Events of the past few decades, especially of recent months, have provoked much interest in religious fundamentalism. The religio-political turbulence in the Middle East and regions of South Central Asia has arrested worldwide attention with its violence, while the political agenda of the Christian Right in the United States has stimulated more than occasional unrest among those committed to more liberal views. Most recently, acts of violence in New York City and Washington DC have been suspected by some to be linked with a fundamentalist group seeking to defend its monotheistic worldview against what is perceived as the global threat of democratic pluralism. For obvious reasons, these and other like phenomena have drawn the interest of religious historians and social scientists who have sought to account for their development and function, and the manner in which they influence social, as well as political, environments. Although such interest has accumulated a massive literature on fundamentalism, what I propose in this brief essay is a unique psychological perspective that contrasts with the more popular notions concerning fundamentalism.

What Is Fundamentalism?

Although fundamentalism is viewed as a cross-cultural phenomenon, most studies mark its beginning in early 20th century American Protestantism—an event that gave first notice and name to the movement (Lawrence, 1989; Bruce, 2000). Primarily among northern Baptists and Presbyterians, fundamentalism emerged as a reaction against increasing modernist trends within these denominations toward embracing modern biblical criticism and principles of evolution (Sandeen, 1970; Barr, 1977). In observing this history, researchers (e.g., Sandeen, 1970; Barr, 1977; Marsden, 1980; Ammerman, 1987) have noted certain characteristics of the movement that have served as a model of “family resemblances” for identifying and understanding resistance to modernity in other cultural contexts (Marty & Appleby, 1991–1995).

What have been considered as the most primary of these traits are what Protestant fundamentalists have claimed for themselves as basic tenets of belief. For instance, such scholars (Packer, 1958; Dollar, 1973; Beale, 1986; Hindson, 2000) have outlined “minimal” fundamentals of the faith that they feel all true Christians should defend against advocates of liberalism and modernism—the most typical including: (1) the authority of the Bible, (2) the virgin birth of Jesus, (3) substitutionary atonement for sin, (4) the literal resurrection of Jesus, (5) miracles, and (6) millennialism. Foundational to these issues is what Beale (1986) has offered as the essential core of fundamentalism: “The essence of Fundamentalism...is the unqualified acceptance of and obedience to the Scriptures” (p. 3, emphasis original). Of critical concern to fundamentalists, then, is insistence on the authority of
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their sacred text, upon which all other particulars stand or fall. As Archer (1980) has succinctly stated, “If any part of the Bible [the original manuscripts] can be proved to be in error, then any other part of it—including the doctrinal, theological parts—may also be in error” (p. 59). No true Protestant fundamentalist would disagree that the authority of the Bible is the ultimate concern.

The Fundamentalism Project

Perhaps the most ambitious effort to address fundamentalism was that of The Fundamentalism Project (Marty & Appleby, 1991–1995) which, although intended as a six-volume series, eventually produced five massive books of scholarly essays. The work involved 75 different contributors who were considered experts in the various religious “fundamentalisms” about which they wrote—the variations being mostly within the traditions of Western Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. In introducing the first volume, Marty and Appleby (1991b) offered what was believed to be the defining feature of fundamentalism—that is, militancy (or “fighting back”)—which gave guidance, along with a standard set of questions, to their scholars in search of various fundamentalisms. A survey of all five volumes, each concerned with a specific aspect of fundamentalism, reveals a persistent difficulty among a number of scholars in applying this feature of fundamentalism to their specific group; in fact, some authors used instead their own models of fundamentalism to guide their study (Frykenberg, 1994; Heilman, 1994). Nevertheless, in the final volume, Almond, Sivan, and Appleby (1995) drew from the entire project series to produce a detailed model that was said to describe fundamentalism cross-culturally.

The cross-cultural analysis of fundamentalism proposed both an ideological and an organizational component (Almond et al., 1995, pp. 405–408). Accordingly, the ideology of fundamentalism includes five characteristics: (1) Reactivity to the Marginalization of Religion (most often militant), (2) Selectivity (i.e., selecting a few focal beliefs to defend, certain particulars of modernism to embrace, and specific aspects of modernism to oppose), (3) Moral Manichaenism, (4) Absolutism and Inerrancy, and (5) Millennialism and Messianism. The organizing tendency of fundamentalism is highlighted by four particular features: (1) an Elect, Chosen Membership; (2) Sharp Boundaries; (3) Authoritarian Organization; and (4) certain Behavioral Requirements (for members). The presentation here, of course, is only the brief sketch of the more complex model.

While the model is a comprehensive analysis that offers valuable insight, two observations are worthy of comment. First, although its approach was intended to be interdisciplinary, the analysis is mostly sociological in nature, leaving the psychological aspect of fundamentalism largely unexplored. A second observation concerns its neglect of fundamentalism from the inside, that is, from the perspective of fundamentalists themselves. Not one of the 75 contributors was a fundamentalist scholar, whose void would seem to leave us an incomplete picture from the analysis offered. Although the editors (Marty & Appleby, 1991–1995) acknowledged this omission, it was explained by reason that such scholars were not readily commended—a consequence that seemed non-problematic to the editors. On the other hand, the research has had enormous impact in expanding awareness of cross-cultural fundamentalism and has inspired questions for directing other fields of investigation. By virtue of its mammoth size alone, The Fundamentalism Project is a scholarly achievement and has made a significant contribution to the study of fundamentalism.

A New Model—The Principle of Intratextuality

Contrasting the view offered by Almond et al. (1995), and observing the cross-cultural importance of sacred texts, I submit the centrality of the authoritative text and the Principle of Intratextuality as an alternative approach for understanding funda-
mentalism, with particular concern for its basic psychological processes.\(^4\) According to this model, the sacred text is accepted as a revelation from some Divine Being whose intent is contained in the text, which, in process of interpretation, gives rise to categorical truths that generalize into an objective reality (Marsden, 1980, p.55). It is common knowledge that fundamentalists consider their texts to be of divine origin (Foos & Patterson, 2000; Harding, 2000; Barr, 1977; Packer, 1958, Machen, 1923). As one Protestant fundamentalist proclaimed, “The Bible plainly teaches that its words are inspired, and that it is the Word of God” (Munhall, 1988, p.51). For such believers, the text is authoritative and is taken as word-for-word objective truth (Packer, 1958, p.47).

The text, held as objective truth, is considered beyond the individual as an objective fact—not as being subjective to the person (Barr, 1977, pp. 311-313). To accept the text as objective truth is to embrace the text’s view of itself, as opposed to one’s own view of the text. In this process, the person obtains a standard of absolute truth situated outside the self that provides an objective reality against which the individual has personal grounding and position to relate meaning to all other aspects of the world. For example, the person in this stance has gained access not only to self-knowledge in relation to the Divine Being (say, as a redeemed child of God), but also a means by which to perceive elements in the world as being either good or evil, sacred or sinful, spiritual or worldly, etc. Since the only objective reality for the person is that which is based on belief in the authoritative text, all who do not share this same belief cannot participate in the same reality and are thus viewed as outsiders and as opposition. Even the Divine Being, who inspired the text, is a subjective reality who, beyond the fixed and enduring text itself, is an ambiguous, inarticulate revelation, and is thus uncertain knowledge—hence the importance of the tangible text. The acceptance of the text gives it status as an “overarching symbol” that serves to protect and sanction the worldview shared within the fundamentalism (Barr, 1977, pp.314–315). The principle cornerstone of this symbol is that of textual authority, which leaves quarters in the constructed world only for those who subscribe to its belief. Critics and unbelievers are eliminated or kept at distance, for all who refuse to embrace this textual authority are perceived as a threat to the security and purity of the fundamentalist worldview.

How is absolute truth to be interpreted from the text? If allowed textual authority, the scripture is sufficient in and of itself, and is self-interpretive for all who take it up as the authoritative text (Packer, 1958). As observed by Harding (2000) among fundamentalist Baptists, “The interpretive tradition is literalist in the sense that it presumes the Bible to be true and literally God’s word, but the practices themselves are not simply literalist” (p.28). Literalism of the text has been a quagmire for social scientists in their attempts to understand both religious conservatives and fundamentalists. It is clear, however, that fundamentalists do not hold for a literal interpretation of everything in the text, but only for “where it is possible” (Marsden, 1990, p.25) and supportive to the structure of the tradition (Barr, 1977, p.51). In this context, it is the text itself that instructs what is to be taken as literal and what is to be taken as symbolic (Packer, 1958, p.102). In other words, as the text is taken up, a dialogic encounter emerges between the reader and the text—based on the Principle of Intratextuality—in which the revelation of the Divine Being becomes illuminated as absolute truth. What emerges as absolute truth is that which is of immediate necessity for maintaining the fundamentalist worldview. No sources outside the tradition—texts that are based on other authorities—are consulted or are even necessary for this to occur; the authoritative text is sufficient in and of itself toward this end, according to the Principle of Intratextuality. The text contains both the revelation and its interpretation—a belief maintained by all fundamentalists.

This psychological dynamic is represented in Figure 1 (see next page), which illustrates the interpretive process involving a sacred text and the Principle of Intratextuality. It should be noted that

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\(^4\) (See Endnotes on pg. 11)
this dynamic is bounded by a solid circle that illustrates reliance on no resources or texts other than the sacred text itself. Not only does this circle indicate an exclusion of other interpretive resources, it also suggests that absolute truths which emerge from the dialogic process with the text are protected from outside influences—they are not subject to outside criticism. An example of an absolute truth among Shi’ite Muslims is that there is no God but Allah; this truth for them is above criticism and not subject to debate. As absolute truths emerge from the interpretive process, they extend (as represented by one-way arrows) into the objective world which includes certain truths known as peripheral beliefs. Since peripheral beliefs exist outside the circle, they are subject to modification based on their relation to absolute truths, personal experience in the world, and even interactions with other peripheral beliefs. Furthermore, these beliefs include all beliefs outside absolute truths, both religious and non-religious. An example of a peripheral belief among fundamentalist Pentecostals is that believers are to trust God for divine healing of illnesses. Although some might hold this as an absolute truth (and be willing to die from illness while “trusting God” alone for healing), others might allow personal experience of illness to modify the belief in some way and justify the use of medicine in conjunction with faith healing. The point to emphasize, however, is that neither peripheral beliefs nor external factors are allowed to penetrate the encircled dynamic that involves taking up the sacred text with the Principle of Intratextuality.

As a point of contrast, Figure 2 illustrates the Principle of Intertextuality—the psychological dynamic involved as non-fundamentalists come to an understanding of the sacred text. In this context, the sacred text becomes one of several authoritative texts that may be consulted in the process of deriving truth, which is more properly understood as relative truth. In contrast to the solid circle in fundamentalist thought, the broken circle here suggests that factors external to the dynamic also have influence on the interpretive process. The two-way arrows are meant to illustrate not only that relative truths extend outwardly to peripheral beliefs, but also that peripheral beliefs may filter back into the interpretive process and exert influence on the understanding of relative truths. Though briefly explained here, the dynamic process of non-fundamentalist thought includes several interrelated factors that are excluded in the thinking of the fundamentalist, the distinction being based primarily on how it is that the person comes to the sacred text and the manner in which it is taken up for understanding of truth.

In contrast to the model presented by The Fundamentalism Project (1991–1995), it is proposed that a more insightful approach to the study of fundamentalism is by use of the Principle of Intratextuality. At one level, the Almond et al. (1995)
model simply accounts for what might be observed as the “fruit,” or byproducts, of fundamentalism and does little to account for how such fruit may come to flourish. It also may be that such a complex model, when describing certain fundamentalist groups, fails to allow for the uniqueness of a specific group to emerge. In contrast, the Principle of Intratextuality examines the processes of fundamentalism, which may or may not involve all characteristics of the alternative model. It seeks to investigate how it is that fundamentalism operates within a tradition, based on a single factor that is certain and obvious to all fundamentalisms—a sacred text. And more than that, it seeks to understand the manner in which the text is taken up and what that actually means. Using this principle, then, we will examine a unique Protestant fundamentalism based on the way in which adherents relate to their Bible and hopefully demonstrate a fuller understanding of their psychological reality and worldview. The present discussion will be limited to absolute truths; peripheral beliefs will be addressed elsewhere.

An Application – Pentecostal Fundamentalism

One of the most significant Pentecostal denominations to emerge in the southeastern United States was the Church of God (of Prophecy). Some may find it puzzling to examine fundamentalism in such a group, since scholars among both social scientists (Ammerman, 1991; Barr, 1977; Marsden, 1990, 1980) and fundamentalists (Dollar, 1973; Beale, 1986; Sidwell, 1998) themselves have been reluctant to see them as part of the tradition. They are typically charged by fundamentalists as heretics and as such are distanced as Evangelicals. Ammerman (1991) makes the distinction based on speculation that “Pentecostals trust the revelatory power of experience more than do the more rationally oriented fundamentalists who seek to confine revelation to scripture alone” (p. 4). On the other hand, reasons do exist to consider fundamentalism among Pentecostals. Even if viewed as distinct from the early Protestant fundamentalist movement itself, Pentecostalism clearly shares the same fundamentals of the faith, that is, the authority and inerrancy of scripture, the deity of Jesus, substitutionary atonement, the resurrection, and millennialism (Marsden, 1990, p. 31; Barr, 1977, pp. 207–209). In Latin America and in other countries, Pentecostalism has even been highlighted as a fundamentalist movement that uses glossolalia as a powerful form of protest against political oppression (Nielsen, 1993, p. 25; Deiros, 1991). Furthermore, even some among the Pentecostal ranks have referred to themselves as fundamentalists (Conn, 1996, p.xxviii). Although Ammerman (1991) dismisses Pentecostals from fundamentalism for their emphasis on experiential discernment, Parker (1996) has observed from a psychological analysis that spiritual discernment among Pentecostals does in fact have a rational aspect based on a spirit theology, well-grounded in scripture, and a sensitivity to traditional cues and affirmations. It also is a mistake to ignore the fact that some Pentecostals have carefully worked out a logical, systematic theology that includes the participation of the Holy Spirit in discovering the revelation of scripture (Pruitt, 1981, p. 287). The fact that the Church of God (COG) emphasizes the importance of biblical grounding, as well as other “classic” fundamentals of the faith, invites investigation into its fundamentalist character from a psychological perspective.

An analysis of beliefs among the COG reflects a few of what might be described as absolute truths, major beliefs based on an Intratextual interpretation of the Bible that weave together an objective reality for adherents. These truths form the basis from which believers perceive and make sense of the world, both as a denomination and as individuals. For example, the fundamental of holiness among the COG is an aspect of reality that dichotomizes the world in terms of sin and righteousness, the sinner and saint, the Adamic nature and spiritual nature, and the lost and redeemed (Pruitt, 1981). Based on this truth of reality, various “sinful” behaviors have been catalogued as abstenions for the righteous, whose compliance is believed to have both corporeal and eternal implications for right standing with God. Furthermore, this truth serves

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as a basis for judging the behaviors of others in terms of their righteousness or sinfulness—that is, their fitness for the kingdom of God and heaven, or their condemnation to an eternity in hell. The truth of holiness is not negotiable or subject to criticism; it is the reality of the world for the COG based on their Bible. Holiness is only one fundamental of the sacred text that contributes, in part, to the way in which the world appears to COG believers. Other absolute truths that contribute to their worldview are Pentecostal (spirit) baptism and the view of itself as the solitary extension of the New Testament church in modern times. Because of restrictions here, I focus only on the latter fundamental and illustrate how the Principle of Intratextuality was used in abstracting this absolute truth from the Bible. Such an enterprise, however, requires looking at an historical figure who had significant influence in the denomination and on the manner in which the group came to take up its text for interpretation.

Although this denomination had many pioneers throughout its history, perhaps none contributed more to its early growth and worldview than A. J. Tomlinson, its first general overseer (Davidson, 1973; Stone, 1977). Tomlinson was not an original member of the newly organized sect, although his immediate selection as pastor upon joining the 22 members began an important chapter in 1903, with respect to their survival and success. A noted leader and able preacher, he led the North Carolinian group in gaining 14 additional members the following year, and in establishing three additional congregations in Tennessee and Georgia the year after (Conn, 1996; Davidson, 1973; Tomlinson, 1984). At end of 1904, Tomlinson moved his office of ministry from the mountains of North Carolina to Cleveland, Tennessee, a town of 4,500, from where he continued to serve three of the four churches as pastor and conduct new evangelistic campaigns.

Continued growth of the new organization led to the eventual need of meeting annually as a corporate group for coming to agreement on various important biblical teachings and practices (Conn, 1996; Davidson, 1973; Stone, 1977). Among the many important issues discussed and decided over the years, perhaps the first decision recorded in its 1906 minutes was the most foundational: “We do not consider ourselves a legislative or executive body, but judicial only” (General Assembly minutes, 1992, p. 8)—that is, only as interpreters of the authoritative scripture. In efforts to adhere only to scriptural principles and to abstain from corruption of “man-made creeds,” the COG throughout its history often referred to this very first act of business as a guiding light (General Assembly minutes, 1992, pp. 40, 58, 257–258). Tomlinson was chosen as moderator and clerk for each of the General Assemblies until 1909, when the sect had grown sufficiently enough to warrant his appointment as general overseer of the church, an office he held until death in 1943 (Davidson, 1973; Stone, 1977). It was from this leadership position that he influenced doctrinal decisions at General Assemblies and inspired what came to be an international Pentecostal denomination.

From early documents and Assembly minutes, it seems clear that the COG saw itself in terms of a unique institution with a divine mission—the call to restore the New Testament church of the apostles, or the “Church of God of the Bible.” Tomlinson was not the originator of this concept, although it seems certain he was the one who sought it out more clearly as a Biblical revelation and gave it impetus as a COG concern (Evans, 1943, pp. 7–9). He duly recognized R. G. Spurling, an earlier pioneer in the church, as one who had introduced him to the “vision of God’s Church” (General Assembly minutes, 1992, p. 194). According to Spurling, the early church was based only on the Two Great Commandments of Jesus—which were first, to love God supremely, and second, to love one’s neighbor as oneself. These, said Spurling, constituted the “law of Christ” (Spurling, n.d., p. 14). Accordingly this law was said to have dominated the early church until 325 ACE, when Constantine ordered the writ of the Nicene Creed, the first of many man-made creeds and doctrines to follow. The content of the creed itself was not the issue for Spurling, but the fact that a human instrument had been devised—even if for the sake of purging heresy from Christianity—that supplanted the law of
Christ and the teachings of the apostles (pp. 22–24). At that moment, said Spurling, apostasy occurred and gross darkness covered the true church from visibility. Christian churches and groups since that time had relied on creeds and doctrines, instead of the law of Christ, as the basis for their faith; hence no Christian institution, as reckoned by Spurling, was in character as the Bible church until the turn of the 20th century, when the COG—the true Bible church—emerged from darkness as a restorative phenomenon. It was this new sect that Tomlinson came to visit on several occasions, receiving exposure to these ideas. However, the invitation to one particular Bible study on June 13, 1903, would prove to be a memorable event both for him and for the COG.

The legendary events of the above date have been widely circulated and published in the COG (Duggar, 1964; Evans, 1943; Davidson, 1973). Concerned over Spurling’s ideas about the New Testament church, Tomlinson left the Bryants, the family hosting the Bible study, for a time of solitude before the meeting was to begin. According to his own words, he climbed to the top of nearby Burger Mountain:

I looked out a place to pray. I felt heavy responsibilities upon me and that I should pray through. I asked the Lord to give special wisdom and guidance, and to keep me from making any mistakes. I had been a close student of the Bible for many years and I was careful to obey its teachings perfectly. I prayed until I was satisfied and committed myself to God for safe keeping. I then went down to the base of the mountain and entered into the meeting that had been called.

When I understood fully that those saintly people meant to stand for the whole Bible rightly divided and take the New Testament as their only rule of faith and practice, it appealed to me and I became very much interested at once. I asked many questions and Bible answers were given which perfectly satisfied all my inquiries.

I then said, THIS MEANS THAT IT IS THE CHURCH OF GOD [emphasis original]. To this they assented...

Then I ventured to ask if they would be willing to receive me in the Church with the understanding that it IS [emphasis original] the Church of God of the Bible. They were willing and I took the covenant with sincerity and extreme sacredness never to be forgotten. (Minutes, 1941, p. 18)

And with that, Tomlinson became a member of what he believed to be the last days Church of God of the Bible.6

In years following, Tomlinson continued his study of the Bible with regard to the last days COG—a study of scripture that might account for much of his retrospective detail of the celebrated 1903 event. In terms of our model of fundamentalism, he took up the text (primarily the Old Testament prophets), entered into dialogue with it, and struggled with what he came to believe was a divine revelation intended from God concerning the true last days Bible church. His early writings are replete with interpretations of various biblical passages abstracting this truth, although the scriptures most often cited were in Jeremiah and Isaiah.

In terms of his own role as a reformer, he saw himself as the subject of a specific biblical prophecy:

And I will cause him to draw near, and he shall approach unto me: for who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto me, saith the Lord. (Jeremiah 30:21)

By his own admission, Tomlinson came to the COG as a troubled person, unsettled in direction for life and even in commitment to any religious group (Tomlinson, 1984). It was in this psychological state that he came to struggle with the text in regard to his revelatory experiences on Burger Mountain and at the Bible study. According to Sundén’s role theory, religious experience, especially the type encountered as supernatural, can be understood in terms of taking the role of structured models provided by

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6 (See Endnotes on pg. 11)
narratives of tradition found in sacred texts (Holm, 1995). Such narratives contain two roles: that of a human party and that of God. In becoming familiar with the narrative, the person acquires a foundation from which future spiritual experiences can emerge, and also a template that provides them a structure. At such times, motivation for seeking these events is thought triggered by a sudden lost feeling of security in an environment previously felt as safe. When this occurs, the person (unconsciously) takes over the role of the protagonist in the narrative as a performance, and also takes on the role of God in the sense that whatever happens in the context of experience can be perceived as being an act of God—a discernment of God’s immediate will. It is in this way that the person senses a “concrete” persuasion that God has been divinely responsible for the occurrences in the experience. In this mental shift, a “Thou” with a “purpose” has been encountered in pure relation through an experience that becomes all-encompassing—one that takes over complete control. Eventually, the person experiences a mental shifting from this religious context of encounter back to the secular realm of existence, but feeling transformed by the experience.

In dialoguing with the text of Jeremiah in this way, a troubled Tomlinson was able to interpret its meaning in relation to himself as the providential seeker drawn to God for the purpose of receiving understanding of God’s divine intent concerning the last days church of the Bible—which was a unique historical honor indeed. In reference to this distinct privilege, Tomlinson (1984) later wrote of Luther’s role in receiving the revelation of Protestantism, which he described as a “limb” extending from the “trunk” of larger truth—the COG. To Wesley was revealed the “limb” of sanctification, to Simpson the “limb” of divine healing, and to Seymour the “limb” of tongues-speaking (glossolalia). It was providentially reserved for Tomlinson, however, that he should receive the revelation of the “trunk” of truth itself—the revelation of the last days COG, the pillar of truth from which all other truths extended as limbs. In reflect-ing back on his role in the event, he later wrote:

Concerning the revelation of the COG itself, Tomlinson often took up other biblical passages and interpreted their meaning from within the text. He found scriptural basis for Spurling’s ideas about the apostasy of early church in Isaiah:

For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer. (Isaiah 54:7–8)

Although most biblical interpreters would agree the passage is directly related to the restoration of Israel, Tomlinson, troubled by his seeking for a meaningful church affiliation, dialogued with the text in such a way as to interpret its meaning as a revelation of the momentary lapse of the New Testament church in its adoption of the Nicean Creed. In this substitution of a man-made creed for the divine law of love, God’s anger would first isolate the apostate church as a means of discipline but would later abate in view of its restorative efforts—as seen in the following passage:

Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee,
and his glory shall be seen upon thee. (Isaiah 60:1–2)

Using this scripture in dialogue with the earlier passage, Tomlinson’s interpretation saw the early church emerging from the darkness of apostasy as a glorious institution, loosening itself from the shackles of man-made creeds and reverting back to the scriptures as the only rule of faith, practice, and government. For Tomlinson, this was a direct prophecy concerning the arise-shine of the 20th century COG, whose solitary business involved restoring the true Bible church and saving the lost. In fulfilling its biblical role as the New Testament church, Tomlinson believed its shining character and stand for truth—as opposed to denominational creedalism—would draw all true Christians into its fellowship, which was destined to become the bride of Christ.

As evidence of the correctness of this interpretation, Tomlinson observed an interesting phenomenon that coincided with the arise-shine of the COG—and with its prophecy in Isaiah. It is clear that he recognized June 13, 1903, as the time the church emerged from darkness into visibility (Evans, 1943; Davidson, 1973; Stone, 1977). However, he also viewed the first successful flight of the Wright brothers’ airplane, six months later (December 17, 1903), as more than mere coincidence, for the same chapter of Isaiah that prophesied the arise-shine of the COG also foretold the flight of the airplane: “Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as doves to their windows?” (Isaiah 60:8). Tomlinson not only pointed out that these events occurred in the same year and in the same chapter, but also that they occurred six months apart and were mentioned six verses apart. Furthermore both events occurred in the same state: the arise-shine in Cherokee County, NC; and the plane flight in Kitty Hawk, NC (Evans, 1943).

Based on the manner in which Tomlinson came to the text, and his means of staying within the text for interpretation, he emerged as a transformed individual who held in his grasp an absolute truth that changed his view of the world. The truth of the COG as the Bible church became generalized into an objective reality for him that directed his mission for the remainder of life—a mission dedicated to spreading the gospel and the message of God’s divine church. Tomlinson proclaimed the message of the church strongly in his preaching and writing, never failing to give it a defense in the face of any opposition.

In his most comprehensive work, The Last Great Conflict (1984), Tomlinson dedicated three chapters to the COG—its history, its prophecies, and much of its theology as the last days Bible church. He began the first of these chapters by observing the unrest among contemporary denominational churches and concluded the cause to be a sincere searching among true Christians for the authentic church of the early apostles. In his view, the Spirit of God was the mastermind at work in leading unwitting persons to dissolve sects and denominational ties as a preparatory move toward a coming together of all true believers. He ventured on to say, “But few, and probably none of these instigators know of the undercurrent or influence that is at work, neither do they understand the purport of such actions, but it is God wielding his mighty sceptre preparing the people for the Bible church—the Church of God” (Tomlinson, 1984, p. 145).

His Annual Addresses to General Assemblies were replete with the church message for the purpose of enlisting recruits and spurring the COG forward in what he believed to be its worldwide mission. For example:

It was the mission of the early Church to propagate the principles and doctrine taught and advocated by the Lord Jesus Christ, and it is no less the mission of the Church of God today ... The Church of God is the very same sacred institution, only having made its appearance in these last days after a period of years of having been obscured under a cloud of the dark ages and creeds. It is coming out all the brighter for the storms of the past. It is beginning to claim the attention of the world again ... Its members only have to

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be possessed with a more perfect white heated love for each other and the principles it holds dear to itself to raise it to heights of glory and power that will attract the attention of all peoples of the world. \(\textit{Minutes, 1921, pp. 15–16}\)

In the face of opposition, Tomlinson would not relent, but encouraged the membership to stand as the true church—a stance he believed God would honor with ultimate vindication.

There must be no retreat! No surrender! But by steadily marching forward we will reach the goal! By the help of the Lord we will hoist the standard to the very top of the mast, and by faith in God smite every opposing force, and cast all the mountains of difficulties into the sea, and still march on and on. The Church of God shall win! \(\textit{Minutes, 1916, p. 18}\)

In his final Annual Address, at almost 78 years of age, Tomlinson’s focus was still on planting the COG in every state across the Union \(\textit{Minutes, 1943, p. 25}\). In his worldview, he was convinced of an absolute truth that only the COG had the true message for lost humanity; for him, it was God’s institution on earth, divinely revealed in the Bible for all who would seek it. Not only did Tomlinson hold to this objective reality, but so did the scores of thousands to whom he had preached and converted to the COG vision. For them, as well as for Tomlinson, there was no other church; all other religious institutions were steeped in creeds and doctrines without scriptural basis. To live within such a worldview takes into account more than a mere distinction between the church and the world; it also distinguishes between the true church and false churches. For members of the true church, they not only feel blessed of God for the revealed knowledge they possess, but also feel a certain responsibility for sharing it with the unknowing. This is precisely what motivated Tomlinson—and those who shared in his Bible-based vision.

**Conclusion**

A comment on the scope of this study seems necessary. This analysis was based on the COG as led by A. J. Tomlinson, primarily within, but not necessarily limited to, his lifetime. The leadership of M. A. Tomlinson, the son who succeeded him in 1943, was very much in the same manner as his father, except he was more sectarian in face of the modernism of the late 1970s and 1980s. Despite the unrest of a younger generation, he attempted to maintain all aspects of church teaching and membership advices that were handed him \(\textit{Fitly joined, 2001}\). By 1990, Billy Murray, the next general overseer, was somewhat willing to revisit church doctrine in terms of what might be considered as peripheral beliefs, e.g., the jewelry teaching and membership advices. Most interesting, however, is the current push by third and fourth generation members toward reinterpreting what it means to be the COG of the Bible \(\textit{General Assembly minutes, 2000, pp. 27–29}\). The present day COG continues to strongly advocate the authority of the Bible, holiness as a lifestyle, and Spirit baptism with speaking in tongues. However, it seems at present that modernism, and its child of ecumenicalism, is forcing another “taking up of the sacred text” in coming to terms with the COG’s role as the Bible church. Whether it eventually succeeds in a reinterpretation of this traditional truth may have dire consequences in a reorganization of its worldview. And whether its worldview is reorganized may also have dire consequences for those who still claim this traditional COG truth as their own. Polarization over this issue has been increasing for some time. The full consequences for the church remain to be seen.

As far as the present model of fundamentalism, it seems useful enough to explore the psychological dynamics of fundamentalism involved in a variety of groups. It is unique from other approaches in that it seeks to investigate how it is that fundamentalists construct their reality of the world. To understand fundamentalists, however, requires that attention be given to their sacred text and, more importantly, to how fundamentalists come to take up their text and derive its meaning.
Whether they meet certain “fundamentalist criteria” (such as militancy, for example) seems to be more of a secondary concern and based on the function of context and the degree to which absolute truths and the subsequent worldview are at stake. From this perspective, important questions about fundamentalisms have yet to be asked. For example, how is it that various fundamentalisms differ, and in what ways do they differ? Perhaps the present Intratextual model will stimulate more effective questions concerning fundamentalism and also provide a means for arriving at more meaningful answers.

Endnotes

1 The model of fundamentalism proposed in this essay is the result of collaborative work by Ralph W. Hood, Jr. (The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga), Peter C. Hill (Grove City College), and myself, although Dr. Hood has been the primary architect. The model and its application to a variety of fundamentalisms are forthcoming in a book by Hood, Hill, and Williamson, and is due for publication by Guilford Press in late 2002.

2 In the proposed model by Almond et al. (1995), the original notion of militancy is retained in the Reactivity aspect of the fundamentalist ideology; it is simply given another label. In the face of oppressive modernism, it is said that fundamentalism reacts with “militant effort” to counteract “the erosion and displacement of true religion” (p. 405).

3 The single social-psychological work included in The Fundamentalism Project was by Hoffman (1995), who based her analysis only on studies done by others concerning fundamentalist Muslims.

4 A common phenomenon among all fundamentalist groups is that they hold strongly to a sacred text that serves as a foundation for religious beliefs and as a guide for behaviors. Protestant fundamentalists hold the Bible as the word of God; Shi’ite Muslims take the Quran and the words of the Prophet as sacred truth; Gush Emunim stand on the texts of the Torah and Talmud; fundamentalist Hindu regard the Vedas; and fundamentalist Buddhists trust the Pali canon. Eastern religions hold their sacred texts in a somewhat different manner than monotheistic religions, although the model of fundamentalism proposed opens up possibilities for empirical investigations into how it is that they come to their texts.

5 The “of Prophecy” is included in parentheses because two contemporary Pentecostal denominations, the Church of God and Church of God of Prophecy, were the same institution from its emergence at the turn of the 20th century until 1923, when it divided over leadership issues. It was at this time that one of its major pioneers and first general overseer, A. J. Tomlinson, was impeached and removed from office, a situation leading to a disruption with the smaller faction following the deposed leader. In decades that followed, the smaller group continued to identify itself as the Church of God, although a 1952 court decision required the suffix “of Prophecy” to distinguish it from the larger faction for business purposes. What is discussed in this essay for one group also applies to the other until the disruption, although beyond that point, focus is more on the “Prophecy” denomination that followed Tomlinson. For sake of consistency, however, reference to the later Tomlinson group will continue to be made as the Church of God since both denominations maintained almost no doctrinal differences. The larger group presently claims over 5 million members worldwide, whereas the Prophecy denomination numbers more than 350,000 members around the world (“A brief history,” 2001; General Assembly minutes, 2000).

6 It should be noted that the larger faction that emerged from the 1923 disruption never embraced this interpretation of the 1903 event. In fact, until recently, it considered Tomlinson more in contemptible terms, and even minimized his contribution to growth in the COG through 1923. Such a stance was no doubt due to the fierce rivalry between the groups that ensued after the disruption. In comparing recent reconstructions of the 1903 event, consult Conn (1955; 1977, 1996), Davidson (1973), Stone (1977), and Fifty Joined Together (2001).

7 Tomlinson evidently was unaware that Charles Fox Parham was the first to teach the doctrine of tongues-speaking as the single evidence of Spirit baptism.

(Continued on page 12)
Fundamentalism

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References


Marsden, G. M. (1980). Fundamentalism and American culture: The shaping


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Please forward nominations to David at:

Dwulff19@aol.com

or

Department of Psychology

Wheaton College

Norton, MA 02766
American Psychological Association — Div. 36 — Executive Committee 2001–2002

Edward Shafranske  
President  
Pepperdine University  
18111 Von Karman Avenue, Room 209  
Irvine, CA 92612  
Office: (949) 223-2521  
Fax: (949) 223-2575  
EdwardShafranske@pepperdine.edu

Donna Goetz  
Treasurer  
Department of Psychology  
Elmhurst College  
Campus Box 314  
Elmhurst, IL 60126  
Office: (630) 617-3735  
donnag@elmhurst.edu

Crystal L. Park  
President Elect  
University of Connecticut  
406 Babidge Rd.  
Box 1020  
Storrs Mansfield, CT 06269  
Office: (860) 486-3520  
Fax: (860) 486-2760  
crysdara@aol.com

P. Scott Richards  
Secretary  
Department of Counseling Psychology  
Brigham Young University  
328 MCKB  
Provo, Utah 84602  
Office: (801) 378-4868  
Fax: (801) 378-3961  
scott Richards@byu.edu

Peter C. Hill  
Past President  
Psychology Department  
Grove City College  
100 Campus Drive  
Grove City, PA 16127  
Office: (724) 458-2004  
Fax: (412) 458-2003  
phill@gcc.edu

David M. Wulff  
Fellows Chair and Member at Large  
Department of Psychology  
Wheaton College  
Norton, MA 02766  
Office: (508) 286-3691  
Fax: (508) 286-3640  
dwulff@wheatonma.edu

Mary Reuder  
Council Representative  
P. O. Box C  
Shohola, PA 18458  
Office: (570) 296-6666  
Fax: (570) 296-6666  
reud@pikeonline.net

Ralph L. Piedmont  
Membership Chair  
Department of Pastoral Counseling  
Loyola College  
7135 Minstrel Way  
Columbia, MD 21045  
Office: (410) 617-7625  
Fax: (410) 617-7644  
piedmont@vax.loyola.edu

William Hathaway  
Council Representative  
Regent University  
1000 Regent University Drive  
Virginia Beach, VA 23464  
Office: (757) 226-4294  
Fax: (757) 226-4303  
willhat@regent.edu

Lisa Miller  
Member-at-Large  
Box 25  
525 W. 120th St.  
Teachers College  
Columbia University  
New York, NY 10027  
Office: (212) 678-3852  
Fax: (203) 341-0756  
lfm14@columbia.edu

M. Elizabeth Lewis Hall  
Convention Program Chair 2002  
Rosemead School of Psychology  
Biola University  
13800 Biola Ave.  
La Mirada, CA 90639  
Office: 562-903-4867  
Fax: 562-903-4864  
liz_hall@peter.biola.edu

Ralph W. Hood, Jr.  
Awards Chair  
Psychology Department  
The University of Tennessee  
at Chattanooga  
350 Holt Hall  
615 McCallie Avenue  
Chattanooga, Tennessee 37403-2598  
Dept. Office: (423) 755-4262  
Ralph-hood@utc.edu

Douglas S. Hardy  
Hospitality Suite Chair  
Department of Psychology  
Eastern Nazarene College  
23 E. Elm Ave.  
Quincy, MA 02170  
Dept. Office: (617) 745-3560  
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