

Considering Fundamentalism

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It is hard to accept the breaking off of a chain of logic that might otherwise be available to discuss the rationality of one position versus another. Suddenly, in the midst of a discussion of competing points, the flow of logic stops. It is as if the other person got off the train, without warning, and got onto another one going in another direction. The discussion comes to a screeching halt because the other side has appealed to a position that can no longer be subjected to common terms of reason. They have made the leap of faith—in some traditions called the “God trick”—to a place impervious to earthly reason. It is a matter of their faith that an unerring principle, a belief system, an ancient text can be called upon unconditionally to support their side. There can be no appeal.

How We Got Started

This collection came together serendipitously shortly after September 11, 2001, when two of us were discussing the rising paranoia that billowed out like toxic dust from the fall of the twin towers. In the aftermath of 9/11 and amid increased sensitivity to U.S. politics, our work as critical thinkers in the academy seemed more intense. We felt the soot and grittiness of the fall settle over us as we tried to define a space from which we could continue to critique hegemonic social practices, of which the complexities of U.S. foreign policy were one example. The debate over what had happened in the U.S. was so polarized that it was hard to say anything without seeming to side with either the destructive acts of terrorism or the hysterical notion of a pristine, victimized United States.

We had each been working independently on the issue of Christian fundamentalism and were alarmed by the influence of fundamentalist thought on public events. In the post-9/11 climate, little if any attention was being paid to the inroads Christian fundamentalism was making in local and international politics. The focus had become riveted on “Islamic fundamentalism” as the only form of extreme religious behaviour. Even though, for instance, Christian fundamentalist, Jerry Falwell had stated publicly that “America got what it deserved” (Saunders 2001: A2)—condemning the fact that gays and lesbians have increasing access to rights, that abortion is a woman’s choice and other such “evidence” of the world in decay—the focus barely moved from “Islamic fundamentalism.” Our third editor joined us and expanded the discussion to other types of fundamentalism, for example, economic and Jewish.

As a result of our informal discussions in the fall of 2001, we applied for and received funding from a University of Regina initiative, the Transdisciplinary Project, to host a symposium entitled, "The Basics of Fundamentalism." We invited other colleagues to reflect on and write about fundamentalism and the meanings they drew from it in their own areas of expertise. We all wanted to know more about the trains (of thought) going in other directions.

The term "fundamentalism" is most frequently used when referring to systems of religious thought such as are found in types of Christianity, Islam and Judaism. The term, however, is not easy to define, nor is it limited to religious contexts. Fundamentalism can also be used to describe particular types of national pride, cultural exclusion, xenophobia, economic theory and other systems characterized by strongly held beliefs, group formation, boundary development and prescriptive practices. Fundamentalism of all types is increasingly under discussion following recent world events, but some issues remain unexplored. Talk of fundamentalism often lacks precision, leaving unexamined the implications of fundamentalist practices. How can we use the term so that it has analytical meaning and is not just a label used by self-proclaimed non-fundamentalists?

This book has three aims: 1) to explore the meaning of fundamentalism in religious, social, cultural and economic settings; 2) to study concrete examples of fundamentalist practices; and 3) to examine the social and political effects of fundamentalism in Canada and elsewhere. We maintain that fundamentalism is not limited to areas of religious practice but also describes the ideological positions of various social and cultural movements. We invite a multidimensional understanding of who or what may be called fundamentalist and the dilemmas that this naming creates. We also consider the social and cultural effects that fundamentalist thought and practice have for adherents and non-adherents. Whereas some contributors to this volume are concerned with definitions, others examine fundamentalist systems for what they accomplish, deny or permit in a social sense. We are concerned to ensure that we do not label as fundamentalists only those with whom we part company ideologically. Conversely, we consider whether the contributors to this book and the directions they take could be characterized as fundamentalist by those whom the writers are describing. Finally, we contend that the more complete understanding that we are working towards here is a necessary project for contesting the claims of fundamentalism.

Fundamentalist movements profess to be upholding some kind of orthodoxy or right practice and regard themselves as instrumental in preserving the tradition from erosion. Even though they claim to uphold a sacred past, their procedures and institutions are quite new or unprecedented and actually constitute a reinterpretation of the past. Fundamen-

talist movements tend toward self-separation or exclusivity, as well as prescriptive distinctions that mark adherents from outsiders. Their practices also claim, by tacit or explicit decree, a masculine hegemony, which results in a male-dominated leadership or authority. J.D. Van der Vyver (1996: 1) contends that “these trends, seen in isolation, would not necessarily constitute fundamentalism of any particular kind. It is the combination of all, or most, of those trends that would attract the fundamentalist badge.”

Although the fundamentalist label can be applied to many social groups and processes, a reference to religious fundamentalism can provide clues to considering the concept more broadly. For example, the term “Christian fundamentalism” has been used in North America, correctly or not, in reference to the Christian Right, which in popular media is sometimes portrayed as intolerant, extreme and anti-pluralistic (Bolce and DeMajo 1999). Politically, the Christian Right is also associated with the views of the Canadian Alliance in Canada¹ and the Republican Party in the United States. Whether the Christian Right is really fundamentalist is a matter not only of definition but also of perception. These perceptions of fundamentalism operate at a mass level and provide social actors with broad definitions for describing who is siding with whom. Although the term fundamentalist is imprecise and somewhat overworked, it is nevertheless helpful across movements, which although they may have different aims, still “bear a strong family resemblance” (Armstrong 2001b: 17).

The essays in this book investigate the nature of fundamentalism expanded beyond the usual frame of religious experience to include areas such as market economics and hegemonic masculinity. While none of the contributors claims to be an expert on fundamentalism, each is committed to studying a topic that contends with some form of fundamentalist practice. The commonality among us is that we all share an orientation that can be described as feminist, anti-racist and anti-oppressive. In the midst of our various forms of liberatory and/or anti-oppressive activity and scholarship, our work bumps up against some type of fundamentalist thinking. Each area of expertise—economics, gender relations, ethnic studies, Aboriginal politics, nationalism and religious studies—is made clearer, brought into sharper relief or simply shown in a different light by the application of a fundamentalist lens.

Each chapter reflects an aspect of personal experience and involvement, including for some a certain vulnerability, that makes fundamentalism and this treatment of it more than an academic affair. Some experiences come from insider knowledge gained in former times of fundamentalist systems. For other authors, connections with fundamentalist communities, such as family and friends, are still on-going and continue to serve important purposes in their lives. For these authors, there is understandable reluctance to externalize a critique that may be read as a betrayal of

their own culture. There may even be negative personal and political repercussions in providing insider criticism of already vulnerable groups.

A similar public/private complexity is described by Linda Kintz (1997), who as a feminist, writes critically of her experiences of living with and researching the lives of conservative, right-wing Christians in the United States. Kintz understands the deep sense of belonging that is experienced by adherents of this religious group; she makes explicit the nature of the public/private appeal of a reactionary spiritual movement even while offering her feminist critique. She closes her book by describing her response to hearing a voice-mail message from an older woman friend, who has invited her to an anti-abortion demonstration. Kintz is torn by the familiarity and the revulsion that she simultaneously feels:

The mother's voice, at least as this culture teaches it to us, is like the nightingale's song, its promise of fullness symbolically overwhelming me with passion while the mother's actual place—the fact that masculine hatred of her has constructed the edifice of that symbolic power in the first place—leaves me both dizzy with desire for her and devastated by what she represents. (Kintz 1997: 272)

It requires courage and intense honesty to speak critically from an insider position about that to which one is still attached, especially if the attachment is in some oppositional or conflicted way. Externalizing the critique with the level of care found in this volume is evidence that the topics capture us still. The stance of disinterested observer is always an impossibility and nowhere more so than in public and private expression on fundamentalism.

Why is this Investigation Important?

Fundamentalism captures our attention for many reasons. It is perhaps the closed-ness of fundamentalism that one notices first, as it rubs up against an ideological assumption of modernity: that modernity itself is a construct with a low tolerance for intolerance. A lack of critical reflection characterizes fundamentalist beliefs. Ghassan Hage (2001: 30) offers the following, “critical reflexivity is *a priori* negative since it implies that the self [and a particular cause] can be questioned or changed. Fundamentalism is clearly more concerned with the never-changing nature” of its particular expressions—patriarchy, religious orthodoxy, nationalism, ethnicity, market economics. Inevitability, essentialism and fore-ordained status are a few of the cornerstones of a fundamentalist belief system that by definition are not open to debate. Reflection is stifled by convincing insiders that they are imperilled by outsiders who are essentially unlike them. Ironically, the ultimate failure to construct the dangerous “other” is a source of continuing

tension both within and without the fundamentalist project, as Carol Schick (chapter 11) explains in her work on public debates over minority rights in schools. She concludes that it is precisely the inability to establish the firm boundaries on which fundamentalist identities and discourses depend that is troubling both for fundamentalists themselves as well as for those outsiders who negotiate the public spaces which fundamentalists claim.

An examination of fundamentalism is important because of the dangerous potential in our society for increasing kinds of violence, of which the invasion of Iraq is a significant example. The prospect of violence has at least two aspects. First, although most fundamentalist groups do not openly espouse violence against their detractors, the stand of religious fundamentalists against justice issues such as homosexuality, birth control and abortion provides licence to the fanatical among their ranks as well as to the irreligious. The repressive aspect of fundamentalism works against marginalized groups and makes them easy targets for the frustration and anger of anyone whose sense of entitlement has not been fulfilled. These acts of violence may seem, at first, to have little to do with fundamentalism, except for the exclusionary talk or the racist, sexist and homophobic examples of “righteous” people. At this time in North America, it is difficult to imagine widespread retrieval of images of Islam without it also releasing prejudice and racism.

Second, religious fundamentalism as representative of an ultra-conservative agenda is worth paying attention to because it is one of the pieces necessary for the development of a fascist state. Although many mainstream conservative Christians wish to be distinguished as separate from the extreme Right, the theological basics are the same: biblical inerrancy and the belief that sooner or later they will be “the saved” (Herman 1997). In Europe prior to World War II, a well organized, extreme right-wing movement was a significant part of the eventual rise of fascism. Religious emphases were merged with nationalism and overt discrimination against minorities—homosexuals, Jews, Gypsies and communists (Swomley 1995: 4). Today, the apocalyptic vision of religious fundamentalists manifests itself in violence against secular society and others identified as enemies, such as is seen in the actions of “Operation Rescue and the lambs of God which engage in terrorist tactics to intimidate women, physicians, and their families; and the Coalition on Revival, which advocates execution of adulterers, homosexuals, and others” (Swomely 1995: 4). The cultivation of violent theologies and a profound sense of disaffection, anger and resentment cannot be safely ignored by any society (Armstrong 2001b). Swomley (1995: 5) concludes: “The purpose of these radical religious demands is not to improve morality or end secularism but to merge the power functions of the state with a particular religious expression and therefore lay the groundwork for a theocracy.”

Fundamentalism shares with fascism a nostalgic mythology of an earlier state of purity and glory, an exclusionary exaltation of the authentic people, the idea of the primacy of the homogeneous whole with a concomitant diminution in the importance of individual rights (Griffin 1991), a concern with absolutes. But we should not expect fascism in the 2000s necessarily to look much like fascism in the 1940s. Expectations and sensibilities have changed. History has happened. Communication technologies have opened up new possibilities and new challenges. Nevertheless, in that certain human fragilities and needs remain, there are fresh opportunities for the political demagogue, the charismatic guru, the video game programmer, the military recruiter, the intellectual with little inhibition and much ambition.

It would be a mistake to see Rightist movements conspiratorially, if only because the complexity of fundamentalist activity might be lost in the process. Taking refuge in the binaries of good and bad simplifies what can be learned about the politics of social situations. Studying fundamentalism provides a way of recognizing the use of fixed identities as a causal force (“we cannot be otherwise”). Ruptures and debate involving fundamentalist ideologies reveal the assumptions about society that otherwise remain concealed. Tracing the path of fundamentalist influence illustrates how slippages are suppressed and sameness is prized. It is important not simply to dismiss fundamentalism as an oppositional force when much can be learned by examining the frame of its orthodoxy, to see where debates have got stuck. Apple and Oliver (1998: 92) remind us that by ignoring possible insight about fundamentalist groups, we “ignore the places where decisions could have been made that would not have contributed to the growth of these movements.” We ask: What are the ideological boundaries that are unavailable for negotiation? How do systems of authority construct starting points? What are the trains of thought whose tracks never meet?

Causality and the Rise of Fundamentalism

An important consideration is why fundamentalism has, at least in its twentieth-century forms, become an issue. Murray Knuttila, writing on hegemonic masculinity (chapter 7) suggests that fundamentalism is linked to “projects of social reform or political power.” Knowing why fundamentalism has come into existence at this time and recognizing who benefits from its ideologies and beliefs are important to understanding what fundamentalism is. Indeed Volker Greifenhagen (chapter 5) writes that fundamentalism is many faceted, and when referring to Islam, fundamentalisms are plural. He therefore calls for the careful and critical application of the label, if it is to retain any descriptive power, especially when applied to Islam. He further differentiates fringe from mainstream Islamic fundamentalisms, although one of the consequences of September

11, 2001, is that the possibility of such a distinction seems to have collapsed.

At a most superficial level, fundamentalism is a label that has served to legitimate prejudice and counter-violence. Put to work, however, fundamentalism is a concept with analytical and explanatory power capable of going beyond stereotypes about religions. As the authors in this volume indicate, the term, although it may be rooted in religious practice and orthodoxy, has a broad application. The fundamentalisms of the affluent and the poor, the American and the Egyptian, the man and the woman, the old and the young, the recent immigrant and the Aboriginal may all be different on the surface and even in some of their deeper manifestations, but it is our argument that they have much in common.

The term fundamentalism derives from the U.S. Protestant evangelical movement that began in the late 1800s (Marsden 1990). Taking its name in 1920 from *The Fundamentals: A Testimony of Truth* (1910–1915), a twelve-volume set of essays that reasserted the five-point fundamental creed² of evangelical Christianity in the face of growing liberal theology, the movement took off after World War I. Fundamentalism as a social movement began as a reaction against what was seen as the increasing control of Protestant mainline churches over both government and biblical criticism, as well as against a broad range of liberal/modern social transformations. Successive displacements wrought by the Civil War and post-war Reconstruction, massive non-British immigration, urbanization and World War I were critical in the rise of the fundamentalist movement (Armstrong 2001a). In essence a revitalization movement (Wallace 1956), it sought to restore the “true” religion and to save the United States from becoming Babylon (Marsden 1990). According to George Dollar (1973: XV), “Historic fundamentalism is the literal exposition of all the affirmations and attitudes of the Bible and the militant exposure of all non-Biblical affirmations and attitudes.” Militancy is a key term here—fundamentalists saw themselves battling against ethical pluralism and changes to traditional society. Battles were waged for prohibition and blue laws and against the teaching of evolution in the schools (Marsden 1990). The movement sought a return to traditional beliefs, thereby to restore the purity of the nation. While claiming to re-establish the New Jerusalem, however, the fundamentalist movement was actually creating an original translation of the Christian religion based on a mythic and romanticized past (Armstrong 2001a).

Many of the features of fundamentalism can be discerned in this description of its origins. To be satisfied in its right-thinking, a fundamentalist system must claim that its standard of truth is based on objective authority and not subjective interpretations. Whether the belief resides in a sacred text or an infallible economic system, the basic tenets are unavailable for debate. Although inerrancy of scripture is not a character-

istic of all religions,³ the papers in this volume show that the social processes following fundamentalist thinking seem to be more or less replicated in a wide variety of contexts. Fundamentalism is especially strong in times of great social change, particularly in periods of perceived loss for social groups, as in the challenge to hegemonic masculinity through the changing roles of women.

Fundamentalism has important social dimensions and dynamics. In the westernized First World, we have experienced five hundred years of colonialism and nearly two hundred years of industrial capitalism. The last century is marked by accelerated rates of change. Sources of change are multiple and interactive with the shortening of distances through changes in transportation and communications technologies; the heightened contact of cultures and ideas; the growth, centralization and concentration of business and corporations; increased dependence on low wages and urbanization; intermittent war and ongoing conflict; the rise of individualism; new social movements; and the breakdown and reconstitution of community along new (and old) lines being among the most significant causes and effects of transformation.

Didi Herman (1997) describes the ways in which the infusion of a civil rights code moved North American society away from religious roots and toward human rights standards of law. Fundamentalist groups see themselves as victims fighting for survival, saying for example, that gay and lesbian rights constitute an attack on heterosexual culture. Fundamentalism can be seen, in part, as a reactionary movement that aims to regain or restabilize lost power, prerogatives and status. Regardless of the rest of their message, many fundamentalist movements, especially religious groups, are also about returning to the rightful order by putting previously subjugated groups back in their rightful places. This frequently includes (re)gaining societal control over women's sexuality, reproduction and labour. Ailsa M. Watkinson (chapter 10) describes several legal examples in which the teachings and actions of fundamentalist Christians in Canada infringe on the rights of groups protected under the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The insistence on equality rights for disadvantaged groups represents a move away from the good old days of unquestioned patriarchal authority and compulsory heterosexuality. Not surprisingly, this same move parallels the rise of the Christian Right in the United States.

Fundamentalism and Social Regulation

Fundamentalism may emerge as a movement, but it is also a set of strategies that are about power. The authors in this volume draw attention to the "fundamentalist dividend," defined as the benefits and competitive advantages that may be gained by being part of a fundamentalist group. The fundamentalist methodology involves re-imagining the past and invoking an authentic community with deterministic social characteristics.

In so doing, it produces a paradox—the fundamentalist simultaneously engages in nostalgia for the past while displaying historical amnesia (Jameson 1992) about a system of living that never existed.

The strength of the fundamentalist identity may easily lead to a type of nationalism or contribute to the growth of nationalism where religion and nation coincide, as discussed by JoAnn Jaffe (chapter 8). The fundamentalist project often involves the desire to be both exclusive and universal. For example, the United States acts in an exclusionary fashion when it argues that a preventative war is a morally justifiable act for the United States but not for others with whom it disagrees. At the same time, the U.S. argues that its policies should be universal, that others should hold the same views, especially with respect to political and economic organization. The fundamentalist position claims the social space of true and faithful outsider (although the outsider status may not be desired) and moral guardian of the broader public. This (literally) ambivalent position may be troubling for both fundamentalist insiders and outsiders, as it produces relationships that are at once contradictory and unstable. The efforts that go into regulating conduct and ideologies are a measure of the instability that fundamentalist practices attempt to control.

Given the unstable nature of “true belief,” how do fundamentalists guard their own? Karen Armstrong (2001b: 17) says that fundamentalism “begins not as a crusade against outsiders but a hatred of those of the same faith.” In spite of the evangelizing imperative of some Christian fundamentalists, there is less of an attempt to regulate the behaviour and habits of those who are outside the range of social persuasion than there is to guard the hearts and minds of committed insiders. Fundamentalist practices glorify the homogeneity of the community as entirely distinct from, at first, co-religionists—such as liberal Christians—and then against outside others and foreigners. This premise accounts for the close scrutiny of the faithful insiders against deviations from or apostasy within their ranks. Purity of belief and behaviour is a mark of the insider and a way of setting the divisions of “with us” versus “against us.” The price to be paid for raising questions or stepping outside normative group actions is swift and sure. Terms of persuasion, if not ridicule, are at the ready for disciplining the wayward, as in Kevin Davison’s (2000) example of the regulating action that is brought to bear on the less than masculine. Men who fail to uphold hegemonic masculinity are automatically stigmatized as males of lesser status and possibly even as gay. “Hegemonic heterosexual masculinity is enforced through the discrimination of sissies and gay youth” (Kinsman, cited in Davison 2000: 47). Gender-appropriate behaviour is policed by punishing—through physical and emotional abuse that amounts to a kind of social terrorism—that which is deemed inappropriate. Fundamentalist systems require ideological control over their elect insiders and, simultaneously, repudiation of outside others. In fundamentalist

Christianity, the existence of others also represents opportunities for missionary work and prayer. Much depends on this construction of opposites in which the other is desired to the extent that the fundamentalist can be fulfilled through the other's neediness.

Fundamentalism as a social process produces both those who are named and those doing the naming. Indeed, fundamentalism is rarely used as a term of self-identification and is almost always applied by those on the outside who take issue with it. Jackie Kuikman (chapter 4) raises important considerations for use of the term for cases in which the definition of fundamentalism is not fixed or agreed upon and when groups to whom it is applied do not necessarily meet all the criteria all of the time. She calls for a "careful and nuanced" approach when applying the term fundamentalist, not only for accuracy in nomenclature but so as not to obscure important differences between groups who "might seem to resemble one another when the term fundamentalism is applied." Kuikman describes how the term, applied as a condemnation, erases several important distinctions between various Jewish groups, setting them up as easy targets for ongoing anti-Semitism.

A closely articulated and practised ethnicity is often the only response to the denigrating effects of an external power, for example, the colonialism experienced by First Nations people. Joyce Green (chapter 2) describes the powerful Janus face of nationalism that, when fused with fundamentalism, has the potential to conflate communities into singular expressions of ideology. Among First Nations communities, a response to colonizing forces has been the adoption—on the part of some First Nations people—of exclusionary cultural practices adjudicated by insider experts who decide what and who is Aboriginal. What might be cause for positive collective pride is, instead, subject to restricted action to the extent that, in order to be authentic, one must *be* one's culture. In order to belong, one must forgo a critique of this particular form of strict characterization or "any other form of social accounting."

Verna St. Denis (chapter 3) contends that essentialist notions held by and about oppressed people limit the justice claims they can make. She describes the problem of insisting on strict adherence to Aboriginal cultural practices as the overriding keys to Aboriginal identification and "healing." Unwavering faith in cultural revitalization as the means to overcome the effects of colonization operates as a particular form of cultural fundamentalism. Moreover, the emphasis on cultural practices serves to restrict a thorough-going critique of power relations and the consequences of systemic racism and poverty experienced by First Nations people. Most unfortunately, silencing the internal critique of a culturalist ideology perpetuates the on-going unequal distribution of wealth and resources, an outcome that continues to benefit hierarchies operating both within and without the social group. There is a great need for solidarity and

little space for self-critique within a group that is already socially disadvantaged. Such cultural fundamentalism has the potential to be doubly restrictive. While the closed system offers safety of association to insiders, it also contributes to the assumption that indigenous people simply *are* their culture, even while it silences internal dissent that cultural practices are not the sum total of their identity.

Nayyar Javed (chapter 6) cautiously negotiates the tenuous ground between liberatory self-naming and traditionalist Islamic practice. Regrettably, stereotyping Islamic peoples and exoticizing Muslim women on the part of the West straitens the women's circumstances rather than offering them any useful solidarity. A common characteristic of fundamentalist groups is the claim that they are under attack from social, religious or political outsiders. It is important to acknowledge that for groups with reduced social and political power as the ones described in chapters by Jackie Kuikman, Joyce A. Green, Verna St. Denis and Nayyar Javed, their ability to claim their rights is a constant struggle. Groups operating through traditional practices, however, need not be fundamentalist or restrictive of human rights as long as dissent does not mean expulsion or coercive conformity. Traditions within a community and a sense of belonging can be reclaimed without reifying the traditions or excluding critical voices.

What is the Appeal of Fundamentalism?

Those who deal in fundamentalisms are often astute in exploiting the insecurities and angst that result from the ongoing revolution in social relations. Fundamentalist patriarchy reassures insecure men of their right to dominate women. A clear sense of entitlement separates the men from the not men, irrespective of whether the patriarchal dividend is forthcoming. Fundamentalist stances provide easy answers to questions of public morality: the response to whether same-sex couples should have the legal right to marry will always be "no." A sense of belonging is offered in exchange for the practice of and belief in prescriptive cultural practices that identify one as secure and at home. There is something very appealing in the promise of an 'authentic' identity and the feeling of belonging that accompanies it. Fundamentalist practitioners offer assuredness, community, acceptance, resolution and a strong set of rules to live by. The fundamentalist dividend may also be manipulative, however, and well able to exploit and cultivate psychological weaknesses and insecurities of all kinds. The promise of fundamentalism is thorough, moving between levels and issues of a most intimate and personal nature, including those having to do with broad historical mega-trends, while offering simplistic answers to complex economic and social relations.

People may be susceptible to the siren song of fundamentalism because they are cast adrift, without compass or anchor, life jacket or life insurance, fearful that the rising tide may lift other boats but not their

own—which can only mean their own craft is sinking. Many people spend the bulk of their waking lives in pursuits that carry little intrinsic satisfaction or meaning for them. They are subjected to hierarchies at work and may feel that they have little control over most aspects of their lives. Fundamentalism cuts through the ambivalence, the contradictions and the disturbing unpredictability. It offers instead, stability, a coherent regimen, answers, certainty and support. It frequently comes packaged with some kind of community, one that may offer a new salient identity, resources and psycho-social supports. A person may be out of step, a misfit or an outsider in the wider world but enjoy a sense of belonging within the community of certainty. A community of fundamentalists may demand certain kinds of conformity, but it may also be accepting of other kinds of difference. Fundamentalism holds out a promise of transcendence, peace and security in a world that specializes in upheaval, dissolving all ties, loosening all bonds and rendering contingent all relationships.

Fundamentalism can offer searchers a measure of security in the turbulence of economic and political disorganization and disorder. As the restructuring and cannibalization of economies throw people into higher states of anxiety and self-doubt, they face increasing pressure to take risks and to consume at levels well beyond their means. The stress of coping and striving is high. How attractive it is to learn that there are ready answers, that their predicament is caused by perfidious infidels or other strangers. Fundamentalists learn that in the face of others who lack moral rectitude, they can achieve inner calm and outward confidence by joining with the members of a strong contingent of true believers. In the kind of fundamentalism that borders on fascism, extremist and disaffected people find a common cause in the rhetoric of xenophobia and the certainty of simplistic answers. The “other” is always a necessity for the formation and fervour of fundamentalist dogma. The safety of the fundamentalist is always at risk from toxic ideologies and religious fanaticism of outsiders. As a consequence of continually anticipated, real or imagined harm, the fundamentalist adopts the status of a beleaguered minority, regardless of its social power. Ironically, the doctrine of U.S. exceptionalism carves out a minority position even for a dominant world force such as the United States.

Each of the variations of fundamentalism that we consider has as its centre a critique of the moral decay of society. In each example, a fundamentalist process is designed to safeguard the interests of the harassed; it arises especially at times of ideological uncertainty and retrieves a “historic vision” of the national or cultural self (Melling 1999).

What of the topics of hegemonic masculinity and neo-liberalism? What if critics of these topics are able to point out oppressive characteristics of these systems without recourse to a fundamentalist lens? What can we gain from our approach of examining unconventional areas in this light? It is

helpful to see that neo-liberalism and hegemonic masculinity, like religious movements, also offer an ideological determinism much wanted in times of uncertainty. As belief systems, faith in the market or in hegemonic forms of masculinity offer security in the midst of diffusion and loss, even as they confirm adherents in their paranoia. Furthermore, the power relations within these hegemonic systems depend on hierarchies of inequality similar to the way women and minorities are regarded within religious and ethnic forms of fundamentalism. Adherents to fundamentalist systems need not be social minorities in order to feel under attack. In a paradoxical way, they feel beleaguered because they are powerful.

One consistent principle in all fundamentalist orderings is a “radical patriarchy” (Riesebrodt 1990), which can be described as prescriptive behaviour that favours a masculine authority. The predominance of masculine leadership in areas of public authority is rationalized as if it were naturally occurring rather than operating through a system of unequal access to social and political power. When it is backed by claims of right thinking and the evidence of the status quo, hierarchical ordering is unquestionable. As in religious fundamentalism, a notion of objectivity or right thinking at once admits and defines the faithful. In the Christian example, accepting the circularity of the truth of the Bible because “the Bible tells me so” is a position that can only be arrived at by the proverbial leap of faith—not by logic. A fundamentalist system—whether it is religious, social or economic—depends on unassailable belief in itself regardless of the adjustments the faith has to undergo to keep itself intact. The opening line of Phillip Melling’s (1999: ix) *Fundamentalism in America* states: “fundamentalism has been seen as ... the deadly enemy of rational debate and intellectual enquiry.” Recognizing the characteristics that neo-liberalism and hegemonic masculinity share with fundamentalist belief systems will explain some of the ways these systems have remained impervious to rational argument even if we cannot always follow where the train of logic stops.

What Does the Process of Fundamentalism Permit?

Some of the writers in this volume speak of fundamentalism as a process, as a set of behaviours, and not only an ideological position. What then is permitted by fundamentalist process? What does it accomplish with its idealized past, inerrant beliefs, fixed boundaries and opposing identifications on both sides of the in/out divide? In spite of the surety of its dogma, fundamentalism is tied to the modernist project of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, even as it rejects modernism—or at least the open critique that is said to accompany it. For example, even though religious fundamentalists reject the supremacy of human rights when those rights are at odds with their beliefs, they still appeal to human rights tribunals to uphold exemptions based on freedom of religion. Religious fundamental-

ists often see themselves as separate from and a corrective to mainstream religious practice. At the same time, they desire to have tremendous influence over public affairs and to see their cause as having central significance. Biblical scholar James Barr (1978: 343) says: “Fundamentalists today are no longer entirely content with their alienation; they are also craving recognition. They want their arguments to be taken notice of; they want their cultural achievements and their scholarship to be recognized.” Barr (1978: 343) continues that the religious fundamentalist who is annoyed at being alienated from the academic world of religious scholarship retaliates by “unchurch[ing] those who believed differently and [treating] their theology and their biblical work as if it was an enemy of God.” The attention of outsiders is necessary both for the recognition of the fundamentalist cause and for proof that oppositional factions threaten them and their beliefs. A fundamentalist agenda with its promise of reward, if not transcendence, is ostensibly meant for insiders; a main dilemma, however, is that outsiders might take fundamentalists at their word and leave them alone.

Having said that, it would be disingenuous not to acknowledge that outsiders to fundamentalist activities often ignore the violations of human rights that can go on within fundamentalist circles, as Nayyar Javed reminds with respect to the lives of some Muslim women. Further, it is the proselytising activity of certain forms of fundamentalism that renders the movements problematic for outsiders. Indeed, it is the sometimes violent promotion of particular fundamentalist ideologies that brings them to our attention.

Fundamentalism as described here is a phenomenon of true belief and true believers. It can be identified as a process in which a set of binary absolutes are constructed: insiders and outsiders, truth and lies, God and devil. Thus, one can note fundamentalism as a principle in operation in a wide variety of contexts—the true believer may be fundamentalist to the extent of admitting no contradiction. In the area of science, biotechnologists who promote GMO (Genetically Modified Organisms) technology in agriculture, to take an example close to those of us in Saskatchewan, revile their critics and accuse them of being ignorant fear-mongers, anti-progress and anti-poor. Their tactic is to delegitimize detractors and place them outside of the pale of reasonable discourse and decision-making. Similarly, as Don Mitchell explains (chapter 9), belief in economic neo-liberalism has long passed the healthy scepticism that one might expect in relation to scientific theory and has progressed to the status of sacred truth. This dogma of market fundamentalism includes the belief that markets are the best means to allocate resources and rewards; in contrast, the notion of the public or common good is regarded as heretical. In circular fashion, social problems that result from market fundamentalism are cited as proof that there is still too much public control over the markets. Like other

fundamentalisms, its imagined utopian past is being used to control the present.

The Left is not immune to fundamentalist impulses either. Marx's idea that the working class would make society into a place where together everyone could reach their full potential led quickly to accusations of false consciousness when the workers did not behave correctly in the interest of all the people. Lenin's prescription was vanguardism, rule by a group of intellectuals and bureaucrats who would determine and then lead the people to understand their own interests. Stalin's fundamentalist/totalitarian answer, like Pol Pot's in Cambodia, was to purge the wrong-thinking worker.

Are We Fundamentalists in Doing this Work?

Throughout this project of defining and examining the social phenomena of fundamentalisms, we ask how we are produced through this naming. Is our work, which we identify as feminist, anti-racist and anti-oppressive—that we intend as liberatory—ultimately fundamentalist? Are we anxious to find distinctions that will not include us, or to locate others as more extreme, so that our own positions are reasonable in comparison? We think these are important questions because we recognize some qualities shared with fundamentalist thinkers such as the passionate holding of a sustained, systematic set of beliefs. Like fundamentalists, we are convinced that what we have learned—in our case, about social justice—is worth working toward and teaching others about. We have concluded, however, that if anyone who is passionate about something can be labelled a fundamentalist, then the word means nothing.

We differ significantly from fundamentalists in that we do not pine for a reconstructed pristine past but instead look toward increased transparency of and political accountability in power relations. The doctrine of fundamentalism is prescriptive and must be enforced, and, by definition, is not open to interpretation or critique. After all, in the case of religious fundamentalism, the authority is prophetic, leaving followers with the duty to remain faithful. While we admit that our projects of social and political change are also enmeshed in ideology, we claim that attention to openness and justice can help us to avoid the pitfalls of fundamentalist practice.

How do we engage differences, tolerate them and avoid sliding into relativism while maintaining our own convictions? How do we decide between competing claims when there is no objective notion of truth that stands outside and from which we take unerring direction? A good counter is to return to the question of whose interests are being served by each particular set of ideas and practices. Who benefits by the social ordering that accompanies each set of fundamentalist principles—what is the fundamentalist dividend? We know that our work is guided by an emancipatory project and that we are taking a stand for social justice

issues. We are not consumed by the relativism that “anything goes.” Indeed, we believe that some ideas are more powerful than others—and that what we choose does make a difference.

At the same time, we want to be aware that the term fundamentalist can be used simply to obfuscate difference or to refuse the possibility that we are the other of whom we speak. We want to avoid using the term simplistically to demonize others who are dialectically opposed to our work for a variety of reasons. Rather than painting fundamentalist ideologies with broad strokes as if all instances were homogeneous, it is important to see the careful negotiations of people living in tension within and on the edges of fundamentalist communities, like some of the writers in this volume. One’s location also matters in how criticism can be heard. “Insider” criticism may hold the highest value; the work of critical insiders also involves the greatest risk, and, most likely, the greatest subtleties.

We return to Linda Kintz (1997) and her reaction to the intimately familiar message on her voice-mail that delivers its hate-filled invitation in all sincerity and righteousness.

If those of us who want to understand contemporary conservatism could only decipher what we hear in this voice, we might also momentarily come much closer to understanding the passions of reactionary politics. And if there are conservatives who are appalled at being symbolically associated with these absolutist conservatives perhaps they too need to understand a bit better the dangers of resonance.... For in contemporary America, where passion and media blur all boundaries, responsibility has far less to do with intentions than it does with the recognition of the dangers of those sympathetic vibrations. (Kintz 1997: 272)

Ruptures in the social fabric, such as 9/11, allow examination of practices such as fundamentalism that otherwise might be taken for granted. Such opportunities for deconstruction are most useful if we also examine our own understandings for intransigence and tendency towards closed thought. Here is where we hope to part company: We take fundamentalist frames to be systems of thought and action that, by definition, remain closed to critical scrutiny. The effects of a particular system will vary, but the closed system itself has every potential to contribute to oppressive acts and prescriptive behaviour. Extreme versions of fundamentalism result in zealotry and fanaticism. A fundamentalist system is an effect of power relations that are bounded by an internal logic that is beyond examination. What remains the same is a fundamentalist notion of a pure past and a pure identity; what changes are the local and historical explanations for why purity cannot be achieved at this particular moment, such as the persistence of evil-doers or feminists or the moral

decay of society. In this volume, it is the closed systems of thought, the resistance to scrutiny and the unassailable logic that captures our attention to and interest in fundamentalism.

Notes

1. In late 2003, the Canadian Alliance of Canada merged with the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada to become the new Conservative Party of Canada.
2. The five-point creed is: the inerrancy of scriptures, the deity of Christ, his virgin birth, the substitutionary atonement of Christ, and his physical resurrection and coming bodily return to earth (Cole 1931: 34).
3. For example, in Judaism, all readings of holy texts are considered to be interpretations, and a large part of Orthodox Jewish religious practice is engaging in different levels of interpretation (Kuikman, this volume). As regards Islam, the Qur'an is considered inerrant and read literally as God's word by the vast majority of Muslims. People who are typically regarded as Muslim fundamentalists are interested in the political extension of Islam and focus on the establishment of an Islamic government (Greifenhagen, this volume).

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