



## Fundamentalism

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### I. Profile Report

1. **Name:** Fundamentalism
2. **Founder:** No one person can be credited with founding Fundamentalism. Nor does any single group comprise the history of the movement. The label 'Fundamentalist' is used as both an adjective and a noun. Accordingly, trying to understand the phenomena requires more than knowing a few names and dates. Curtis Lee Laws, editor of a conservative publication entitled *Watchman-Examiner* is credited with coining the term "fundamentalism."
3. **Origin of the Concept:** The term 'fundamentalism' has its origin in a series of pamphlets published between 1910 and 1915. Entitled "The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth," these booklets were authored by leading evangelical churchmen and were circulated free of charge among clergymen and seminarians. By and large, fundamentalism was a response to the loss of influence traditional revivalism experienced in America during the early years of the twentieth century. This loss of influence, coupled with the liberalizing trends of German biblical criticism and the encroachment of Darwinian theories about the origin of the universe, prompted a response by conservative churchmen. The result was the pamphlets. In 1920, a journalist and Baptist layman named Curtis Lee Laws appropriated the term 'fundamentalist' as a designation for those who were ready "to do battle royal for the Fundamentals."
4. **Date of Birth:** Second decade of the 20th century
5. **Birth Place:** The United States
6. **Year Founded:** Concept coined in 1920
7. **Sacred or Revered Texts :**

*The Bible* is the sacred text of the Christian Fundamentalists. Indeed, if there is one single thing which binds Fundamentalists together, it is their insistence that the Bible is to be understood as literally true. Further, Fundamentalists see themselves as the guardians of the truth, usually to the exclusion of others' interpretation of the Bible. Fundamentalism in other faith traditions similarly proclaims guardianship of truth.
8. **Cult or Sect:** Negative sentiments are typically implied when the concepts "cult" and "sect" are employed in popular discourse. Since the Religious Movements Homepage seeks to promote religious tolerance and appreciation of the positive benefits of pluralism and religious diversity in human cultures, we encourage the use of alternative concepts that do not carry implicit negative

stereotypes. For a more detailed discussion of both scholarly and popular usage of the concepts "cult" and "sect," please visit our [Conceptualizing "Cult" and "Sect"](#) page, where you will find additional links to related issues.

9. **Size of Group:** The size of this group depends on how fundamentalism is defined. Conservatively estimated, there are at least 30 million Christian fundamentalists in the U.S. alone. Fundamentalism stands with Pentecostalism as the most successful religious movements of the 20th century.

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## II. Problems in Analyzing Fundamentalism:

One can hardly read a weekly news magazine without encountering the term 'fundamentalist' with reference to some group active on the world stage. In fact, the popularity of the term is part of the problem. Several scholars have noted the difficulty inherent in using an imprecise term like 'fundamentalism' to describe groups as different as the Christian Coalition and the Nation of Islam.

Jeffrey K. Hadden has identified four types of fundamentalism. First, *theological fundamentalism* was the Christian theological movement concerned with defending traditional Christian doctrine against modern thinking. *Political fundamentalism* is a combination of theological fundamentalism and the personal commitments of religious adherents to combat worldly vices. Manifestations of political fundamentalism include much of the activity in the temperance movement or the virulent anticommunism of Gerald L.K. Smith. Political fundamentalism suffered a major setback by their defeat at the Scopes Monkey trial. These two types of fundamentalism melded together to combine a caricature of culturally unenlightened individuals bent on preserving tradition at the expense of progress. This *cultural fundamentalism* was cynically portrayed by social critics such as H.L. Mencken and novelists such as Sinclair Lewis. William Jennings Bryan served as the prototype for Mencken after the debacle of the Scopes trial in Tennessee. The political activity engaged in by fundamentalists invited comparison to other religiously motivated groups around the world. Accordingly, *global fundamentalism* as a phenomena denotes many religiously motivated politically active groups existing in a variety of religious traditions and political systems.

**Defining Fundamentalism:** Given the many disparate uses of the concept, it is not surprising that fundamentalism has not been easy to define. Several recent works are helpful in developing a conceptual understanding of the phenomenon. Three important works are examined here:

**Bruce Lawrence, *Defenders of God: The Fundamentalist Revolt Against the Modern Age***

Lawrence defines fundamentalism as " *the affirmation of religious authority as holistic and absolute, admitting of neither criticism nor reduction; it is expressed through the collective demand that specific creedal and ethical dictates derived from scripture be publicly recognized and legally enforced.* "

Lawrence argues that fundamentalism is a specific kind of religious ideology. It is antimodern, but not antimodernist. In other words, it rejects the philosophical rationalism

and individualism that accompany modernity, but it takes full advantage of certain technological advances that also characterize the modern age. The most consistent denominator is opposition to Enlightenment values. Lawrence believes that fundamentalism is a world-wide phenomena and that it must be compared in various contexts before it can be understood or explained with any clarity.

Lawrence ends his general discussion by listing five "family resemblances" common to fundamentalism. 1) Fundamentalists are advocates of a minority viewpoint. They see themselves as a righteous remnant. Even when they are numerically a majority, they perceive themselves as a minority. 2) They are oppositional and confrontational towards both secularists and "wayward" religious followers. 3) They are secondary level male elites led invariably by charismatic males. 4) Fundamentalists generate their own technical vocabulary. 5) Fundamentalism has historical antecedents, but no ideological precursor.

**The Fundamentalism Project, directed and edited by Martin E. Marty and Scott Appleby** (see bibliography below for publications resulting from this project)

The American Academy of Arts and Sciences funded a multiyear project that brought scholars from around the world together to study Fundamentalism. Ultimately they produced 5 volumes containing almost 8,000 pages of material. Admitting some difficulty with the term, the project opts to use it anyway for a variety of reasons. Essentially, they argue that it is commonly accepted, here to stay, and the best term anyone can come up with for this phenomena. The last chapter of volume 1, *Fundamentalisms Observed*, discusses the "family resemblances" found in the various chapters.

These family resemblances include:

1. religious idealism as basis for personal and communal identity;
2. fundamentalists understand truth to be revealed and unified;
3. it is intentionally scandalous, (similar to Lawrence's point about language -- outsiders cannot understand it);
4. fundamentalists envision themselves as part of a cosmic struggle;
5. they seize on historical moments and reinterpret them in light of this cosmic struggle;
6. they demonize their opposition and are reactionary;
7. fundamentalists are selective in what parts of their tradition and heritage they stress;
8. they are led by males;
9. they envy modernist cultural hegemony and try to overturn the distribution of power.

The Fundamentalism Project enumerates several more of these "family resemblances" but most are represented in this abbreviated list.

The last several chapters of the final volume, *Fundamentalisms Comprehended*, attempts to delineate several properties of Fundamentalism with the research of the previous 7,500 pages in mind. Appleby, Emmanuel Sivan, and Gabriel Almond list 5 ideological characteristics and 4 organizational characteristics of fundamentalism. The Five ideological characteristics are:

1. fundamentalists are concerned "first" with the erosion of religion and its proper role in society;
2. fundamentalism is selective of their tradition and what part of modernity they accept

- or choose to react against;
3. they embrace some form of Manicheanism (dualism);
  4. fundamentalists stress absolutism and inerrancy in their sources of revelation; and
  5. they opt for some form of Millennialism or Messianism.

The organizational characteristics include:

1. an elect or chosen membership;
2. sharp group boundaries;
3. charismatic authoritarian leaders; and
4. mandated behavioral requirements.

### **Jeffrey K. Hadden and Anson Shupe, "Secularization and Fundamentalism Reconsidered"**

At about the same time that the Fundamentalism Project was getting underway, Hadden and Anson Shupe offered the following definition of fundamentalism. It is "a proclamation of reclaimed authority over a sacred tradition which is to be reinstated as an antidote for a society that has strayed from its cultural moorings." Hadden and Shupe note that fundamentalists refute the split between sacred and secular that characterizes modernist thinking. It also involves a plan to bring religion back to center stage in public policy decisions.

As the Fundamentalism Project makes clear, in every corner of the world and in every major faith tradition, there are groups identified by some as fundamentalists. Hadden and Shupe argue that fundamentalism is an attempt to draw upon a religious tradition to cope with and reshape an already changing world. The question arises: What changes are so world wide that a reactive movement like fundamentalism can be found anywhere in the world? The answer, according to Hadden and Shupe, is globalization. The range of religious responses to globalization explains fundamentalism's global presence.

Hadden and Shupe argue that around the world there is a "common process of secularizing social change." This process contains "the very seeds of a reaction that brings religion back into the heart of concerns about public policy. The secular...is also the cause of resacralization...[which] often takes fundamentalistic forms."

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### **III. Links to Fundamentalism Sites**

Since Fundamentalism is not organized as fundamentalism per se, but as many disparate groups, Internet sites tend to be equally disparate. The listing included here includes examples of denominational groups, independent churches, and a sampling of anti-fundamentalist pages. We have not included non-Christian groups, e.g. "Islamic Fundamentalists."

#### Southern Baptist Convention

The Southern Baptist Convention is the largest fundamentalist body in the U.S. This home page

links to the vast expanse of Southern Baptist organizational divisions and includes a history of the denomination.

<http://www.sbcnet.org/index.htm>

#### Bob Jones University

Bob Jones University, founded in 1927 by Bob Jones, Sr., has remained one of the most conservative institutions of higher education in the U.S. The school received a flurry of publicity during the Presidential Primary season of 2000 at the result of a campaign stop by George W. Bush. You can read President Bob Jones III's [response](#) to the media the institution received. Also of interest is a brief [history and philosophy](#) statement. Bob Jones University also has a substantial archive of fundamentalism materials. See the The Fundamentalism File link just below. <http://www.bju.edu>

#### The Fundamentalism File

Bob Jones University is one of the oldest and strictest fundamentalist educational institutions. This link goes to information about a fundamentalist archive containing 80,000 documents in the BJU library.

<http://www.bju.edu/resources/library/ffile.htm>

#### Bible Believer's Resource Page

A web site of the Fundamental Evangelistic Association provides commentary on many topics of interest to fundamentalists. Click on "Biblical Fundamentalism" for the FEAs perspective on the history of fundamentalism and their take on many contemporary preachers who they see as having strayed from the truth.

<http://www.tcsn.net/kcondron/>

#### Bible Believers' Home Page

A quite extensive site of writings of bedrock fundamentalists.

<http://www.biblebelievers.com/>

#### Lecture on Fundamentalism

This is a lecture by Professor Terry Matthews of Wake Forest University on the history of Fundamentalism in the United States.

<http://www.wfu.edu/~matthetl/perspectives/twentyone.html>

#### The Rise of Fundamentalism

This article by Grant Wacker, respected Duke historian of American religion, begins by defining fundamentalism and then offers important historical perspective. As part of the National Humanities Center web series on Divining America: Religion and the National Culture, it offers access to excellent instructional materials.

<http://ipmwww.ncsu.edu:8080/tserve/twenty/tkeyinfo/fundam.htm>

#### The Christian Right

This in another article by Grant Wacker. It defines, locates, and offers a succinct overview of the religious right in the U.S. As part of the National Humanities Center web series on Divining America: Religion and the National Culture, it offers access to excellent instructional materials.

[http://ipmwww.ncsu.edu:8080/tserve/twenty/tkeyinfo/chr\\_rght.htm](http://ipmwww.ncsu.edu:8080/tserve/twenty/tkeyinfo/chr_rght.htm)

#### Thomas Road Baptist Church

Jerry Falwell became one of the visible fundamentalist preachers in the United States in the early

1980s as the result of his founding the Moral Majority, a politically conservative organization. This home page of Falwell's church in Lynchburg, Virginia provides an archive of his sermons.  
<http://www.inmind.com/trbc/>

#### Baptists International Network Homepage

An apparently unaffiliated page that links lots of Baptist resources on the Internet.  
<http://www.baptists.org>

#### Madalyn O'Hair on Fundamentalism

Madalyn Murry O'Hair, founder of American Atheists, has been one of the most outspoken opponents of organized religion in the second half of the 20th century. This is the full text of an address she gave on fundamentalism at Memphis State University in 1986.  
[http://rogue.northwest.com/~crt/writ/fund"ism.htm](http://rogue.northwest.com/~crt/writ/fund)

#### Why the "Fundamentalist" Approach to Religion Must Be Wrong

This article is found on the home page of Scott Bidstrup who describes himself as a "secular humanist liberal gay cowboy." In this and other articles on his site, Bidstrup attacks fundamentalists for being intolerant while dishing out a good bit of religious bigotry of his own. This is a good example of an abundance of anti-fundamentalist materials on the Internet.  
<http://pe.net/~bidstrup/religion.htm>

#### The Fundamentalism Project

This is a listing of the table of contents of the five volumes of The Fundamentalism Project mentioned in the text and bibliography above.  
<http://www.press.uchicago.edu/Complete/Series/FP.html>

#### Inherit the Monkey Trial

This is a *Christianity Today* interview with historian Ed Larson about his Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate Over Science and Religion* (1997), and his comments on why Christians should be taught evolution. The page includes several valuable links on the the Scopes Trial, legal cases on evolution and other related matters. A valuable resource.  
<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2000/006/2.50.html>

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## V. Select Video Materials on Fundamentalism

*Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory* (1992).

Written and narrated by Randall Balmer (author of book by same title: Oxford, 1989). A three part tour of varieties of evangelicalism in America produced by a Gateway Films Vision Video in conjunction with WTTW/Chicago (aired on