

# CROSSROADS

An interdisciplinary journal for the study  
of history, philosophy, religion and classics

VOLUME 1 ISSUE 2 2007

ISSN: 1833-878X

Pages 4-14

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*Fundamentalism: A Synthesis of Cultural and Cognitive Perspectives*

## **ABSTRACT**

This article proposes a synthesis of cultural and cognitive perspectives on religious fundamentalism. Cultural perspectives provide insights into the contents of fundamentalisms in socio-historical contexts. Cognitive perspectives provide insights into the cognitive operations that contribute to a fundamentalist mentality. A synthesis of the two perspectives reveals significant interactions between cultural contents and cognitive operations. I apply a neo-Piagetian interactionist theory of cognitive development to engage the cultural content of religious fundamentalisms. I provide illustrative examples of cultural contents from Christian and Muslim fundamentalisms that reflect and perpetuate a particular type of cognitive structure. The synthesis contributes to the understanding and engagement of religious fundamentalism.

## **BIOGRAPHY**

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# FUNDAMENTALISM: A SYNTHESIS OF CULTURAL AND COGNITIVE PERSPECTIVES

## INTRODUCTION

*Fundamentalism* is an ambiguous and elusive concept. Scholarly attempts to define fundamentalism have struggled to deal with its popular cross-cultural abstractions, and to escape its pejorative appropriations. The term's detractors perceive it to be nothing more than a 'dirty fourteen-letter word' used by modernists to marginalise their post-enlightenment critics<sup>i</sup>. The term's defenders accept it reluctantly in lieu of a better alternative<sup>ii</sup>. Beyond its somewhat ambiguous and pejorative usage, there seems to be something *fundamental* about fundamentalism. I propose a synthesis of cultural and cognitive perspectives for a more integrative multidisciplinary understanding of fundamentalism.

Cultural perspectives of religion tend to emphasise interpersonal dimensions of experience within a shared religious discourse. They focus on the contents of a culture or social grouping (rituals, beliefs, practices, institutions, historical events etc.) and abstract organisational structures and dynamics. Traditional socio-cultural perspectives, like Emile Durkheim's functionalism tend to subordinate the individual to the power of static social facts. Here, the individual is a *tabular rasa*, a blank slate written over by socio-cultural content. More modern perspectives, like Anthony Giddens' structuration theory record a much more dynamic interplay between individual agency and fluid social patterns<sup>iii</sup>. However, the evolution of theory and practice can be a slow process and cultural approaches to religion still often neglect the influence of individual cognition on the reception and formation of culture. Traditionally, cultural perspectives move from the social to the individual; from the external world to the internal world. Accordingly, modern perspectives are often criticised for transmitting a legacy of neglect of the individual and the internal. Professor of Religion Jason Slone notes, 'We now know that cultural theories of religion are impoverished by a lack of understanding of how the mind works and thus why humans think what they think and do what they do'<sup>iv</sup>. Fundamentalism provides a point of exchange where cultural perspectives may be enriched with cognitive understandings of how the mind works.

Alternatively, cognitive perspectives of religion tend to emphasise individual and intrapersonal dimensions of experience. They focus on the contents held, and behaviours exhibited by an individual, and then abstract mental structures and processes. Early pseudo-cognitive perspectives like phrenology subordinated the individual to static mechanisms of mind. More recent perspectives like neo-Piagetian interactionism emphasise the dynamic interplay between cultural milieus and cognitive structures. However, it takes time for practice to embrace theoretical change. Traditionally, cognitive perspectives move from the individual to the social, and from the internal world to the external world. Accordingly, modern perspectives are still criticised for a legacy of neglecting the social and the external. Professor of Religion and phenomenologist, Heinz Streib notes, 'It is justified to speak of reductions with regard to religious development whenever the cognitive developmental logic is deemed to be not only the central theme, but also the motor of religious development, thus excluding dimensions of content, experiences, and function of religion'<sup>v</sup>. The solution to the cognitive 'exclusion' identified by Streib and the cultural 'impoverishment' identified by Slone, is surely to coordinate the two perspectives' respective strengths. Then, through synthesis and dialectic, scholarship may reach a better understanding of phenomena such as fundamentalism.

This synthesis between culture and cognition is grounded in the assumption that they are interactive, rather than mutually exclusive influences. It is also grounded in the assumption that a synthesis of perspectives is not only possible, but absolutely necessary. The interactionist study of culture and cognition represents an emerging field, especially in its application to religion. As noted in a recent introductory text, 'The field of culture and cognition is far from being widely recognised and still lacks meaningful integration of the different approaches'<sup>vi</sup>. Fundamentalism provides a valuable study for meaningful integration. It is a way of thinking that emerges from a culture; reciprocally, it is a culture that emerges from a way of thinking.

## CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES ON FUNDAMENTALISM

It is perhaps understandable given the origins of the term *fundamentalism* that debate over definition has been dominated by cultural analyses. Early cultural analyses described the beliefs, rituals, practices, institutions, group dynamics and historical roots of American Protestant Fundamentalism in the early part of the Twentieth Century<sup>vii</sup>. To limit the definition of a term to this cultural context is to define a fundamentalist as one who adheres to these five beliefs: the inerrancy of the Bible; six-day *ex-nihilo* creationism; the reality of miracles; the virgin birth, Christ's substitutionary death for the atonement of sins, and physical resurrection; and his imminent return. The term *fundamentalist* was applied in a Muslim context as early as 1937<sup>viii</sup>, a usage that has increased significantly in post-September 11<sup>th</sup> popular discourse. Similarly, *fundamentalism* has also been used to

describe Jewish<sup>ix</sup>, Hindu<sup>x</sup>, Sinhalese Buddhist<sup>xi</sup> and other religious movements. Marty and Appleby's multi-volume *Fundamentalist Project* represents a collaborative attempt to identify structural similarities between diverse religious movements designated as *fundamentalist*<sup>xii</sup>. Most recently, the term *fundamentalism* has been abstracted to describe non-religious cultures<sup>xiii</sup> which bear little cultural relation to the anti-modernist struggle of 1920s American Protestant Fundamentalism. The increasing generalisation of fundamentalism across cultures has led to an interest in its psychological, and more specifically, its cognitive characteristics.

Earlier cultural perspectives acknowledged the possibility of a psychology of fundamentalism. James Barr, author of the seminal work - *Fundamentalism*, noted in a preface to the second edition: '...perhaps on deeper investigation it would turn out that the doctrinal and the psychological accounts of fundamentalism are not as fully in contrast as I have supposed'<sup>xiv</sup>. A decade later, Marty and Appleby provided the following caveat to their *Fundamentalism Project*: '...while there may be such a thing as a 'fundamentalist mentality' which finds its expression in various ideological or scientific forms, here the prime interest has to do with fundamentalisms in which the religious dimension is foremost'<sup>xv</sup>. I suggest that understandings of fundamentalism will be impoverished until the interactive relationship between this 'mentality' and the 'religious dimension' is better recognised and investigated.

## COGNITIVE PERSPECTIVES ON FUNDAMENTALISM

Cognitive perspectives focus on the structure and organisation of thought in the individual mind. They assume the universality of neural mechanisms that give rise to cognitive processes. They also tend to assume the primacy of the epistemic self as the centre and motor of human development<sup>xvi</sup>. Cognitive perspectives often begin with the assumption that 'religion is a natural by-product of cognition' and 'is not a cause of behaviour per se'<sup>xvii</sup>. The study of fundamentalism challenges the accuracy of this notion. As we shall see in the following section, fundamentalism exemplifies the co-evolution of culture and cognition.

Extended cognitive perspectives on religious fundamentalism are quite rare and recent. They have generally emerged as applications of James Fowler's work on faith development<sup>xviii</sup> which proposes six cognitively-based stages of faith<sup>xix</sup>. Robert Shinn's brief theoretical article, *Fundamentalism as a Case of Arrested Development*<sup>xx</sup>, is perhaps the earliest application of Fowler's structural-developmental theory to religious fundamentalism. Shinn suggests that fundamentalism is a manifestation of Fowler's Stage 3 (synthetic-conventional) faith<sup>xxi</sup>. Fowler himself later characterises fundamentalism as a manifestation of Stage 2 (mythic-literal) faith, though without reference to specific fundamentalist contents. What is the cognitive perspective guiding developmental theories of fundamentalism and can it be synthesised with cultural perspectives on fundamentalism?

Structural-developmental theories of fundamentalism are essentially 'neo Piagetian' theories: applications of Jean Piaget's genetic epistemology<sup>xxii</sup>. Genetic epistemology refers to the cognitive construction of ways of knowing. Piaget argued that the mind could no longer be seen as a static receptacle for knowledge. He wanted to challenge the notion that knowing is static and immutable: 'thought, then, is not momentary; it is not a static instance; it is a process'<sup>xxiii</sup>. According to Piaget, the mind constructs knowledge in stages of development that facilitate adaptation. Adaptation is the attempt to fit, survive or prosper in a given environment. Cognitively, there are two processes that facilitate adaptation: *assimilation* and *accommodation*. The process of assimilation involves the integration of new information into existing knowledge structures. A structure could be seen as an organising pattern for knowledge. To use an analogy, a structure is like a web that is sensitive to the vibrations of new knowledge. It is an interconnected system organised by characteristic cognitive operations and abilities. However, some new information cannot be easily assimilated into existing knowledge structures. Such information may create cognitive dissonance<sup>xxiv</sup>. The resolution of cognitive dissonance involves either the distortion or repression of the new information or a more profound change in structure known as *accommodation*<sup>xxv</sup>. This change is essentially a reorganisation of the structure. Accommodation of a whole structure is akin to a paradigm shift.

Accommodation and assimilation are interactive. Piaget argued that intelligence reflected a healthy interplay or interaction between the two processes. This interplay is marked by periods of structural stability or *equilibrium* where a general set of operations governs the interplay between assimilation and accommodation. According to Piaget, the individual constantly strives for a state of equilibrium. These periods of equilibrium are known as *stages*. A *stage* is a period when knowledge is consistently organised by the same cognitive operations<sup>xxvi</sup>. Piaget argued that there is an invariant, incremental and universal sequence of identifiable stages through which cognition develops, and that a stage is generally consistent across multiple domains of knowledge (i.e. moral, logico-mathematical). In theory, change in these stages is the product of many factors including physical brain development, and socio-cultural experience. However, in application, Piagetians have often been criticised for

neglecting the latter factor. Hence, the goal of this article: to provide a context for the re-establishment of a link between cognitive and cultural factors. So, how have these cognitive processes been applied to fundamentalism? Is fundamentalism *just* a stage of cognitive development that is perpetuated by contents that arrest the radical accommodation that leads to a new stage?

According to Fowler and Shinn, fundamentalism can in part be represented as a particular way of structuring information. Therefore, from a cognitive developmental perspective, fundamentalism represents a *stage*. For Fowler, the stage most closely representing fundamentalist cognition is Stage 2 (mythic-literal). In mythic-literal cognition: 'Beliefs are appropriated with literal interpretations, as are moral rules and attitudes. Symbols are taken as one-dimensional and literal in meaning. In this stage the rise of concrete operations leads to the curbing and ordering of the previous stage's imaginative composing of the world' <sup>xxvii</sup>. Recently, Heinz Streib has added to this conceptualisation of fundamentalism and introduced some important qualifications to cognitive developmental theory that support the synthesis proposed in this paper. For Streib, fundamentalism is a *heterodyning* of mythic-literal and rationalistic stages <sup>xxviii</sup>. Heterodyning is a combining of stages, where the old stage is never fully left and the future stage is never fully entered. Streib argues that adult heterodyning makes fundamentalism more 'stable, more rigoristic, and more cruel' <sup>xxix</sup> than its childhood styles. In this heterodyning, fundamentalism transposes the mythic into the literal using developing cognitive powers to rationalise rather than transform past affective commitments. The rigorous, rational style transforms the mythic commitments into literal propositions. Author Malise Ruthven makes related observations in his analyses of Islamic fundamentalism<sup>xxx</sup>. In *A Fury for God*, Ruthven argues that Islamist leaders are characteristically those who revive childhood mythology with a monodimensional rationalism: 'A consistent pattern emerges, across all these different countries, of fundamentalists drawing heavily from students and university graduates in the physical sciences, usually students with rural or traditionally religious backgrounds' <sup>xxxi</sup>. The rural mythic interpretations of Islam formed in childhood are defended with a rigorous scientific literalism formed in young adulthood <sup>xxxii</sup>. While such observations seem to support the developmental model, Streib's study of fundamentalism raises important qualifications to traditional cognitive-structural perspectives.

Fundamentalism obviously exerts a very powerful cultural influence on the individual's cognitive processes. The study of fundamentalist culture and individual cognition causes a reassessment of the primacy of cognition driving the direction of development. It forces a reengagement with affective, social, and cultural influences. With these influences acknowledged, development becomes an altogether more messy and less linear process <sup>xxxiii</sup>. Furthermore, the formative power of fundamentalism and its cultural effect on cognitive style pose a challenge to Slone's claims that 'religion is not a cause of behaviour' and that religion, 'does not determine how we think or act' <sup>xxxiv</sup>. These are not useful statements when the existence and complexity of interaction between fundamentalist contents and individual cognition is considered. The serious task ahead for theories of religion is to provide more powerful explanatory theories and empirical studies of the relationship between cognitive structures and the contents of religious cultures.

There is already tacit evidence of the interaction between religious cultures and individual cognition in social-psychological studies. Such studies reveal a relationship between fundamentalism and low cognitive complexity on religious issues <sup>xxxv</sup>; fundamentalism and measures of 'cognitive bondage' where individuals are not free or able to question their beliefs <sup>xxxvi</sup>; and fundamentalism and limited creative thinking <sup>xxxvii</sup>. Rokeach found that Southern Baptists scored mostly highly for dogmatism where dogmatism referred to rigidity in thinking, intolerance of ambiguity, and inability to deal with new information <sup>xxxviii</sup>. Results of a Gallup Poll published in 1989 revealed that in terms of literal Biblical belief, 'Education is the major variable, with belief in the literal truth of the Bible decreasing according to the educational background' <sup>xxxix</sup>. Oser and Gmünder found that a person's level of formal education does exert an influence on the stage development of their religious judgement <sup>xl</sup>. These studies imply a two-way relationship between cultural factors and cognitive competencies.

There are few studies focussing explicitly on the interaction between cognitive structures and the contents of fundamentalist cultures. Oser and Gmünder identified the relationship between cognitive structure and cultural content in their 1991 study of religious judgement:

Cultural development can hamper or sponsor the construction of individual stages while, simultaneously, shaping the content of the stages. A certain content may be inappropriate at a certain time and may therefore fail to yield religious reasoning...the social praxis of meaning-making either sponsors or hampers the religious structures...This means that structures take shape differently in different cultures or civilisations. <sup>xli</sup>

Perhaps the most extended study of culture and cognition is Barnes' seminal, *Stages of Thought: The*

*Coevolution of Religious Thought and Science*<sup>xliii</sup>. Barnes uses a Piagetian framework to trace the cultural-cognitive development of science and religion. His premise is that, 'A culture may maintain a simpler easier style of thought as its dominant style for many centuries or even millennia, even if some individuals go beyond the culture's general achievement'<sup>xliiii</sup>. Fowler refers to this relationship between cognition and culture as 'the structuring power of contents' and the 'interplay between structure and content'<sup>xliv</sup> and acknowledges the need for more research into the relationship<sup>xliv</sup>. The study of fundamentalism provides an opportunity to bring cognitive and cultural perspectives together to observe this interplay. Somewhat belatedly, it will address a dearth of examples of the long acknowledged interaction between cognition and culture.

## CULTURAL-COGNITIVE PERSPECTIVES ON FUNDAMENTALISM

There are many contents in fundamentalist cultures (as in all cultures) that reflect the influence of cognition and exert an influence on cognition in an interactive cycle. The following synthesis provides two illustrative examples of interactive between fundamentalist contents and cognition. The first example illustrates the interaction between binary thinking and culturally reinforced binary oppositions that structure fundamentalist contents. The second example illustrates fundamentalist contents that disrupt cognitive equilibrium by perpetuating assimilative primacy.

### *Binary Cognition and Contents*

Fundamentalist cultures reflect and perpetuate an undifferentiated *binary* form of logical operations. Binary logic proposes an either/or choice between two concepts (groups, entities, propositions etcetera). In the binary pair, *p* or *q*, either *p* is correct or *q* is correct. Developmentalist Helmut Reich describes binary logic as one of the earliest operations that dominates and structures a way of thinking<sup>xlvi</sup>. Reich's cognitive theory of relational and contextual reasoning (RCR) posits that development leads to more differentiated and integrated reasoning. In Reich's early levels of reasoning *explanandum*, or competing theories are, '...considered separately; only one of them is declared correct...are alternatives...usually single-track choice of A or B'<sup>xlvii</sup>. Binary cognition is also recognised in neurotheological literature<sup>xlviii</sup>. Andrew Newberg identifies the 'binary operator' as one of several cognitive functions. The binary operators, 'enable the mind to make fundamental sense of things by reducing the most complicated relationships of space and time to simple pairs of opposites – up versus down, in versus out, left versus right, before versus after, and so on'<sup>xlix</sup>. Accordingly, binary logic serves a functional purpose. Simple 'black or white' binary logic is perhaps more conducive to immediate action and motivation than more complex differentiated thinking involving 'shades of grey'. It seems easier to communicate and elicit an affective state by imposing grand dichotomies of 'good and evil', 'black and white', 'us and them' onto otherwise complex and differentiated realities. The binary operator is a tool of simplification that may serve a purpose in a particular context. However, what happens when the context changes and the binary formulation remains entrenched in language and culture? The affective function of a past binary is defended as if it were an epistemic binary, true for all time in all contexts. The general application of binary logic is a cognitive habit reflecting a tendency to process information in encompassing, undifferentiated categories. I contend that fundamentalist cultures perpetuate cognitive habits by enshrining grand binary dichotomies in cultural contents.

Fundamentalisms are characterised by their binary divisions between people (i.e. saved and unsaved), their behaviours (i.e. good and evil), and their post-mortal destinations (i.e. heaven and hell). These divisions are often simplistic, holistic and charged with value. They are simplistic in that they are untroubled by complex circumstances or causation for behaviours. They are holistic in that they view the whole person in terms of a part of the person (a person's articulated beliefs). They are charged with value in that the difference between binaries is a matter of life and death. In Christian and Muslim fundamentalisms this value is charged with the matter of eternal life or death in heaven or hell<sup>1</sup>. The sharp binary distinctions between people are evident in the Protestant fundamentalist culture as 'saved and unsaved', 'sheep and goats', and 'lost and found'. These divisions are perhaps derived from or at least linked to scriptures that reinforce separation<sup>ii</sup>. Such scriptures are ambiguously appropriated as 'proof texts' and embedded in fundamentalist cultural discourse where they are used to perpetuate a binary division between believer and unbeliever. The language of separation that demonises the world and the Other has the effect of restricting encounters with them both physically and cognitively.

The binary division between believers and unbelievers is also evident in the Koran and disseminated into Islamic fundamentalist culture in the division between *dar al-islam* (the sphere of Islam) and *dar al-harb* (the sphere of war); the practice of *dhimmitude* (treatment of non-Muslims); and attitudes towards the *harbis* (non-Muslims). Such divisions are seen by fundamentalists to be supported by a text-centred interpretation of the verses of an infallible Koran<sup>iii</sup>. Bat Ye'or identifies and examines a resurgence of *dhimmitude* in *Islam and*

*Dhimmitude: Where Civilisations Collide*. He writes, 'Because critical dialogue with a dhimmi is forbidden, the movement for reform and openness toward the non-Muslim did not exist in the *umma*'<sup>liii</sup>. Of the lack of historical criticism in the closed societies of Islam Ye'or comments: 'All these elements block the development of Muslim critical thought about its relationship to the *harbis*, the non-Muslims living outside the *dar al-islam* and not yet subjected by *jihad*; as well as to the *dhimmis*, the non-Muslims subjected by *jihad* to the *dhimma* 'pact of protection''<sup>liv</sup>. The effect of such culturally embedded binary categorisation is disengagement with the Other. Disengagement prevents opportunities to differentiate and accommodate. Thus the cultural contents enforcing this binary separation perpetuate the assimilative structure by restricting social and cognitive opportunities to differentiate.

The structuring power of fundamentalist cultures' binary division between heaven and hell should not be underestimated. In fundamentalism, heaven and hell are perceived as literal realities with a space-time existence to be experienced by every individual. Jerry Falwell, America's most prominent fundamentalist evidences this perception: 'Ask a Fundamentalist whether he believes there are really flames in hell and he will simply say, 'Yes, and hot ones too!'<sup>lv</sup>. Fundamentalists equate a person's articulated belief with their eternal destiny in heaven or hell. Hence, in Protestant fundamentalism a person can only be saved from eternal punishment in hell if 'they confess with their lips and believe in their hearts that Jesus Christ is Lord'<sup>lvi</sup>. The ultimate consequence of this binaries (saved and unsaved in heaven or hell) permeates other content domains and structures them accordingly.

The seriousness of the heaven and hell binary in fundamentalism leaves little room for ambiguity and no room for compromise. Almost all contents are subordinated to related binaries including 'good and evil' and 'saved and unsaved'. Thus, subordinate cultural contents including dancing, dress, music, and movies are imbued with the gravity of good and evil, heaven and hell. This subordination produces sweepingly broad binary categorisations. For example, dancing is good or evil; music is good or evil; television is good or evil. Such matters are imbued with ultimate concern. They may be perceived with a 'black and white' binary logic and construed as matters of heaven and hell. For example, a number of apostates from Southern Baptist forms of fundamentalism identify a former belief that all dancing is evil: 'Dancing became a point of confusion for me. We were not allowed to dance at school, but I went home for weekends... I expected [dancing] to be a sinful, sensuous grinding of bodies that would heat up lustful thoughts and lead directly to sex'<sup>lvii</sup>. The binary extends to subordinate contents because of the gravity of the ultimate contents: Dancing, leads to premarital sex, which leads to hell.

The relationship between binary structuring and fundamentalist contents seems to be cyclical. The contents reinforce the structural style and the structural style reinforces the contents. Binary structuring gives rise to grand dichotomies which, when enshrined in culture, perpetuate binary thinking. This is not to deny the place of binary logic in religious thinking, nor is it to preclude a binary approach to the contents above. However, it is to suggest that binary logic dictates fundamentalist contents which in turn structure binary ways of thinking. The result is a self-perpetuating cycle of logic reflecting a particular style and structure. While this dynamic interaction occurs in all cultures, it is the relative strength, frequency, and permeation of the interaction that characterises fundamentalist cultures.

#### *Cognitive Equilibrium and Cultural Contents*

The contents of fundamentalist cultures characteristically suspend or compartmentalise the cognitive equilibrium between accommodation and assimilation. Fundamentalist contents create the illusion that the existing structure is perfectly able to assimilate all possible contents (past, present and future) encountered. There is no need for further accommodation because the received structure is perfectly adequate for all environments and contingencies. A Muslim apostate reflects on this closed epistemology as a characteristic of their former fundamentalism:

Just like other Muslims I used to believe that to learn about anything one has to go to the source. Of course the source of Islam is the Quran and the books written by Muslim scholars. Therefore, I felt no need to look elsewhere in order to find the truth, as I was convinced that I have already found it. As Muslims say '*Talabe ilm ba'd az wossule ma'loom mazmoom*'. The search of knowledge after gaining it is unnecessary.<sup>lviii</sup>

The fundamentalist contents that strengthen this illusion (that fundamentalist knowledge is final knowledge) usually pertain to revealed knowledge and mandated authority.

Revealed knowledge is knowledge received directly from a transcendent source. Mandated authority is

authority based on divine ordination. Contents supporting revealed knowledge passively counter any desire to accommodate. There is no higher form of knowledge than revealed knowledge because there is no higher source of knowledge than the Transcendent omniscient God. If knowledge may be attributed to an omniscient source, then all temporal restrictions and qualifications may be bypassed. For the fundamentalist, the knowledge of special revelation forms a perfect structure, superior to, and able to assimilate all empirical knowledge that may challenge the revelation. Therefore, accommodation is countered for no accommodation is deemed possible or necessary. The structuring power of contents is particularly apparent in fundamentalist cultures because of the unified source of contents. Fundamentalists tend to be people of one revealed book, which takes primacy in all matters of knowledge: 'So central are these texts even to everyday life that enclave members resort to 'bringing out the word,' that is, random selection of a page in order to induce instructions or omens for mundane choices or actions'<sup>lix</sup>. This authority is revealed in fundamentalist literature. Prominent apologist, Gleason Archer, writes in *Alleged Errors and Discrepancies in the Original Manuscripts of the Bible*: 'We must therefore conclude that *any* event or fact related in Scripture - whether it pertains to doctrine, science, or history - is to be accepted by the Christian as totally reliable and trustworthy, no matter what modern scientists or philosophers may think of it'<sup>lx</sup>. This source uniformity and authority is sometimes acknowledged as the key characteristic of fundamentalisms. Ralph Hood defines fundamentalism in *The Psychology of Fundamentalism*<sup>lxi</sup> with an 'intra-textual' model: fundamentalists are those whose thinking is structured by a text. Kathleen Boone's approach is similar. In *The Bible Tells Them So: The Discourse of Protestant Fundamentalism*, Boone writes: 'By viewing fundamentalism as a *tendency*, a habit of mind rather than a discrete movement or phenomenon, it is possible to discern a unified body of discourse, a body of discourse arising from belief in the sole authority of an inerrant Bible'<sup>lxii</sup>. The issue is inadvertently recognised by Korniejczuk who notes a potential clash between developmental structures and Biblical contents:

For people who genuinely believe in the existence of a transcendent God, in His intervention in human affairs, and in the divine inspiration of His Holy Word ...the course of their religious development may be different because they grow in their religious development adopting a biblical theoretical framework as their source of beliefs and as their basic conceptual presuppositions.<sup>lxiii</sup>

I am suggesting that fundamentalists *do not grow* in their religious development *because* of particular cultural contents. Scriptural texts are not independent of cognitive structure. Accordingly, they may be used to facilitate or arrest cognitive development through assimilation and accommodation. When combined with the fundamentalist doctrine of inerrancy and their tendency to use Scripture acontextually and literally, the resultant contents perpetuate a particular structure.

In Protestant fundamentalism, revealed knowledge is evidenced by a belief in 'inspired and inerrant Scripture'. In Pentecostal fundamentalism, it may manifest as a 'word of knowledge', or a 'prophetic vision'. In the colloquial discourse of these fundamentalisms, it is evidenced by such culturally embedded expressions as, 'God said it, I believe it, that settles it'. In formal discourse it is evidenced in the claims of apologists, such as Norman Geisler: 'To stray from the Scripture in faith or conduct is disloyalty to our Master. Recognition of the total truth and trustworthiness of Holy Scripture is essential to a full grasp and adequate confession of its authority'<sup>lxiv</sup>. Promulgation of the belief in a perfect structure is an effect of such claims. The structure is received rather than constructed or tested through a balanced dialectic between accommodation and assimilation. All the answers are contained in the culture's revealed text, therefore no empirical evidence contrary to the text need be admitted. Such a view may have some extreme manifestations.

There are perhaps few more dramatic cases of scriptural authority subordinating empirical knowledge than the practice of 'snake handling' in West Virginia. Church members take Scriptural literalism<sup>lxv</sup> and authority to the extreme while handling rattlesnakes and copperheads during the act of worship. There are recorded deaths from snakebite inflicted during these services. The continuing faith of the believers is perhaps testament to the primacy of belief over experience; assimilation outweighing accommodation. In such a case, fundamentalism subordinates empirical and rational knowledge with knowledge from revelation – the perfect structure. Contents that affirm the infallibility, inspiration, transcendence, and perfection of this structure passively inhibit accommodation. The use of revealed knowledge to reinforce the perfect structure belief is also evident in Islamic fundamentalism.

It is difficult to dissociate Islamic fundamentalism from moderate Islam in this regard, as nearly all Muslims consider the Koran to be the inspired word of the transcendent Allah<sup>lxvi</sup>. However, it is possible to observe its more extreme manifestations and applications. For example, the more extreme fundamentalisms such as the Sunni Faramawiyah prohibit education through any other text than the Koran<sup>lxvii</sup>. Revealed knowledge interpreted with a text-centred approach, asserts its primacy over all other epistemologies. The dislocation of

sacred text from its historical and human construction serves to inhibit engagement with accommodative or potentially dissonance-causing contents. Arguably, religious believers of a single revealed book have a disposition towards the type of assimilative cognition and illusion of perfect structure that characterises fundamentalism.

Contents that passively counter the accommodative process are also evidenced and enculturated in fundamentalist contents concerning human authority. Mandated authority is related to revealed knowledge, though it concerns a human rather than textual medium. The transmission, interpretation and protection of revealed knowledge are tied to mandated authority. Examples are found in the Papal authority and the apostolic succession of Catholicism and in the succession of the caliphate in some expressions of Islam. Gabriel Almond describes the contents that impute authority to leaders in fundamentalism:

The typical form of fundamentalist organisations is charismatic, a leader-follower relationship in which the follower imputes extraordinary qualities, heavenly grace, special access to the deity, deep and complete understanding of sacred texts to the great rav, the rebbe, the imam, the virtuous jurist, the minister. One man is set apart from all others... the distance between charismatic leaders and followers is illustrated in body language and rituals such as kissing the hand of the emir or touching the prayer garment of the rebbe.<sup>lxviii</sup>

Such descriptions characterise the 'size, power' features of the locus of authority in early stages of development<sup>lxix</sup>. The observance of divinely mandated authority implies that knowledge received from authority is superior to, and able to assimilate all empirical knowledge. In Fowler's typology, development is indicated by a 'more self-reliant' locus of authority. Contrarily, fundamentalist contents create a heightened perception of a perfect structure and a passive defence against accommodation. Obedience to a human authority perceived as being imbued with divine authority can lead to the illusion of a perfect structure. In this scenario, no content or teaching beyond the authority figure need be considered or accommodated. The cognitive effect of such contents is that the structure is perceived as whole, complete, and perfect: immune to accommodating dissonant contents.

There are other counter-accommodative contents that guard the cultural boundaries of fundamentalist discourse. They cannot be bypassed; they must be journeyed through to exit a fundamentalist culture and mindset. These contents have been described as mind-controlling devices in literature on the psychology of restrictive religion<sup>lxx</sup>. Most often, they concern doubt, deception, and punishment. These three strategies for arresting cognitive change are not limited to religious fundamentalisms but are rigorously employed in fundamentalisms due to the perceived life and death, heaven and hell consequences for incorrect belief.

In Protestant fundamentalism, doubt is embodied by the figure of Thomas. The 'doubting Thomas' is seen as inferior for 'blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed'<sup>lxxi</sup>. To doubt is to be 'tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming'<sup>lxxii</sup>. The causes of doubt are often questioned and the integrity of the doubter brought into question. It is difficult for a fundamentalist to accept that a person may struggle to accept their truth on intellectual grounds. Fundamentalist author, Josh McDowell, writes of doubt leading to rejection of faith in his seminal *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*: 'The rejection of Christ is often not so much of the 'mind,' but of the 'will'; not so much 'I can't,' but 'I won't'...I have found that most people reject Christ for one or more of the following reasons: 1. Ignorance...2. Pride...3. Moral Problem'<sup>lxxiii</sup>. Cultural contents of fundamentalism that stigmatise doubt and question the inherent integrity of the doubter serve to counter accommodative influences and repress development. They reinforce assimilation by repressing the consideration of potentially accommodative contents.

The second group of contents that actively counter accommodation concerns deception. Fear of being deceived is heightened when the deception is spiritualised. Deception is a common theme in fundamentalist discourses manifest in such concerns as 'false prophets, false apostles, false teachers, deceivers, false angels of light, wolves in sheep's clothing' and for some Protestant fundamentalists – the anti-Christ. Concern about deception creates a climate of suspicion in Protestant fundamentalism. In a structure where absolute truth is paramount and problems of interpretation rarely legitimated, dissent attributed to spiritual deception and demonisation of the other is commonplace. The narratives of apostates from fundamentalism evidence a fear that their questions and doubts are the products of supernatural (demonic and satanic) attacks on their cognitive faculties. One apostate from Christian fundamentalism recalls, 'I can remember being in tears wondering if I was wrong or being deceived or going to hell or whatever'<sup>lxxiv</sup>; another writes, 'I couldn't simply dismiss this perception the way I had been taught, chalking it [doubts] up to 'Satan disguised as an angel of light'<sup>lxxv</sup>. An apostate from Muslim fundamentalism recounts, 'All I said was 'god forgive me' (astakhfur allah). I felt that a demon (which Islam believes in) must have whispered doubts in my ear. I was in shock'<sup>lxxvi</sup>. The fear of demonic deception

has a paralysing effect that protects the fundamentalist discourse from the engagement of further doubts. It makes the discourse impervious to conflicting contents, reasoned objections, and contradictory experiences, as they may all be attributed to supernatural deception.

The collective effect of such contents is to counter accommodative operations in the domain of religious cognition. Thus, these culturally embedded contents indirectly perpetuate an individual's particular way of structuring the world by repressing critical analysis of potentially dissonant contents. The dissonance and doubt of normal 'growth pains' are interpreted in fundamentalisms as 'warning signs' of a change far less benign than a more adapted state of equilibrium. The two illustrative examples mentioned in this section highlight the need for a more focussed, empirical and rigorous studies of the interaction between cognition and culture in fundamentalism<sup>lxxvii</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to present grounds for a synthesis of cultural and cognitive perspectives on religious fundamentalism. This synthesis of perspectives serves to focus the term *fundamentalism*. Its popular usage is too broad and encompassing, not because it is applied in diverse cultural contexts, but because the specific contents and cognitive operations that underlie the intuitive abstraction are too poorly defined. A synthesis of perspectives on fundamentalism will perhaps lead to an expansion and a contraction of the term's usage. The expansion will see its increasing application to a variety of cultural contexts including non-religious cultures. The contraction will see its disambiguation from contents in cultures that have been stigmatised by loose associations.

Finally, I have suggested that fundamentalisms' characteristic cultural contents suppress the adaptive dialectic between accommodation and assimilation. Perhaps, the only grounds for assessment of fundamentalisms' adaptive strategies are situational and contextual. Arguably, fundamentalism's adaptive strategy (not to accommodate) is becoming less feasible and less appropriate in the 'shrinking village' of globalisation. Ironically, the proselytised expansion of fundamentalisms has contributed in the exposure of one fundamentalism to another. The culturally embedded contents that perpetuate assimilation and inhibit accommodation make for potentially violent encounters between fundamentalist cultures; and between fundamentalisms, modernisms and postmodernisms. Cultural and cognitive perspectives must engage in synthesis in order to more fully understand the interactive forces that produce fundamentalisms. This understanding may bring further clarity, if not resolution to the unavoidable dialogue *with* fundamentalisms and *between* fundamentalisms in the modern milieu.

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- <sup>iii</sup> Anthony Giddens, *Durkheim*. (London : Fontana Modern Masters 1986), 12.
- <sup>iv</sup> Jason Slone, *Theological Incorrectness: Why Religious People Believe What They Shouldn't* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 121.
- <sup>v</sup> Heinz Streib, 'Faith development theory revisited: The religious styles Perspective', *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 11(3), 143-158. (2001), 144.
- <sup>vi</sup> Norman Ross, *Culture and Cognition: Implications of Theory and Practice* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.2004), 2.
- <sup>vii</sup> For example - Ernest Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), and James Barr, *Fundamentalism* (London: SCM Press, 1981).
- <sup>viii</sup> Ruthven, *Fundamentalism*, 27.
- <sup>ix</sup> Karen Armstrong, *The Battle for God: Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2000).
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- <sup>xvi</sup> Streib, 'Faith development theory revisited'
- <sup>xvii</sup> Slone, *Why Religious People Believe Things They Shouldn't*, 123.
- <sup>xviii</sup> James Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1981).
- <sup>xix</sup> These stages include: Intuitive-Projective Faith, Mythic-Literal Faith, Synthetic-Conventional Faith, Individuative-Reflective Faith, Conjunctive Faith, and Universalising Faith. Each stage is the collective account of seven aspects of faith. These include: Form of Logic, Perspective Taking, Form of Moral Judgment, Bounds of Social Awareness, Locus of Authority, Form of World Coherence, and Symbolic Function.
- <sup>xx</sup> Robert Shinn, 'Fundamentalism as a case of arrested development' In J.J. Selvidge (Ed.). *Fundamentalism Today: What Makes it so Attractive?* (Eglin, Ill.: Brethren Press, 1984) 91-98.
- <sup>xxi</sup> Shinn refers to Fowler's stages of faith, claiming: 'Fundamentalism manifests characteristics of stage 3. In a more enlightened form or phase, commonly called evangelicalism, it manifests a few of the characteristics of stage 4'. – 'Fundamentalism as a case of arrested development', 92.
- <sup>xxii</sup> Jean Piaget, *Genetic Epistemology* (New York: Norton, 1970).
- <sup>xxiii</sup> *Ibid.* 2.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1957).
- <sup>xxv</sup> Phillips, *The Origins of Intellect: Piaget's Theory*. (2nd edn, San Francisco: W.H. Freeman and Co. 1975) 9.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Patricia Miller, *Theories of Developmental Psychology* (3rd edn, New York: W.H. Freeman and Company, 1993) 38.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 149-150.
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Streib, 'Faith development theory revisited', replaces the word *stages* with *styles* to reflect a more differentiated and phenomenologically reflective approach to religious development.
- <sup>xxix</sup> *Ibid.* 154.
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- <sup>xliii</sup> *Ibid.* 17.
- <sup>xliv</sup> Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 272.
- <sup>xliv</sup> *Ibid.*, 273.
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<sup>xlvii</sup> Ibid. 52.

<sup>xlviii</sup> Andrew Newberg, Eugene D'Aquili and Vincent Rause, *Why God Won't go Away: Brain Science and the Biology of Belief*. (New York: The Ballantine Publishing Group, 2001).

<sup>xlix</sup> Ibid. 50.

<sup>i</sup> Kathleen Boone, *The Bible Tells Them So: The Discourse of Protestant Fundamentalism*. (Albany NY: The State University of New York Press, 1989), 47.

<sup>ii</sup> All biblical texts cited are from the *New International Version* (New York: Zondervan, 1984): For example, 2 Corinthians 6:14: 'Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?'; Other examples are found in Romans 16:17; 2 Thessalonians 3:6; and 2 Thessalonians 3:14.

<sup>iii</sup> All Koranic references are from the translation of M.H. Shakir trans. (Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, Inc., 1983). For example, Sura 5:51: 'O you who believe! do not take the Jews and the Christians for friends; they are friends of each other; and whoever amongst you takes them for a friend, then surely he is one of them; surely Allah does not guide the unjust people'.

<sup>liii</sup> Bat Ye'or, *Islam and Dhimmitude*. (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Press, 2002) 379.

<sup>liv</sup> Ibid. 379.

<sup>lv</sup> Quoted in Boone, *The Bible Tells Them So*, 47.

<sup>lvi</sup> A popular paraphrase of Romans 10:9.

<sup>lvii</sup> Raoul Adam, *Apostasy from Fundamentalism Project: Coded Data*, (University of Queensland: Unpublished, 2006) 232.

<sup>lviii</sup> Ibid. 268.

<sup>lix</sup> Almond, Appleby and Sivan, *Strong Religion*, 76.

<sup>lx</sup> Quoted in Boone, *The Bible Tells Them So*, 25.

<sup>lxi</sup> Ralph Hood, Hill, and Williamson, *The Psychology of Religious Fundamentalism* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2005).

<sup>lxii</sup> Boone, *The Bible Tells them So*, 10.

<sup>lxiii</sup> Korniejczuk, *Psychological Theories of Religious Development: A Seventh-Day Adventist Perspective*. [Paper prepared for the International Faith and Learning Seminar]. (Lincoln, NB: Institute for Christian Teaching, 1993) 11-12.

<sup>lxiv</sup> Norman Geisler, *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979) 493.

<sup>lxv</sup> These are the verses most commonly used to justify the practice: Mark 16:17-18: 'They will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well'; Luke 10:19: 'I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you'.

<sup>lxvi</sup> Ruthven, *Fundamentalism*, 79.

<sup>lxvii</sup> Dekmejian, *Islam in revolution: Fundamentalism in the Arab World* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1981) 79.

<sup>lxviii</sup> Almond, Appleby and Siven, *Strong Religion*, 98.

<sup>lxix</sup> Fowler, *Stages of Faith*.

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<sup>lxxi</sup> John 20:29

<sup>lxxii</sup> Ephesians 4:14

<sup>lxxiii</sup> Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands A Verdict*, (San Bernadino, California, Here's Life Publishers, 1979) 10-11.

<sup>lxxiv</sup> Raoul Adam, *Apostasy from Fundamentalism Project: Coded Data*, 205.

<sup>lxxv</sup> Ibid. 203.

<sup>lxxvi</sup> Ibid. 267.

<sup>lxxvii</sup> A task currently underway in the author's cognitive analysis of apostasy from religious fundamentalisms - Adam, *A Cognitive Developmental Analysis of Apostasy from Religious Fundamentalisms*, (University of Queensland, Unpublished dissertation, 2006).