured them they would rejoin their loved ones in the kingdom of God. It brought them closer to their loved ones on earth. It brought forgiveness of their sins. It made them feel safe in God’s protection. In contrast, they got almost no happiness from science. Notably, they said science did *not* enable them to work out their own beliefs and philosophy of life, it did not bring the joy of discovery, it did not provide the surest path we have to the truth, it did not make them feel safe, it did not show how to live a happy life, and it did not bring the satisfaction of knowing their beliefs were based on objective facts.

We should note that fundamentalists indeed get great joy from their religion. While most people tell pollsters they are happy, highly religious people number among the happiest of us all. You can see why they would. They believe they know the meaning of life on its deepest level. They believe they are in personal touch with the all-good creator of the universe, who loves them and takes a special interest in them. They say they are certain they will enjoy an eternity of happiness after they die. In the meanwhile they have answers at their fingertips to all the problems of life that depress others, such as sickness and personal failure. And they are embraced on all

sides by a supportive community. Why wouldn't they be very happy? The real question ought to be: why do so many people, including some of the fundamentalists' own children, turn their backs on all this happiness?

It's that old Devil, isn't it? We shall take this up shortly.

Zealotry. OK, you told me who you are a few pages ago. Now I want to know, in my constantly nosey way, what you believe in. Do you have a *most important outlook* or way of understanding things? Maybe it's a religion, a philosophy, a social perspective like socialism or capitalism. What do *you* use, more than anything else, to make sense out of things, to understand "life"?

- I don't have a basic, most important outlook.
- It's a religious outlook.
- It's a personal outlook all my own that I developed by myself.
- It's a personal outlook that I developed with a few friends.
- It's a capitalist perspective, a capitalist theory on how society should operate.
- It's a socialist perspective, a socialist theory on how society should operate.
- It's a scientific outlook. Science gives me my most basic understanding of things.
- It's the feminist movement; feminism gives me my most basic understanding of things.
- It's the environmental movement; environmentalism gives me my most basic understanding of things.
- It's some other "special cause" movement, such as "animal rights" or "right to die."

All right, if you've decided what makes sense out of the world for you, what you use most to comprehend the hurly-burly of life, then to what extent are the following things true for you?

- ___ 1. This outlook colors and shapes almost everything I experience in life.
- 0 = Not at all true of me
 1 = Slightly true of me
 2 = Mildly true of me
 3 = Moderately true of me
 4 = Decidedly true of me
 5 = Definitely true of me
 6 = Very definitely true of me
- ___ 2. I try to explain my outlook to others at every opportunity. (Use the scale above.)
- ___ 3. I am learning everything I can about this outlook.
- ___ 4. I think every sensible person should agree with this outlook, once it has been explained.
- ___ 5. I get excited just thinking about this outlook, and how right it is.
- ___ 6. It is very important to me to support the leaders of this outlook.
- ___ 7. Nothing else is as important in my life.
- ___ 8. It angers me that certain people are trying to oppose this outlook.
- ___ 9. No other outlook could be as true and valid.
- ___ 10. It is my mission in life to see that this outlook becomes "No. 1" in our country.
- ___ 11. This outlook is the solution to all of humanity's problems.
- ___ 12. I am very committed to making this outlook the strongest influence in the world.

This is called the Zealot scale, for reasons I think you can easily understand, and it's time to add up your numbers. If you are the kind of rather normal person who answers my surveys, your total will be something around 10--20. Which means you don't get terribly worked up about your way of understanding things. But fundamentalists who say their religion provides them with their basic outlook in life score about 40. They are especially likely to say their religion colors and shapes almost everything they experience in life, that it is the solution to all of humanity's problems, that it is very important to them to support the leaders of their religion, that they are learning everything they can about their religion, that nothing else is as important in their life, and no other outlook could be as true and valid.

No other group comes close to being as zealous. Feminists usually come in second in my studies, but way behind the religious fundamentalists, and one finds far, far fewer of them. And if you took all the zealous capitalists and socialists in my last study of over 600 parents and put them in a room to slug it out, not a punch would be thrown. You want to know who's on fire, you want to know who's making a commitment, you want to know who are putting their money, their time and their energy where their beliefs are, you want to know who are constantly "on call" for the cause--and in large numbers--it's the fundamentalists.²¹

Zealotry and conversion. Fundamentalists, you may have heard, proselytize. Whether they go door to door, or just gently approach co-workers and neighbors, or pleasantly invite classmates to their youth group, fundamentalists usually believe they have an *obligation* to try to convert others. "Suppose a teenager came to you for advice about religion," I have asked in several studies. "He had been raised in a nonreligious family as an atheist, but now this person is thinking about becoming much more religious, and wants your advice on what to do." Even though fundamentalists often speak of parents' sacred right to raise their children as they see fit, the vast majority of the fundamentalists said they'd tell the teen his parents were wrong. And virtually all said they would try to persuade the teen to join their religion.

One can wonder what fundamentalists would say if one of their children went to an atheist for advice on religion, and the atheist said the parents were wrong and tried to lead their child into atheism. But would such nonbelievers?²² I have given several groups of atheists the mirror-image scenario in which a teenager who had been raised as a strong and active Christian comes to them for advice because he is now questioning things. Very few Manitoba parent atheists said they would tell this teen that his parents were wrong, nor would they try to get him to become an atheist. Instead they almost all said they'd tell him to continue searching and then decide for himself. A sample of active American atheists was pushier. About two-thirds would have thumped the drum for atheism, loudly or softly, and about half said they would want the teen to become a nonbeliever. But far, far more of the fundamentalists, we saw, would have tried to convert an atheist's child.

I probed this apparent double standard with a large sample of Manitoba students. Half were told a troubled teenager who had been raised in a strong Christian family went to an atheist for advice. "Would it be wrong for the atheist to try to get the teen to abandon his family's teachings?" A solid majority of both low and high RWA students (70 percent in each case) said yes, it would be wrong.

The other half of the sample got the mirror image situation of a troubled teen raised an atheist who went to a Christian for advice. A solid majority (61 percent) of the low RWAs again said it would be wrong for the Christian to try to get the teen to abandon his family's teachings. But only 22 percent of the high RWAs thought proselytizing would be wrong in *this* case. Instead, the great majority of them thought it would be right for a Christian to try to convert the youth. That's a double standard big enough to drive a busload of missionaries through.

Parents of university students have, we can safely surmise, raised some children, so we can inquire how much freedom of choice their kids had regarding religion. A solid majority of my samples said they wanted their children to make up

their own minds about religion. But not the fundamentalist parents, who said they had made a strong effort to pass their beliefs on to their offspring--a response their children confirmed when describing how much emphasis was placed on the family religion while they were growing up. Fundamentalist parents said they did *not* want their children to decide about religion. Instead they wanted their progeny to believe what they believed, to keep the faith, and pass it on to the grandchildren.

6. *Keeping the Faith, Not*

Does the religious emphasis pay off? Yes, in the sense that if parents pay no attention to religion, the children are likely to become non-practicing Catholics, Presbyterians-in-name-only, “I guess I’m a Prodestant” Christians--or even unaffiliated “Nones.” But placing great emphasis on the family religion does not always produce the desired result, and may even backfire.

I have inquired about the current religious affiliations of *parents* of students at my university for many years. I now have answers from over 6,000 moms and dads. These parents were 48 years old on the average when they served in my studies, and since I also ask what religion they were raised in, we can see if they turned out the way *their* parents (the grandparents) intended.

Generally they did; about two-thirds of those raised in a Christian denomination still followed the path trod by their ancestors (e.g., raised a Lutheran, still a Lutheran)--although they were not necessarily active members. (Instead they were the “Stay Away Saints,” as some evangelical leaders call them.) But that means about a third of them had disconnected themselves from their home religion. Some had converted to another, but most of them had become Nones, (e.g., raised a Lutheran, now not anything), which was the category that grew the most--almost 300%!--in my studies from where it had started.²³

The only other group besides the Nones that ended up in the black, with more members than it started out with, were the Protestant fundamentalists (Baptists, Pentecostals, etcetera), and they only gained 18%. Furthermore, they did it through conversions, because *almost half* of the parents who had been raised in these denominations had left them by the time they reached middle age. (It was one of the poorer “retention” records among the various religions.)

The “departed” departed in all directions, but mostly they went to more liberal denominations, or (especially) they too ended up Nones. The fundamentalists who remained *had* to proselytize to avoid the fate of all the other denominations: i.e., an appreciable net loss. If they had not won lots of converts, they too would have shrunk, because they had a lot of trouble holding onto their own sons and daughters.

Given all that childhood emphasis on the family religion, and given all the enriching rise-and-shine happiness that comes from being a fundamentalist, how come so many people raised in that environment walk away? Some may walk because active membership in those churches requires a lot of commitment. Protestant fundamentalists go to church way more often than anyone else in Canadian Christendom, they read the Bible more, they tithe more, and so on. Also, being a fundamentalist can require giving up various pleasures and life-styles that others enjoy as a matter of course. So some people may leave these demanding religions precisely because of the demands.

But when Bruce Hunsberger and I interviewed university students who had very religious up-bringsings but then left the family religion, and asked them why they did so, they almost never mentioned these things. Instead they mainly said they left because they just couldn’t make themselves believe their church’s teachings any more.

Believing the Word. Christian fundamentalism has three great enemies in the struggle to retain its children, judging by the stories its apostates tell: weaknesses in its own teachings, science, and hypocrisy. As for the first, many a fallen-away fundamentalist told us that the Bible simply proved unbelievable on its own merits. It was inconceivable to them that, if an almighty creator of the universe had wanted to give humanity a set of teachings for guidance across the millennia, it would be the material found in the Bible. The Bible was, they said, too often inconsistent, petty, boring, appalling, self-serving, or unbelievable.

Secondly, science made too much sense and had pushed traditional beliefs into a tight corner. When their church insisted that its version of creation, the story of Adam and Eve, the sundry miracles and so on had to be taken on faith, the fledgling apostates eventually found that preposterous. Faith for them was not a virtue, although they could see why their religion taught people it was. It meant surrendering rationality. From its earliest days fundamentalism has drawn a line in the sand over scripture versus science, and some of its young people eventually felt they *had* to step over the line, and then they kept right on going.

Still the decision to leave was almost always wrenching, because it could mean becoming an outcast from one's family and community. Also, fundamentalists are frequently taught that no one is lower, and will burn more terribly in hell, than a person who abandons their true religion. What then gnawed away so mercilessly at the apostates that they could no longer overpower doubt with faith?

Their families will say it was Satan. But we thought, after interviewing dozens of "amazing apostates," that (most ironically) their religious training had made them leave. Their church had told them it was God's *true* religion. That's what made it so right, so much better than all the others. It had the truth, it spoke the truth, it *was* The Truth. But that emphasis can create in some people a tremendous valuing of truth per se, especially among highly intelligent youth who have been rewarded all their lives

for getting “the right answer.” So if the religion itself begins making less and less sense, it fails by the very criterion that it set up to show its superiority.

Similarly, pretending to believe the unbelievable violated the integrity that had brought praise to the amazing apostates as children. Their consciences, thoroughly developed by their upbringing, made it hard for them to bear false witness. So again they were essentially trapped by their religious training. It had worked too well for them to stay in the home religion, given the problems they saw with it.²⁴

7. Shortfalls in Fundamentalists' Behavior: Hypocrisy

Ronald J. Sider, a theologian at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, recently followed up Mark Noll's *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* with *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience*. He observed that, despite Jesus' unequivocal stand on the permanence of marriage, evangelical Christians divorce as often as others do. And despite Jesus' great concern for the poor, the political agenda of prominent evangelical political movements rarely includes justice for the impoverished. The number of unmarried couples living together jumped more in the Bible Belt during the 1990s, Sider pointed out, than in the nation as a whole. Of the evangelical youth who took a “True Love Waits” pledge to abstain from intercourse until marriage, 88% broke it, he reported. Evangelicals proved more likely to object to having African-American neighbors than any other religious group. He reminded his readers that many evangelical leaders either opposed the civil rights movement or else said nothing. And “saved” men were reported just as likely to use pornography, and to physically abuse their wives, as “unsaved” men.²⁵

You will note that while Sider sometimes upbraids his fellow evangelicals for being worse than others, he mainly points out that they are not better than average, when he thinks they should be. We have seen that fundamentalists do indeed think they are morally superior. But hypocrisy comes easy to compartmentalized minds.

For example, Matthew's Gospel (7:1) has Jesus saying, "Judge not, that ye be not judged," and you will often hear fundamentalists say, "Hate sin, but love the sinner." When I asked a sample of parents if they believed one should do this, virtually all of the fundamentalists said yes. And yet these same parents only two pages later in the survey were advocating rejection of homosexuals and discrimination against them. Some even agreed with the statement, "In many ways the AIDS disease currently killing homosexuals is just what they deserve." Gentle pieties get shoved back into their files all too easily in fundamentalist minds when a chance to unload on some despised group pops up.

The hypocrisy does not escape the notice of others. I once asked parents who had stressed the family religion *less* to their children than it had been stressed to them as they were growing up why they did not "pass it on." Some said they found church too boring to want to keep going. Others said the church seem preoccupied with money. And of course some said the teachings did not make sense, etcetera. But the reason checked off most often was, "As I grew up, I saw a lot of hypocrisy in the people in my religion."

The most common examples involved a) "the holy people" looking down on others in the community, b) the people who acted like Christians only on Sunday, and c) the intolerance and prejudice found among members of the congregation, including the clergy. These things had usually been spotted many years ago, when the parent was but a teenager, but obviously the spotting had a lasting effect because these parents were now nearing 50. The "whited sepulchers" they found in church drove them away from the family religion, which consequently lost nearly all of the next generation reared by these parents as well.

You can find other examples of such a backlash. Attitudes toward homosexuals have become markedly more tolerant and accepting in North America in a very short period of time. When I asked students what had affected their attitudes toward gays

and lesbians, personally knowing a homosexual proved the most positive influence (as I reported in chapter 2) and the scientific evidence indicating sexual orientation may have biological determinants (as mentioned in chapter 3) finished second. But in third place came, “I have been turned off by anti-homosexual people.”²⁶ Virulent opposition to homosexual causes may, in the long run, backfire and hurt the opposers and benefit their intended targets, especially when the attackers claim they are acting on moral grounds and actually “love the sinner” they are smiting.

Cheap Grace. Unfortunately, fundamentalist Protestantism may directly promote hypocrisy among its members through one of its major theological principles: that if one accepts Jesus as a personal savior and asks for the forgiveness of one’s sins, one will be saved. But a lot depends on what “accepts” means. Is one’s life transformed? Do good works increase? Is the born-again person more like Jesus, holier? That would be all to the good. But because of some evangelist preachers, the interpretation has grown that all “accepts” means is a one-time verbal commitment. You say the magic words and you go to heaven, no matter what kind of life you lead afterwards. Many have thought that a pretty sweet deal. You’ve conned a free pass through the Pearly Gates from the Almighty *and* you can sin and debauch all you want for the rest of your life.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer coined the phrase “cheap grace” to denigrate this interpretation of the New Testament,²⁷ and other writers have lamented the cheap grace that seems to ooze from some evangelists who seem to keep a sharp eye on the donations that follow. Sider (p. 57) summarizes the analysis of another professor of theology, John G. Stackhouse Jr., as follows: “Many evangelicals lie, cheat, and otherwise sin against others in an ‘already-forgiven bliss’ with an attitude of ‘I’m-cool-’cause-Jesus-loves-me-and-so-I-don’t-owe-you-a-thing.’”

Do only good little girls and boys go to heaven? Or does goodness, as the film star Mae West said many years ago, have nothing to do with it? I asked a large sample

of parents to respond to the following proposition: “If we have faith in Jesus, accepting him as our personal savior and asking forgiveness of our sins, *we will be saved*, no matter what kind of life we live afterwards.” Forty-two percent of the Christian high fundamentalists agreed with that statement. If that indicates the attitude of fundamentalists in general, a huge number of people are swilling in cheap grace. They fully expect that when the saints go marching in, they’re gonna be in that number because they once uttered a magic spell.²⁸ The lives they’ve lived since are irrelevant, they believe.

Life Without Guilt. That helps explain the hypocrisy many people find among “the saved.” But it doesn’t really account for the self-righteousness. After all, you still know you’ve sinned--even if you have a “Get Out of Hell Free” card tucked up your sleeve. So why do fundamentalists think they sin so much *less* than everyone else? The answer may involve how they have learned to handle guilt, thanks again to their religious instruction.

What do you do when you have done something morally wrong? What are you most likely to do to get over the guilt, to feel forgiven, to be at peace with yourself? Here are some possibilities.

- I ask God for forgiveness, by prayer, going to Confession, or some other religious act.
- I go out and do something nice for someone else, a “third party” not involved in what I did.
- I rationalize the bad act. I tell myself it was not so bad, that I had no choice, etc.
- I talk to someone close, such as a good friend or relative, about what I did.
- I get very busy with some chore, assignment, or job to take my mind off what I did.
- I discuss what I did with those who may have suffered, and make it up to them.
- Nothing; I just forget it.

OK, whatever you typically do, how well does this work? How completely forgiven do you feel after you have done this?

0 = Not at all; I still feel just as guilty as before.

1 = A little less guilty

2 = Somewhat less guilty

3 = Moderately less guilty

4 = Appreciably less guilty

5 = Much less guilty

6 = Completely free of guilt

Most Christian fundamentalists who have answered these questions in my studies said they ask God for forgiveness. And you know what, that makes them feel remarkably cleansed. Their average response on the “How completely forgiven?” question was nearly a 5. Again, it’s just a verbal thing. No admission of wrong-doing to injured parties is required, no restitution, and no change in behavior. But it works really well: Instant Guilt-Be-Gone; just add a little prayer. And why wouldn’t you sin again, since it’s so easy to erase the transgression with your Easy-off, Easy-on religious practice?

Fundamentalists therefore might feel little after-effect of their wrong-doings twitching away in their psyches. They have been to the River Jordan and had all their sins washed away, often on a weekly basis just like doing the laundry. But this very likely contributes to self-righteousness, and let’s remember that self-righteousness appears to be the major releaser of authoritarian aggression. So it could come down to this: “Hello Satan!” Yum, sin! “Get thee behind me, Satan!” Whack-whack-whack!²⁹

The non-fundamentalists in my samples did not have it so good. Their major ways of handling guilt were to discuss the immoral act with those who may have

suffered and make it up to them (which they were twice as likely to do as fundamentalist were), or to talk with a friend about what they had done. Whatever they tried, it did not remove most of the guilt; their responses to the “How completely forgiven?” question averaged less than 3. But the residual guilt may help them avoid doing the same thing again, and when someone asks them how moral they are compared to other people, the unresolved, festering guilt may remind them that they are not as moral as they’d like to be.

A Few Surprising Findings about Fundamentalists. Since fundamentalists insist the Bible is the revealed word of God and without error, you would think they’d have read it. But you’d often be wrong. I gave a listing of the sixty-six books in the King James Bible to a large sample of parents and asked them, “How many of these have you read, *from beginning to end*? (Example, if you have read *parts* of the Book of Genesis, but not *all* of it, that does not count.)” Nineteen percent of the Christian High fundamentalists said they had never read *any* of the books from beginning to end, which was neatly counterbalanced by twenty percent (but *only* twenty percent) who said they had read all sixty-six. (I tip my hat to anyone who put her head down and plowed through the first nine chapters of Chronicles I. Look it up.)

On the average, the high fundamentalists said they had read about twenty of the books in the Bible--*about a third* of what’s there. So they may insist that the Bible is totally accurate in all that it teaches, but most of them have never read a lot of what they’re so sure of. They are likely, again, merely repeating something they were told while growing up, or accepted when they “got religion.” Most of them literally don’t know all that they’re talking about. (But they are Biblical scholars compared to others: Most of the *non*-fundamentalist parents had not read even one chapter.)

This explains the results of a multiple-choice “Bible Quiz” I gave university students once. It was a very easy test in which I just asked which book in the Bible contains a famous story or quote. It was so easy because most of the possible answers

I served up would be ridiculous to anyone who knew the Bible even superficially.

For example, where in the Bible would one find the passage, “In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then the angel of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified...to you is born this day in the city of David a savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord”? The Gospel of Luke, The Book of Jeremiah, the Psalms, or Genesis? Since the last three are found in the Old Testament, and almost everyone who goes to a Christian church on Christmas hears this passage during the reading from the Gospels, the answer is pretty obvious, isn't it?

How about this one: Is the story of Sampson and Delilah in Exodus, the Gospel of Matthew, the Acts of the Apostles, or Judges? (Most students thought Sampson was writ up in Acts, maybe because he was an action-hero.) The other questions involved the location of, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life,” and who said, “If I speak in the tongues of mortals and angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal...If I have all faith as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing...And now faith, hope and love abide, these three: and the greatest of these is love.”

The sample as a whole barely scored above chance on my four-question quiz, which makes sense when you recall that most of their parents had not even read one book in the Bible. But what surprised me no end was how poorly the *fundamentalist* students did: overall they got only a 60%. They did best on that much-advertised quotation from John 3:16--which three-fourths of the fundamentalists got right. But all of the questions were so easy, why didn't they get an A+ instead of a D or an F?

The answer appears to be that, while they may tell everyone the Bible contains God's revealed truth to humanity, so everyone should read the Good Book, in truth

they--like an awful lot of their parents--don't know what's in it because they haven't read much of it either.

I've also asked parents who do read the Bible how they decide what to read. Most fundamentalists said they read selected passages, which often were selected *for* them by their church, a Bible study group, the editor of a book of devotional readings, and so on. Very few bother to read all the infallible truth they say God has revealed. If you only get into heaven if you've been devoted enough to read the whole Bible, there'll apparently be no line-up before St. Peter. ³⁰

The Most Amazing Discovery of All (to me, anyway). Isn't there something profoundly strange about the fact that so many fundamentalists have apparently skipped over so much of the Bible? Wouldn't you read the Bible, cover to cover, over and over, until the end of your days, if you *really* thought this was the revealed word of God? Let's remember who that is: **GOD**, damn it all, the almighty, eternal, omnipresent--not to mention all-knowing--creator of the universe. What else could you read that would be as important as God's message, if you believed that's what the Bible is? What could be one-zillionth as important? What on earth is going on? Don't the fundamentalists themselves believe what they preach to everyone else?

Maybe not. When I cover the topic of hypnosis in my introductory psychology course I often describe a series of experiments done with the "Hidden Observer" technique. In a typical study people are hypnotized and then they put their arm in some ice-water. The hypnotist tells them their arm feels fine, and they obligingly report it feels just peachy. But then the hypnotist appeals to a "Hidden Observer" he says is inside the person. If this observer knows that actually the arm is hurting like all blazes, it's to make a certain sign confirming that. A lot of Hidden Observers spill the beans and admit the arm truly does hurt, even though the "public" subject still insists it does not.

I have then, at a later date, asked my students to let their Hidden Observers answer a question about the existence of God. “Does this person (that is, you) have doubts that (s)he was created by an Almighty God who will judge each person and take some into heaven for eternity while casting others into hell forever?” A *third* of the high RWA students checked off an alternative that read, “Yes, (s)he has secret doubts which (s)he has kept strictly to herself/himself that this is really true.” Another twenty percent said they had such doubts, but at least one other person knew about them. That adds up to *most* of the highly authoritarian students.

I don’t think I was actually communicating with tiny Munchkins inside the students’ heads. I suspect the Hidden Observer angle just gives people a chance to admit something without taking full responsibility for admitting it--sort of like, “The devil made me do it.” But I think we see in these numbers a continuing subterranean after-shock from that one-sided search about the existence of God that (we saw in chapter 3) high RWAs typically engage in. The “search” was so one-sided it didn’t really resolve the question to the searcher’s satisfaction, all verbal assertions notwithstanding. The doubts remain, but are enormously covered up.

This means the whole edifice of belief, Bible and bustle is built on an unresolved fundamental issue in many fundamentalists. Indeed, it’s *the* fundamental issue, isn’t it? But what speaks loudest to me is how secret these doubts are in so many cases. NO ONE knows, for very good reason, and the secret doubters will probably never “come out” of the choir. Instead their faithful presence in church will reassure all the others, including the other secret doubters, that “everyone in our group really believes this.” And they may well carry their secret to the grave.³¹

Summary: So What Does All This Amount To?

This chapter has presented my main research findings on religious fundamentalists. The first thing I want to emphasize, in light of the rest of this book,

is that they are highly likely to be authoritarian followers. They are highly submissive to established authority, aggressive in the name of that authority, and conventional to the point of insisting everyone should behave as their authorities decide. They are fearful and self-righteous and have a lot of hostility in them that they readily direct toward various out-groups. They are easily incited, easily led, rather un-inclined to think for themselves, largely impervious to facts and reason, and rely instead on social support to maintain their beliefs. They bring strong loyalty to their in-groups, have thick-walled, highly compartmentalized minds, use a lot of double standards in their judgments, are surprisingly unprincipled at times, and are often hypocrites.

But they are also Teflon-coated when it comes to guilt. They are blind to themselves, ethnocentric and prejudiced, and as closed-minded as they are narrow-minded. They can be woefully uninformed about things they oppose, but they prefer ignorance and want to make others become as ignorant as they. They are also surprisingly uninformed about the things they say they believe in, and deep, deep, deep down inside many of them have secret doubts about their core belief. But they are very happy, highly giving, and quite zealous. In fact, they are about the only zealous people around nowadays in North America, which explains a lot of their success in their endless (and necessary) pursuit of converts.

I want to emphasize also that all of the above is based on studies in which, if the opposite were true instead, that would have been shown. This is not just “somebody’s opinion.” It’s what the fundamentalists themselves said and did. And it adds up to a truly depressing bottom line. Read the two paragraphs above again and consider how much of it would also apply to the people who filled the stadium at the Nuremberg Rallies. I know this comparison will strike some as outrageous, and I’m NOT saying religion turns people into Nazis. But does anybody believe the ardent Nazi followers in Germany, or Mussolini’s faithful in Italy, or Franco’s legions in Spain were a bunch of atheists? Being “religious” does not automatically build a firewall against accepting totalitarianism, and when fundamentalist religions *teach* authoritarian submission,

authoritarian aggression, and conventionalism, they help create the problem. Can we not see how easily religious fundamentalists would lift a would-be dictator aloft as part of a “great movement,” and give it their all?

Chapter 5, “Authoritarian Leaders,” will appear on this website on February 12.

Notes

¹ Because religion is such an opinion-based topic, I had better lay my own cards on the table. I was raised a Catholic and was a strong believer until age 21. After searching other religions I became a “None,” and then an agnostic--believing one cannot say at this point whether the universe had a creator, and if so what that creator’s qualities might be (beyond the all-time highest score on the SAT-Math test). I have enough familiarity with religion that I can pass as a scholar among people who know nothing about the subject. Similarly, I know enough of the Bible to seem well-informed in a room of people who have never opened the book. I don’t think any of this has affected the answers people have given to my surveys, which is what this chapter is about. But as always, you will be the judge of that. [Back to Chapter](#)

² See Witzig, T.F., Jr. (2005) Obsessional beliefs, religious beliefs, and scrupulosity among fundamental Protestant Christians. Dissertation Abstracts International: Section B: The Sciences & Engineering, Vol. 65 (7-B), 3735. US: University Microfilms International. Witzig used the original 20-item version of the Religious Fundamentalism scale, whose scores could range from 20 to 180. Converting the 141.2 mean that he obtained to an equivalent score on the twelve-item revision you answered involves two steps. First one graphically maps the 141.2 (on a 20--180 dimension) onto the equivalent place on a 12-108 dimension (see note 3 of chapter 1). This gives you an 84.7. Second, because the two scales have different sets of items, when the same people take both tests the average item score on the revised version is about 10 percent higher than that on the original version. Multiplying 84.7 by 1.10 gives you an equivalent score of 93.1 on the revised scale.

Howard Crowson of the University of Oklahoma informed me in January, 2007 that a sample of 137 residents of Norman Oklahoma had averaged 60.7 on the Religious Fundamentalism scale (in terms of a -4 to +4 response scale). The sample was recruited by students in his graduate statistics class, and was predictably young (mean = 37.5 years) and well-educated (most had earned at least bachelor's degrees). Fundamentalism correlated .62 with my DOGmatism scale, .47 with Dangerous World scores, and .61 with self-placement on a "Liberal--Conservatism" scale.

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³ If I had it to do over again, I would have emphasized "militancy" more in the construct of the religious fundamentalist. A militant item made it onto the original 20-item version of the Religious Fundamentalism scale: "God's true followers must remember that he requires them to *constantly* fight Satan and Satan's allies on this earth." But it was not sufficiently connected to the rest of the scale, in our Canadian samples, to make the more cohesive 12-item version I use now. Similarly, "If you really believe in God's true religion, you will use all your might to make it the strongest force in our nation" and the contrait, "When it comes to religion, 'Live and let live' is the best motto. No one religion should dominate in our country" almost connect with the rest of the Religious Fundamentalism scale strongly enough in Canadian samples to be included in the measure--but still fall short. It would be interesting to see if they make a stronger showing in American samples.

Which raises the question of how much Christian fundamentalists in Canada differ from American fundamentalists. As Mark A. Knoll points out in *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids, MI, William B. Eerdmans, pages 246-250), one can find both similarities and differences in the history of religion in the two countries. For example, both modern nations were founded by Christian immigrants from Western Europe. But Protestants settled almost all of the thirteen original colonies, whereas in Canada *two* Christianities took root from the start, Catholicism and Protestantism. Some Christian fundamentalists came

directly to Canada from Europe, as in the later migration of the Anabaptist Mennonites and Hutterites. But a lot also came up from the United States, and the biggest difference between fundamentalists in the two countries today may not involve theology or brand names, but strength. A much greater percentage of Americans than Canadians could be called Christian fundamentalists. [Back to Chapter](#)

⁴ Fundamentalists have been successful, to some extent, at appropriating the label “religious” for only themselves, just as *some* political conservatives have unfairly pilfered “patriot.” Many fundamentalists claim that if one does not believe what they believe and act as they say you should, one is not really religious (e.g. “not a true Christian”). This chapter is about religious fundamentalists, and I do not wish to imply that all religious people are fundamentalists. Most persons in my sample who consider themselves affiliated with an organized religion do not score highly on the Religious Fundamentalism scale, and there are many ways of being religious without even belonging to a religion. [Back to Chapter](#)

⁵ It may be true that the Bible is without error, but the issue is certainly confused by the fact that Christians do not have *a* Bible. Over 7000 different editions of the Bible have been published (Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 1992, P. 402). Care to argue which one is closest to an “original” version no one can find anymore? As well, the Catholic Bible has about a dozen books in it, the Apocrypha, that you won’t find in a Protestant Bible. And even if there were only one (English) Bible, believers have a never-ending capacity for *interpreting* it in different ways. Consider all the different sects that have balkanized Christianity over the interpretation of one particular, often obscure, passage or another.

Probably the best known “distinctly different” interpretation of seemingly minor Biblical texts is presented by Jehovah’s Witnesses who believe certain verses prohibit blood transfusions--a procedure not even known in Biblical times. Most of these passages however involve prohibitions against *eating* blood, and nobody eats blood during a transfusion any more than someone “eats” a flu shot. Genesis 9:4 for

example goes, “But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat.” Leviticus 17:11-14 talks about pouring out the blood of an animal before eating it. In Acts 15:20 and 29 the apostle James combines, somewhat mysteriously, idols, fornication, animals that have been strangled, and blood as things one should avoid. Because of the way these passages have been interpreted, hundreds of Jehovah’s Witnesses have died because they (or their parents) refused a blood transfusion.

Probably the most nonrepresentative of all the splinter groups would be the Church of Jesus Christ--Christian (a.k.a the Aryan Nations). This white supremacist group thinks the most significant passage in the Bible, also involving blood, is Genesis 9:5, in which God says to Noah, “And surely your blood of your lives will I require...” Why is this so significant? Because followers believe this means God only loves white people, who show their blood in their faces when they blush. (No, I’m not inventing this; see *Blood in the Face* by James Ridgeway.) (By the way, folks who aren’t white also blush, but it sometimes takes a little sensitivity to notice it, and sensitivity does not appear to be the strong suit of the Aryan Nations.)

To take a slightly less splintered, but still striking example, does Mark 16:18 [“They (Christ’s followers) shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them”] mean--as some Appalachian Christian sects insist--that disciples of Jesus won’t be hurt if they handle poisonous snakes? Most Christians seem to interpret this in some other way, which seems very sensible. But the meaning of the words themselves appears clear as a bell, and the Appalachian rattlesnake-handlers could well claim that other Christians are not following the Bible. (One notes however that even the “true believers” here limit themselves to picking up poisonous snakes, not drinking lethal amounts of cyanide or strychnine. And inevitably many of them die of snake bites, the latest being 48-year old Linda Long who died of a bite received during services on November 5, 2006 at the East London Holiness Church in London, Kentucky. See Ralph W. Hood, Jr., Peter C. Hill, and W. Paul Williamson, *The Psychology of Religious Fundamentalism*, 2005, New York: The Guilford Press, Chapter 5.)

Want an ironic wrinkle? Because the best and oldest manuscripts of the Gospel of Mark end with Chapter 16, verse 8, most New Testament scholars agree the concluding verses 9--20 that you will surely find in your Bible were tacked on by a scribe early in the second century. Defenders of your Bible say these verses must have been lost for a while by the early church, and then discovered and put back in their original place. But there's no evidence that such a slip-up occurred, and stylistic differences and syntactical jerks make it pretty clear the added verses were not recovered from an earlier manuscript, but were instead added on by "someone else."

Without the additional verses, the account of the Resurrection found in Mark is pretty unconvincing--no one sees Jesus--whereas verses 9--20 bring "Mark's" Gospel (the first one compiled) closer to the later Gospels of Luke and John. But the part in the add-on about handling serpents and drinking poison (Mark 16:18) comes straight out of left field, in terms of the other Gospels (although Acts 28: 3-7 says that Paul was unharmed by a venomous snake bite). So in all probability, those rattlesnakes have been handled, and a lot of people have died, because of a dishonest scriptural editor nineteen hundred years ago. (Let all editors beware!)

Of course, the vast majority of Christians have very ordinary, straightforward interpretations of Biblical texts. These can nevertheless give rise to considerable disagreement. What precisely did Jesus mean when he said "Thou are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18)? The Pope had one opinion; Henry VIII another. But have you ever heard two Freudians argue over the interpretation of a dream? And how many kookie theories of psychotherapy do you suppose there are?

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⁶ One could date evangelicalism in America back to early 19th century revivalism, or even earlier. See George M. Marsden's *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 1991, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI. [Back to Chapter](#)

⁷ This is a good place to describe my parent studies for those who join me in caring about methodological issues. Let's focus on the big study of religion I did in October, 2005 that provides much of the data in this chapter. I made a long, eight page (i.e. sixteen printed sides) booklet available to students in my own introductory psychology class and two other classes. The students were told they could take a booklet (and two answer sheets) home to their parents, if they wished. If both parents (or one parent and another "old" relative) filled out the anonymous survey within a month, the student would receive credits worth 4% of his grade in the course. All 500 of the booklets I had printed were claimed, and most of the parents came through for their kids. Seven hundred and fifty-six of the one thousand answer sheets were returned (which is a little lower than usual in these studies, but the booklet was the longest I ever sent home, and took about two hours to complete). The vast majority of the answers came from the students' mother and father.

Some of the answer sheets had to be discarded immediately because the parent had not replied to most of the questions, or had given stereotypical answers (e.g., all "neutrals"), or the responses came from a sibling rather than a member of the older generation. Altogether I pitched thirty-one bubble sheets from the stack for these reasons. I then screened each remaining answer sheet looking for careless answering, which you can judge by seeing how often the respondent contradicted earlier responses on the same scale. A lot of contradiction usually means the parent just blackened bubbles at random to make it look as though they had answered the survey. As well (and this was my fault for asking so many questions) some of the parents clearly lost their way on the bubble sheet, especially toward the end of the booklet. You can tell this by the frequency with which they put down an answer that wasn't possible, given the question (e.g. a "Yes or No" question to be answered with a 1 or 0, but the "8-bubble" was blackened). When the rest of the answer sheet made sense, I tried to figure out where the respondent had gone off the track and slide the misplaced answers up or down a notch. But sometimes that was impossible, so I chucked the answer sheet from the study. Altogether I pitched another fifty-seven

sheets for these reasons, which is more than usual in these studies and again attributable to the lengthy booklet. This was all done “blindly,” before any of the sheets had been read by the optical scanner.

By now I was down to 668 respondents. Setting aside surveys from parents who said they were Jews, Muslims, Hindus, etcetera, the sample size became 638. The top 25% of the Religious Fundamentalism distribution scored over 71 on that scale (N = 160, 89 of whom were women). I call these parents “high fundamentalists” in the narrative.

How representative is the 638-person sample of any larger group? Well they certainly don’t accurately represent the Canadian public, nor that in my province. They are 48.5 years old on the average and went to school for an average of 13.9 years. [The 160 high fundamentalists averaged slightly lower in age (47.7 years) and education (13.7).] But the overall sample probably provides a reasonably good cross-section of the parents whose children attend the large public university in my province. I never have found a self-selection bias for RWA, for example, in these parent studies, and while I worry that some students may fill out the questionnaires themselves, my past inquiries about this in a super-anonymous setting have revealed only about 2% do so. If you think parents of university students are reasonably normal folks, then this is probably a reasonably representative draw of a rather normal population.

Of course a Canadian sample is not an American sample. But one would expect the RWA Scale and Religious Fundamentalism *relationships* found within Canadian samples to appear within American ones. They almost always have before, and usually are a little larger in the USA because of the greater range in scores provided by more fundamentalists. [Back to Chapter](#)

⁸ Why the difference between 85 percent and 72 percent? For one thing, there are fewer evangelicals (139) by Barna’s criterion than high fundamentalists (160) in the

sample, so at most only (139/160=) 87 percent of the high fundamentalists could possibly be evangelicals. Beyond that, a certain number of high scorers on the Religious Fundamentalism scale achieved only near-perfect scores on the seven items used to identify evangelicals, instead of the “7 out of 7” required. The item most frequently “missed” was the one dealing with salvation and grace, about which evangelicals disagree, as we shall see. Put that aside, and the 72 percent becomes 80 percent. [Back to Chapter](#)

⁹ Being “born again” did *not* match up with being an evangelical or a fundamentalist. I used the two items Barna has developed to identify born-again Christians, viz., “Have you made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in your life today,” and “Do you believe that when you die you will go to heaven because you have confessed your sins and accepted Jesus Christ as your savior?” *Most* (54%) of the parents answered yes to both questions. Lots of people are “born again,” but many of them would not qualify as evangelicals nor do they usually pile up big scores on the fundamentalism scale. [Back to Chapter](#)

¹⁰ “Well of course they do,” you might be saying. “Both scales have a lot of religious stuff on them.” Good point. But (to repeat material from note 7 of chapter 1) several lines of evidence indicate that the religious items on the RWA scale got onto the scale because, more than anything else, they tapped sentiments of authoritarian submission, authoritarian aggression, and conventionalism. That is, religion turns up on a measure of right-wing authoritarianism in North America because that’s one of the aspects of life in which authoritarianism is now quite prevalent. If this were not the case, the correlation between these items and the rest of the scale would be much lower and they would not have “made the cut” for getting onto the RWA scale.

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¹¹ To illustrate the point about generalizations always having exceptions, one can think of some very unauthoritarian Baptists, such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and ex-president Jimmy Carter. The first socialist premier in Canada, who pioneered

medicare and other programs in Canada's social "safety net," was the Baptist minister Tommy Douglas. [Back to Chapter](#)

¹² See Bob Altemeyer, "Why Do Religious Fundamentalists Tend to be Prejudiced?" *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 2003, 13, 17-28.

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¹³ The Promise Keepers quote is from Bill McCartney with David Halbrook, *Sold Out: Becoming Man Enough to Make a Difference*, 1997, Nashville: Word Publishers, and was given by Donald J. Sider in *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience*, 2005, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, on pages 25-26. [Back to Chapter](#)

¹⁴ Want some numbers to get an idea how strong these generalizations are? In that 2005 study of 638 parents of university students I described in note 7, Religious Fundamentalism correlated .74 with Right-Wing Authoritarianism (an "almost unheard of" strong relationship), .89 with Barna's measure of being an evangelical (an even bigger "almost unheard of" relationship), .72 with scores on the Religious Ethnocentrism scale (yet another almost unheard of relationship), and (THUD!) .19 with scores on the Manitoba Ethnocentrism scale that measures racial and ethnic prejudice (a weak relationship). (See note 12 of Chapter 1 to see where these labels came from.) The size of the last correlation is hardly alarming, but the question I have tried to answer is, why is there a *positive* correlation between being a religious fundamentalist and being racially prejudiced--as there has been in study after study? Why are "holy people" *more* prejudiced than "unholy people"? Shouldn't holy people be less prejudiced than most?

Recently Gary Leak and Darrel Moreland at Creighton University in Omaha tested my hunch that *religious* ethnocentrism plays a pivotal role in the appearance of non-religious prejudices in fundamentalists. Using a mediated hierarchical regression analysis of Religious Fundamentalism and Religious Ethnocentrism scores from nearly 300 students to predict general racial prejudice, hostility toward homosexuals and prejudice toward African-Americans, they found religious ethnocentrism

mediated fundamentalists' other hostilities so powerfully that controlling for it always appreciably reduced the fundamentalist-prejudice relationship. In all cases, religious ethnocentrism proved to be the mediator in the relationship, not fundamentalism. After I learned of their study I performed their analysis on my sample of 638 parents' answers to the Manitoba Ethnocentrism scale and the Attitudes toward Homosexuals scale, and found the same thing. A considerable amount of fundamentalists' non-religious prejudices thus are attributable to their strong religious prejudices. Learning to dislike people on religious grounds seemingly has powerful consequences for how we react to people who are different in other ways. [Back to Chapter](#)

¹⁵ Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, 1994, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., pages ix, 3. [Back to Chapter](#)

¹⁶ I recently looked to see if Christian fundamentalists had a double standard about Mormons proselytizing door-to-door. They did *not*. Most of them (52%) said no restraints should be placed on such activity, and only a very few (6%) said it should be forbidden. So it is *not* true that fundamentalists use double standards in every judgment they make.

One is always tempted to make such over-generalizations when a string of findings all come out pointing in the same direction. Exceptions exist, in my own studies and possibly in others', to most of the conclusions I am drawing here. Fundamentalists/authoritarians do not *always* think illogically, think everything is our greatest problem, hold starkly contradictory ideas, act without integrity, respond dogmatically, and so on. But it is easy to find situations in which they do, compared with others, so with the bulk of the data on one side, I draw the conclusions I do. Thus in this case, I have often found that fundamentalists/authoritarians use double standards in their judgments. I have moreover tried several times to see if their opposites do the same thing when given the chance, and it is much harder to find evidence that they do. [Back to Chapter](#)

¹⁷ For a clear explanation of the ways in which creation science and intelligent design run afoul of accumulated evidence and fail to make the grade as sciences, see Francis Collins' *The Language of God*, 2006, New York: Free Press. Dr. Collins, an evangelical Christian, heads the Human Genome Project in Washington D. C., and along with many other scientists has no difficulty reconciling his deeply held religious beliefs with a total acceptance of the theory of evolution. David G. Myers of Hope College, a man of strong faith and the author of the textbook I assign my introductory psychology students, would be another example. [Back to Chapter](#)

¹⁸ For the record, Darwin never said humans evolved from *monkeys*, even though many other people besides fundamentalists think he did. Even with the limited knowledge available to him 150 years ago, Darwin realized that humanity's ancestors had long separated from the evolutionary path that led to monkeys. Instead, he correctly inferred that the "anthropomorphous apes" (chimpanzees, gibbons, gorillas, orangutans, and ourselves) had descended from an ancient anthropomorphous forerunner (Charles Darwin, *The Origin of the Species and the Descent of Man*, New York: The Modern Library, p. 518-519.)

Our "grandma" and "grandpa" were not monkeys or chimps but australopithecines, whose fossil record now goes back several million years. It is one thing to look at a rhesus monkey and say, "We could never have come from that." It is another thing to look at "Lucy" and say the same thing--and fundamentalists would go much farther out on a limb and deny the relevance of even *Homo erectus*. But of course most fundamentalists probably have no knowledge of such discoveries which--while they have an endless capacity for igniting controversy among paleoanthropologists--long ago supplied many possible "missing links" between humans and our "recent" predecessors. The problem is not, "*Where* is the link?" but "*Which one* was it at this point in time?" That said, the total primate fossil record is by no means complete; fossils only form under certain rare conditions, and exploration for them is still going on.

As for evolution being “just a theory,” people who say this are using “theory” in the sense of a theory being an untested hypothesis, a hunch. When scientists talk about the theory of evolution, they mean “theory” in the sense of a set of testable propositions that have been shown to explain and predict a lot of things. Thus you have Newton’s theory of gravity (and on a broader scale, Einstein’s). Does anybody think gravity is unproven because there is a theory of gravity? If so, I hope they don’t try stepping off a tall building.

In just the same way, virtually every scientist working in a relevant field believes evolution occurred and is still occurring. Evolution itself is not a hypothesis, not a hunch. Evolution is as accepted as a fact in science as the belief that if you lift a pencil now and let go, it will fall. (Go ahead, try this, even at home.) And if you want a demonstration that evolution still occurs, get yourself infected by one of the treatment-resistant bacteria that have evolved and spread since the introduction of antibiotics. (No, don’t try this, anywhere.) [Back to Chapter](#)

¹⁹ Hence I was not surprised to read on December 3, 2006 that Bishop Adoyo, the head of the Pentecostal Church in Kenya, wants the National Museum in Nairobi to place its priceless collection of hominid fossils in a back room where the public cannot see them. He explained that these fossils support the theory of evolution, which his religion opposes. The bishop threatened to organize protests to force the museum to comply if it did not agree to his request. The bishop’s message seems crystal clear: We don’t believe this, so we don’t want the public to see the evidence that we are wrong. [Back to Chapter](#)

²⁰ You may understandably be wondering where I get off putting students’ religious beliefs to such a test as part of a psychology experiment, so let me tell you more about the study. The students knew when they signed up for the experiment that it involved “interpreting certain passages from the Bible.” They also knew the study happened in two phases held one week apart. In the first part they read the four Gospel accounts,

the confrontational summary, and gave their reaction. Then they were given a copy of the Gospel accounts used, the confrontation, and the survey they had just answered to take home. I asked the students to discuss the matter with whomever they wished (parents, friends, ministers or priests were specifically mentioned), reconsider their answers, respond to the survey once more, and turn in their “second opinion.”

I did this to make sure the experimental procedure did not have undue influence over them, and to give their trusted sources of information the last word. The students were also given the phone numbers of several on-campus counseling services and the university chaplains in case they found the experiment upsetting. The precautions proved unnecessary, as opinions almost never changed from Phase 1 to Phase 2. I did the experiment, not to try to convert gullible university students to a life of agnostic debauchery--which I thought from the outset extremely unlikely to happen--but to see if my DOG scale could predict who would modify their beliefs about the Bible and who would not. (It did.) See Bob Altemeyer, “Dogmatic Behavior among Students: Testing a New Measure of Dogmatism,” 2002, *Journal of Social Psychology*, 142, 713-721.

Mike Friedman and his colleagues at Texas A&M University recently used the resurrection accounts and the confronting paragraph as part of a study of fundamentalists’ reactions to threat. All of the high fundamentalist students in this condition of the experiment stated on the pretest that the Bible was free of inconsistency or contradiction, and 31% of them still insisted it was after reading the confrontation. The rest admitted inconsistencies existed, saying they were due to translation errors (44%) or else were unimportant to the main point (25%). The investigators did not collect data on personal dogmatism, so we do not know if the unyielding believers were more dogmatic than the believers who budged, which they had been in my study. [Back to Chapter](#)

²¹ Religious fundamentalists do not just open their pocketbooks to the causes and politicians of their choice. Several studies have found that religious people give more

money and time to charities than nonreligious people do. The most charitable region in Canada, according to studies of tax returns, is the heavily Mennonite section of my province, Manitoba. Wondering if this might reflect tithing to support their own churches, I asked a big sample of parents what percentage of their income they gave to charity, excluding any support of their church, missionaries, religious schools, and so on. The fundamentalist average equaled 3.2 percent, while the rest of the sample gave only about half as much, 1.7 percent. If you think the fundamentalists were exaggerating so as to look good, how did they know what the rest of the sample would answer? [Back to Chapter](#)

²² Bruce Hunsberger and I found in our study of active American atheists that the few members of that sample who said they had “advertised” their atheism through such things as bumper stickers found that it attracted a lot of parking tickets and vandalism.

Some highly religious people are outraged that atheists would publicly declare their lack of faith. Accordingly many of the people who belong to atheist associations hide their beliefs from most others, knowing from experience it could affect their employment, membership in other clubs, and social connections. It reminds me of the reaction of many high RWAs when homosexuals began to come out: “Don’t these people know they’re supposed to be ashamed of what they are?” That in turn reminded me of the reaction of many White supremacists to the civil rights movement: “Don’t these n----- know they’re inferior and should never be treated as our equals?” Fortunately, eventually, minorities can overcome these reactions. [Back to Chapter](#)

²³ This is just one example of how organized religion is slowly dying in the Western world. In Europe, polls reveal, hardly anyone goes to church every week any more. The United States, with about 32% of its adult population regularly attending weekly services, is one of the most “religious” countries in the West. See Bob Altemeyer, “The Decline of Organized Religion in Western Civilization,” *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 2004, 14, 77-89. [Back to Chapter](#)

²⁴ Another factor may play a considerable role in creating amazing apostates in fundamentalist sects. Their religion may have tried very hard to “put the fear of the Lord” into them. But the apostates may not have been as fearful as their brothers and sisters and peers who stayed. They may have been more willing to take the risk of going it alone. Certainly it would take considerable courage to cut all those ties, throw away the sure ticket to Heaven, and start over from scratch facing the emptiness alone.

Speaking of fear, Bruce Hunsberger and I also interviewed university students who had come from *nonreligious* backgrounds but were now “amazing believers.” They had, it seemed, usually become religious for emotional reasons as a way of dealing with fear of death, despair, and personal failure, and been “brought to Christ” by religious friends and youth groups. These conversions seldom happened for intellectual reasons. Frequently, in fact, the amazing believers were given the Bible after making their commitment to Jesus so they could “find out what you now believe.” See Bob Altemeyer and Bruce Hunsberger, *Amazing Conversions: Why Some Turn to Faith and Others Abandon Religion*, 1997, Amherst, N.Y., Prometheus Books.

For a conversion from atheism to evangelical Christianity brought about by intellectual reasons, see *The Language of God* by the amazing believer, Francis Collins. [Back to Chapter](#)

²⁵ Donald J. Sider, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience*, 2005, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, Chapter 1. [Back to Chapter](#)

²⁶ See Bob Altemeyer, “Changes in Attitudes toward Homosexuals,” 2001, *Journal of Homosexuals*, 42, 63-75. [Back to Chapter](#)

²⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German Protestant theologian who joined an underground anti-Nazi movement as Hitler marched Germany to war. He was arrested and eventually executed in 1945 shortly before Allied forces liberated the camp in

which he had been held. His analysis of cheap grace appeared in his 1937 book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, which was translated into English in 1959 by SCM Press of New York. [Back to Chapter](#)

²⁸ Being sensitive to direction-of-wording effects, I also posed the question in a “negative” form, where belief in cheap grace would require *disagreement*: “If we are born again but *continue* to sin, we are NOT saved. God will not accept sinful persons, no matter what they have faith in.” A third of the Christian high fundamentalists disagreed with this. So what was the real level of belief in cheap grace in this sample? Somewhere between 33 and 42 percent. But either way, tis a good-sized crowd.

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²⁹ A political columnist for a Winnipeg newspaper, Frances Russell, wrote an article in 2005 on the religious right in which she said the movement seemed intolerant, dogmatic, and a threat to democracy. She expected a negative reaction from fundamentalists, but she was quite unprepared for the tooth-and-claw hostility that erupted. Besides sending the inevitable messages to Ms. Russell hoping/promising that she would roast in hell forever, fundamentalists organized letter-writing and telephone campaigns (something they do very well) to the paper’s editor and publisher demanding she be fired. Since there is a wee chance some fundamentalists will be upset by what I have reported about them here, they probably want to know whom to contact to get me fired. But they’ve missed their chance, since I now stand on the very brink of retirement. [Back to Chapter](#)

³⁰ George W. Bush is reported to have read the Bible in its entirety twice. So he might do very well on the following pop quiz which is based--not on Habakkuk, Haggai, Nahum and other books in the Bible that most people never heard of, but on the New Testament and the books from the Old Testament that people are more likely to read.

1. Which Gospel was originally Part I of a two-part account of the origins of Christianity? (Look up “Acts” to get the answer.)

2. After God finally convinced Moses to go back to Egypt and demand that Pharaoh release the Jews, who met Moses at an inn and tried to kill him?
3. If a “cubit” was--as is commonly inferred--the distance from a man’s elbow to the end of his longest finger, or about eighteen inches, about how big was Solomon’s magnificent temple? (A) A duplex apartment building, (B) A medium-size circus tent, (C) An indoor football stadium, or (D) An ocean liner.)
4. What prayer did Jesus instruct his disciples *not* to say in public but “enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly” (Matthew 6:6)?
5. How many “Of every clean beast...the male and his female” did God command Noah to take into the ark? (See Genesis 7:2 and Genesis 7:8, 9; see also Genesis 8:20.)
6. Where does God tell the Hebrews, “Thrice in the year shall all your men children appear before the Lord God, the God of Israel,” and “The first of the first fruits of thy land thou shalt bring unto the house of the Lord thy God. Thou shalt not see the a kid in his mother’s milk”? (A) The ceremonial and dietary laws in Deuteronomy, (B) The Epistle to the Hebrews, (C) They are two of the commandments God gave Moses, who wrote them down on stone tablets, (D) The admonitions of the prophet Amos, (E) The epistle of Andy.
7. From which tree in the Garden of Eden were Adam and Eve forbidden to eat? (A) The Tree of Life, (B) The big apple tree in the middle, (C) The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, (D) It’s not named, but it’s whatever tree the snake was in). (See Genesis 2:17.)
8. Which of the following epistles did the Apostle Paul *not* write: (A) Romans, (B) II Corinthians, (C) I Titus, (D) Galatians, (E) It’s a trick question; most scholars of the New Testament agree Paul wrote all of these.
9. Which of these is specifically stated in the Bible regarding God’s “anointed one” (“the Mesiha” in Arameic) whose right hand God would hold, who would

subdue nations before him? (A) That his name would be Yeshua {"Jesus" in translation}, (B) That he was King Cyrus of Persia, (C) That he would come from Galilee, or (D) The name of his mother would be "Miriam").

10. When Jesus said in Luke 24:46, just before he ascended to heaven, "Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day," which passage in the Hebrew scriptures was Jesus referring to that prophesied he would suffer, die, and rise from the dead on the third day?

And since you're such a good reader, even of long endnotes, I'll give you an Extra Credit question.

11. It says in Leviticus 20:13 that (male) homosexuals should be put to death. What other activity does the Bible indicate should be punished by death (by stoning) in Numbers 15: 32-36?

[Look in Exodus 4:24 for the very surprising answer to the question of who tried to kill Moses before he could get back to Egypt. The answer to Question 3 is "A;" Solomon's temple was about as big as a duplex. (See 1 Kings 6:2.) Look in Exodus 34 for the amazing answer to Question 6. The answer to Question 8 should be easy for anyone who's read the New Testament; there is no Epistle to Titus. Look in Isaiah 45:1 for the interesting answer to Question 9. The answer to the Extra Credit question: picking up sticks on the Sabbath would get you well and truly stoned, once and for all, if authorities took the Bible literally.]

If you know the answer to Question 10, a lot of people who have never been able to find that prophecy will be stupendously grateful. Various long-shots have been cited, such as Jonah 1:17 ("Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.") But that's hardly a prediction of what happened to Jesus, and you'll have trouble getting three days and three nights squeezed into the approximate 40 hours between a Friday

afternoon and a Sunday morning. Other, even longer shots have been offered up: Psalm 30:3; 41:10; 68:20; 118:17, and Hosea 6:2. Look them up and see what you think.

(How does one explain the fact--if the Gospels are true--that *Jesus* thought his death and resurrection fulfilled a prophecy that in fact did not exist?)

All the quotes here, by the way, are from the King James version of the Bible, which scholars tend to think is inaccurate in many respects, but which conservative Protestants prefer. [Back to Chapter](#)

³¹The fact that so many authoritarians appear to have Top Secret doubts about the very existence of God brings all their other loudly professed beliefs into question. For example do they really believe, down to the soles of their feet and the bottom of their souls, that they are going to continue living after death, and indeed go to heaven for all eternity? I know they say they absolutely and positively, 110 percent believe this, but these are people much given to fear and they may secretly be just as terrified of death as others are--maybe more so.

Do you remember when the televangelist Oral Roberts told the world God had revealed that he would “call Oral home” if the faithful did not contribute \$8 million dollars to Oral’s operations in Tulsa? The point is, Oral did *not* want to die. That’s why he kept asking people to send him more dough. Well think about it. If you believe Oral believed that God had threatened him with an eternity of utter happiness if he did not raise the \$8 million, why didn’t Oral just keep God’s ultimatum to himself and hold the Almighty to his word?

Roberts raised \$9.1 million by God’s deadline--and one does mean “deadline” apparently--and sure enough God has not called him home yet. He (Oral) did break his hip in March, 2006. He was a faith healer in the early days of his ministry, but he hied himself bimby fast to a hospital to get his hip fixed. [Back to Chapter](#)