

Fundamentalism, Biblicism, Creationism and Intelligent Design in the global context with reference to South Africa

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Mystic theologian, scientist and truth

I would love to be a mystic theologian, especially of the stature of Meister Eckhart. The mystic resists the temptation to preshrink religion into a set of modern theological propositions and beliefs. The mystic path is an inspired path of doubt-filled pilgrimage to the truth that lies beyond all certainties. Truth for the mystic is a mysterious event of experience and counter-experience. This twofold experience transforms the individual and opens up a world of experiences that cannot be reduced to rapturous feeling and thought.¹ It is the courageous way of faith, letting go of created, finite representative ideas about God, objects of human creation, idols that feebly point to the glory of the immortal unknowable God.² Philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx thought that the human notion of God was a crutch for security and a sign of weakness or distress.

The journey of the mystic is punctuated with revelation, a rupture rather than rapture, understood first as *epistemological incomprehension*, second as *experiential bedazzlement* and third as *existential transformation*.³ The mystic way is an open-ended system of inquiry into the heart of unknowable mystery, resulting in personal transformation and active compassion for nature and all its creatures. This is a faith that speaks to the wide-eyed intelligence in us, or help us rediscover a religion that can actually bring us to adulthood, rather than preserve us as cryogenic embryos or infants.

The way of science is also an open-ended system of inquiry and discovery, a path strewn with old questions and old answers, and new questions from stories woven in the lab, and evolved answers that have a limited shelf life. These stories and questions spring forth from an open mind, alert to a world that is vast, rapidly expanding and changing and naturally pregnant with ambiguities and possibilities.

For the mystic, a relationship with this world, with its nature and meaning is vital for a deep spirituality. Cox explains this spirituality as a “move to horizontal transcendence” or “turning to the immanent”.⁴ He goes on to say that it is more correct to speak of it as the rediscovery of the sacred in the immanent, the spiritual within the secular. The metaphysical poet Gerard Manley Hopkins speaks of this world as being “charged with the grandeur of God”. St. Francis in his canticle spoke of the immanent God in the creation as ‘brother sun’ or ‘sister moon’.⁵ Both mystic and scientist reverently bow respectfully before the vastness and grandeur of this universe.

The mystic faith also avoids an attitude of certainty, especially a certainty that implies human confidence in a religion reduced to mere propositional beliefs, dogma and doctrine. Further, the mystic resists falling into the trap of shrinking God into a name or names, symbols or persons. In their relationship to religion, mystics employ a hermeneutic of suspicion, questioning and at times a challenging stance, paradoxical explanations of knowing and not knowing, a holding onto things sensed and a letting go. This hermeneutic of suspicion has much to do with understanding the nature of God. God is not an object of contemplation as Duns Scotus and the philosophical method of Descartes proposed. Rather, God is something and [no]thing at the same time, a paradox.

For mystics, naming God reduces God to something of a finite cultural creature, an image of the human mind and in all cases, a mere anthropomorphic conjecture. Rudolf Otto explains this when he says:

God is not, so to speak, wholly ‘wholly other’. That aspect of Deity, the mysterious overplus surpassing all that can be clearly understood and appraised, is asserted emphatically against any excessive anthropocentric [anthropomorphic] tendency to scale down the Sacred and Holy to the measure of our human reason.⁶

¹ Peter Rollins,, *The Fidelity of Betrayal, Towards a Church beyond, Belief*, (Brewster: Paraclete Press, 2008, 138.

² Romans 1. 23

³ Rollins (2008), *Fidelity of Betrayal*, 110.

⁴ Harvey Cox, *The Future of Faith*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2009), 2

⁵ <http://www.catholic.org/clife/prayers/prayer.php?p=183>

⁶ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957), xviii.

Revelation for Otto is experience of the plus and overplus which transcends the limitations of any language, culture and religion.

This understanding is also at the heart of C.S. Lewis's poem *Footnote to All Prayers*.

He whom I bow to only knows to whom I bow
When I attempt the ineffable Name, murmuring Thou,
And dream of Pheidian fancies and embrace in heart
Symbols (I know) which cannot be the thing Thou art.
Thus always, taken at their word, all prayers blaspheme
Worshipping with frail images a folk-lore dream,
And all men in their praying, self-deceived, address
The coinage of their own unquiet thoughts, unless
Thou in magnetic mercy to Thyself divert
Our arrows, aimed unskilfully, beyond desert;
And all men are idolators, crying unheard
To a deaf idol, if Thou take them at their word.
Take not, O Lord, our literal sense. Lord, in thy great
Unbroken speech our limping metaphor translate.

Meister Eckhart puts it succinctly when he discusses naming God and mystical experience. In his sermon 72, God is above all names and above nature.⁷ In his sermon 11, Meister Eckhart talks of “the peak of the soul not wanting God as Holy Ghost nor as the Son. Nor does the soul want God, as he is God. The soul desires a nobler, better thing than God having a name.”⁸ Even the Christian concept of the Trinity, especially in its literalism, is not above criticism among mystics who see God as wholly “other”.

There is a way of getting around the problem of inadequately speaking about and scripting God. The literary tools of stories and poetry convey an adequate partial understanding of God, yet at the same time humbly leave room for the “overplus” that is God. We can be comfortable, when speaking of God in mystical experience, only when the language of appraisal uses the tools of metaphor, paradox and analogy. In this way of pursuing the truth, the way of epistemological or intellectual humility, we avoid the constant companion of linguistic poverty in the appraisal of truth that is God.

The main problem in science and religion today is the human desire for certainty. Succumbing to the incredible power of this desire, the journey with the ultimate questions about the cosmos and divine overplus ends in mere rational thought, human ideas that emanate from the mind, translated into script, using modern empirical language of certainty. It is Voltaire who said: “Uncertainty is an uncomfortable position, but certainty is an absurd one.”

Krista Tippett⁹ says that to name God causes problems precisely because God is named, using limited and flawed human resources of perception. She explains that we as humans are merely *containers* for divine insights fashioned in the frailty and passion of the human condition. Religion, for Tippett, becomes entangled with human identity and for her there is nothing more intimate and volatile as that, especially in an age of global transition such as ours.¹⁰ Religion is the cause for much of the division in the world and as such threatens democracy and civilisation globally.

Because religion is a quest for truth, as Peter Berger says, it cannot be a private affair between consenting adults.¹¹ For Tippett there must be a religious [spiritual] voice in public life. It could serve as a voice of balance among extreme competing certainties which have hijacked the cultural discourse. “In the vast middle, faith is about questions and answers. It is possible to be a believer and listener at the same time, to be fervent and yet searching, to honor the truth of one's convictions and the mystery of the convictions of others.”¹²

In many respects, the mystic theologians, in their quest for experiencing and understanding mystery in the cosmos, use of an open-ended system of enquiry. They are creative in coming up with new hypotheses of encounters to be tested, their [*be*] attitude is of one of epistemological humility. The mystic is ill at ease with the finite discovery experience of absolute wonder in the universe. In human language the mystic uses analogy, paradox, metaphor and such literary tools of the story and poetry. The mystic intent and the goal are to evolve into perfect humanity. All the above reveals a deep respect

⁷ Oliver Davies, *Meister Eckhart, Mystic Theologian*, (London: SPCK, 1991), 204.

⁸ Davies, *Meister Eckhart*, 1991: 204.

⁹ Krista Tippett, *Speaking of Faith*, (London: Penquin Books, 2007), 2.

¹⁰ Tippett, *Speaking of Faith*, 6.

¹¹ Tippett, *Speaking of Faith*, 6.

¹² Tippett, *Speaking of Faith*, 2.

for the mystery that is larger than all the galaxies and all religious stories put together. In this enterprise of question, journey, discovery, and transformation, the mystic and scientist are marvelous bedfellows. For both of them, the human quest is a quest for truth.

Both mystic and scientist are on the same journey of discovery of truth and meaning for life. For the mystic, the locus of the divine mystery is also the mystery of the cosmos. Both mystic and scientist, in the pursuit of truth, travel a path that includes study of the ultimate environment, this universe and its mystery. In twenty-first – century religion, this is an intellectual quest that goes beyond the closed, rationalised ideology that is fundamentalism. For many, religious fundamentalism Balkanizes the world¹³ by creating conflicting ideological beliefs, and sends the faith of the true believer into Babylonian captivity. To be a disciple (student) is to be on the road of discovery of God within ourselves and beyond the gods of one's own making, the God beyond all tribal religion or belief. Spiritual questions don't go away, nor does a sense of wonder and mystery cease, in the absence of a belief in God.¹⁴

Both mystic theologian and scientist are travelling on the same path of discovery of the mysterious, unknowable reality. This is a common quest for truth. In the words of scientist Stephen Hawking: "We are getting close to answering the age old questions: Why are we here? Where did we come from? Does the universe have a beginning or an end? And if so, what are they like? And the answer to that will be the ultimate triumph of the human race; we will [then] know the mind of God."¹⁵

Both scientist and mystic proclaim a message about the vastness of space. This is a journey of faith that cannot stop short at finite human ideas. Faith is not the opposite of doubt or uncertainty; faith is the opposite of certainty. Positive doubt is the outworking of truth. Faith is the mother giving birth to doubt. For both mystic believer and scientist, to stop on the journey to discovery, to build tabernacles to house and contain the mysterious reality, and to reduce further this mystery to a set of short-lived fundamental doctrines or ideological beliefs, is a distortion, an indulgent misrepresentation of the truth, clearly identifiable as fundamentalism.

Fundamentalism is a toxic virus that contaminates both theologian and scientist. According to the neuro-scientist David Eagleman, scientists like the realist neo-atheists of this age, who embrace logical positivism, such persons such as Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, rushed to commit to a position of atheism, knowing little of this vast universe, much of which still remains hidden and invites experimental discovery. Eagleman, says that being an atheist is an absurd position simply because this cosmos is so vast, and because we know too little to commit to just one position.¹⁶ We also know too much to commit to just one story of religion. It may be valid to label as fundamentalist some scientists who already have committed to a position.

So too, like science, religion cannot afford stopping short of the truth. Religion is a quest for ultimate truth. To reach this goal, both partners in this endeavor, namely the scientist and mystic, cannot arbitrarily turn pit stops into *the* goal of the journey, especially if that journey is into the very heart of the divine mystery and the quest for the Holy Grail, the beginning of all things. To stop on the journey is to rest on the fundamentalisms of human creation, the compost heap of finite knowledge, which parades as ineffable truth.

¹³ Harris, Sam, *The end of Faith, Religion, Terror and The future of Reason* (W.W.Norton &Company: London, 2005),67.
Also: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FHHOIF-dFEg&feature=youtu.be>.

¹⁴ Tippet, *Speaking of Faith*, ,10.

¹⁵ Flew, Antony (1996)
http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/antony_flew/hawking.html.

¹⁶ Eagleman, David, 2010, http://poptech.org/popcasts/david_eagleman_on_possibilianism

Fundamentalism, Biblicism, creationism and intelligent design in the 20th century

How was fundamentalism understood in the modern era? What implications is this understanding for religion in this twenty-first century, manifestly post-imperial, post-colonial, post-Christendom era? How should one respond to fundamentalism?

According to Barr, the foundation of fundamentalism is the belief in the inerrancy of the scripture. Fundamentalists claim that the doctrines and practical authority of scripture are its infallibility. This infallibility includes the historical remarks.¹⁷

Fundamentalism maintains that its doctrinal and practical authority will fall like a pack of cards, without the fundamental belief in the inerrancy of scripture. Therefore it resists all critical ways of understanding scripture- the ancient, the modern and postmodern- thus preventing all recovery of the meaning of the scriptures. For fundamentalists this rapturous belief in the scriptures cannot be ruptured by the overplus that is God, as in the experience of both mystic and scientist in revelation and experiment. This approach to the scriptures is Biblicism, an attempt to elevate the status of the Bible to the position of God. Spiritual authority for fundamentalists is rooted in the human ideology of the inerrancy of the scriptures. This is not the same as literalism where authority is resident within *sola scriptura*.

When did modern fundamentalism begin? In the USA it began with Anglo-Saxon Protestantism. The broader context of fundamentalism in the modern era was facing threats within the historical context of the day, especially the context of critical studies of scripture and rationalist thought. This context birthed the revivalist Anglo-Saxon movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which emphasised personal faith, personal religion and personal new birth. Some notable figures who held to this way were Wesley, Whitefield, Moody and Billy Graham. In this movement, the theology was diverse. The theology did not agree with the traditional denominational theologies of the day.

Outside of the American Anglo-Saxon world, the root of fundamentalism was in the traditional denominational orthodoxies of the seventeenth century.¹⁸ Examples are the Missouri Synod of American Lutheranism and various churches of Dutch and German Reformed traditions. Fundamentalism in these cases was associated with traditional scholastic and confessional orthodoxy. Examples of this are Lutheran fundamentalism, Dutch fundamentalism, and so on.

These two main forms of conservative Protestantism, one going back to revivalism and the other to the older confessional orthodoxy, have run parallel and supported one other. The difference is in the context. A tension exists between these two forms because they are different. The difference is within conservative and fundamentalist Christianity. The revivalists may have been right to emphasise a Christianity that could be communicated by the common man, based on the personal faith of the believer, as against a dead orthodoxy. It is from the traditional orthodox group that intellectual leadership came.

No one within the fundamentalist camp wishes to be called fundamentalist. All prefer labels such as Evangelical or Orthodox. Both these groups subscribe to the same ideology of fundamentalism. Conservative evangelicals seem to hold to the main points of fundamentalism, but behave like tortoises, conceding minor changes, but when under pressure from within the camp, fall back to the letter of fundamentalism.

Fundamentalists embrace human ideology as well as religious conservatism. Conservatism as a human ideology is not intolerable. On the other hand, religious conservatism is demonic (*Demonic* here is a display of inhumanity in social relations). This happens when this conservatism is endowed with religious sanction, or is made the kernel of the message of scripture, or is thought to be the support upon which the message of scripture depends. .

Conservative Evangelicalism and Orthodox fundamentalism are doctrinal and hold religious positions which seek to tie Christian faith to conservative ideology. The device of scripture speaks conservative theology and as such, imposed on scripture a human tradition. Seeking to elevate scripture, fundamentalists have distorted its meaning at the expense of walking a path to elusive truth. The scriptures explain idolatry as exchanging the glory of the unknowable God for an image made in the likeness of man.¹⁹

Fundamentalism is an intellectualism of a kind that denies the intellect the power to do much about the faith. It appears to be a fideist (faith) position, but in reality it is a rationalist position. This position seems to be the one widely operative in Christianity today. This is immensely strong in the Anglo-Saxon world because rationalism is strongest here. The rationalism of Fundamentalism is clear about the doctrines of inspiration and infallibility of the scriptures. Inspiration is mentioned in the

¹⁷ James Barr, *The scope and authority of the Bible*, (Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1980), 66ff.

¹⁸ Barr, *Scope and authority of the Bible*, 66ff.

¹⁹ Romans 1:13.

scriptures, but nowhere do the scriptures support the authoritative that fundamentalism grants to it. Likewise, the scriptures do not say anything about historical accuracy, the original authors, or even that Jesus commanded or authorised the writing of the New Testament canon. The fundamentalist position is not derived from the scripture but from rational thinking. For the fundamentalist, the scripture is inspired and inerrant. Fundamentalism's polemic is always directed against unbelieving rationalism, but at the end of the day, that polemic still remains rationalism. Its polemic is against those they do not understand, those who are not rationalistic.

Fundamentalism is the one solidly rationalistic position in Christendom. Barr's²⁰ experience with fundamentalists is that they do crave intellectual confirmation and justification. They attack the validity of any work that is against fundamentalism, by judging it as written by those who are stupid, ill-informed and without evidence. Barr goes on to say that the very craving for intellectual justification comes from a deep inner intellectual self-distrust.

Among fundamentalists, there is considerable scholarship allied with conservative religious views. They derive comfort from the fact that such scholars and scholarship exist. Conservative scholarship serves as propaganda, a signal of confirmation and reason for the status quo. Fundamentalists may never read these scholars, nor do they intend to adjust to what conservative scholarship is saying. They misunderstand what constitutes the essence of scholarship, which does not lie in brains or quantity of learning, as fundamentalists understand it, but fresh ideas, fresh analysis, and new, creative perspectives. Fundamentalists employ a closed system of inquiry differing markedly from the method used by mystics and scientists.

Unlike scientists and mystics who understand community as open and global, inclusive of unlike minds, the fundamentalist community is a closed society organised on fixed foundational ideology and beliefs. David Eagleman²¹ makes the point that space is not totally populated and it is possible to hold several hypotheses at the same time. In mysticism and science there is no certainty and plenty of ambiguity. Scientists and mystics have given a gift of three words to humanity: *I don't know*. This leads to learning, fresh ideas, fresh analysis and new perspectives. In order to discover new things, one needs a mind opened by wonder, imagination and creativity. The antidote for toxic fundamentalism is a new experience of faith that is in the vast middle, between the poles of extremity, a faith that asks questions. To learn and adapt to global transition, we need intellectual or epistemological humility. Fundamentalism has proved to be stodgy, apologetic and uncreative. In Fundamentalism, imagination and creativity are in conflict.

There is a social character of fundamentalism but it is at best snobbery and self-importance inflated by ignorance. This social character guides its ethical stance in the world. By ethical stance is meant how fundamentalists see and estimate others, especially those who stand outside the private fundamentalist club. Fundamentalists are criticised for their lack of an ethical stance in the world rather than their intellect. They have not worked out how they can live alongside those who think quite differently, desiring that all should wear the same uniform of fundamentalist Christianity. Justification by faith means not faith in the way of Jesus but conversion to fundamentalism. Simply put, *it is the fundamentalist way or the highway*. Their approach is a colonial, imperialistic one and this explains why fundamentalism flourished in the golden days of Western political imperialism. The basic weakness of fundamentalism is its inability to accept others for what they are. In fundamentalism, doctrine and principles are primary. People, faith and existential attitudes are secondary. Even in matters of spirituality, it is doctrine *before* spirituality which means first encounter with divine overplus, then transformative evolution of humans into perfect humanity, a new kind of being who shows compassion and generosity and who brings timely help to those who hurt and hope in the world.

The social functioning of fundamentalist society, in large measure, is dictated by its doctrines. It is the life of the society that attracts new converts. For fundamentalists, the pressure of life in that society changes the newfound fledgling faith of the individual into a deadening conformity to the norms and orthodoxies of the group. This is what has happened to the spiritual charismatic movement in South Africa in the late 1960s and 1970s. Almost all those involved in the movement have now embraced deadly fundamentalism or Pentecostalism.

Martin Marty, who conducted a groundbreaking study on 123 religions of the world, concluded that in a world grown complex and threatening, fundamentalists did not participate in social issues such as questions of worldview, identity, sexuality, gender differentiation, family, education, and communication. Instead they retreated into the "*zones closest to self*." ²² Now that they have become a more conservative political bloc, the issues they champion are not social but *personal enlarged*

²⁰ Barr, *Scope and authority of the Bible*, 71.

²¹ Eagleman, 2010, http://poptech.org/popcasts/david_eagleman_on_possibilianism.

²² Tippett, *Speaking of faith*, 154.

issues.²³ Fundamentalists would change if they personally experienced loved ones who are homosexual, needing stem cells, or are being persecuted for being on the wrong side of the argument of the present 'hot button issues', which include 'prolife or prochoice', and gender and sexuality issues, to name a few.

Fundamentalists are not literalists when it comes to reading the Bible although they do consider the Bible to be inerrant, without error, in point of fact. Fundamentalism veers back and forth between the literal and figurative sense, to preserve the impression that historically the Bible is always right. For example, in matters of creation, fundamentalists do not stand by the account that the world was created by God in seven days. They think that it involved a long process, over millions of years, stretching out the period of creation to fit the facts gained from a little modern scientific knowledge. In this way they abandon the literalist interpretation to preserve one that makes the text inerrant. The inerrancy of the text, its historical truth, is the fundamentalist position. Because of this insistence that the Bible cannot err, fundamentalists interpret the Bible wrongly. Fundamentalism, apart from being a biblical religion that interprets scripture on its own terms, has evaded the literal sense of the Bible so that it may imprison it within a specific human tradition.²⁴ This tradition, derived from an older Protestant theology, does not detract from the understanding that it functions as a human tradition and imprisons the meaning of scripture. There are admirable things in fundamentalism, but its exclusiveness, its non-acceptance of other Christians, and other religions, its fostering of suspicion and fear, its lack of freedom, its Cartesian, rationalistic mindset, its refusal to learn, its own doctrine of scripture and its insulation from critical studies of the scriptures- all these spoil it.

This belief in the Bible as inerrant and historically correct is used to support intelligent design theory. This fundamentalist theory sees the order in creation, as strong evidence of proof that there is a Creator at work in the world. Inasmuch there is order in the world, scientists have discovered that there is much in this world that is random and unpredictable. The intelligent design theory does not take these discoveries of disorder into consideration.

The Discovery Institute, a politically conservative think tank in the USA, initially put forward the intelligent design theory as a form of creationism, asserting that some features of the universe's living things can be explained by an intelligent cause rather than evolutionary, natural selection. This theory is a contemporary adaptation of the traditional [*teleological argument*](#) for the existence of God. The Discovery Institute has presented the intelligent design theory as a scientific theory, based on observable evidence about the origins of life, rather than an ideology. The think tank believes that the designer is the Christian God.

The theory redefines science fundamentally by positing supernatural explanations. This viewpoint is known as theistic science. The scientific community has responded with rejection, explaining that science does not include supernatural explanations. Creationism has many conceptual and factual flaws and therefore is pseudo-science or religious science. There is no empirical support for creationism other than conceptual support of fundamentalist doctrine in the inerrancy of scripture and conservatism. In the fundamentalist theory of creationism, the scripture is applied to science. Fundamentalists also approach other scientific discoveries, for example discoveries in archaeology, to prove inerrancy of scripture concerning the existence and hand of God in history. The fundamentalist theory of intelligent design is another instance of dependence on human authority.

Important to fundamentalism is its unique understanding of faith. Barr says that there is such a thing as the 'domino theory' in fundamentalist thinking.²⁵ Foundational to the theory is the rational deduction from the previously accepted principle of infallibility in scripture. The theory cannot accept that any point in scripture can be uncertain. There is a domino chain that cannot be broken by uncertainty or fallibility. A belief that any part of the scripture is fallible breaks the chain. If this happens, one will never reach the end of the chain. The end of the chain is belief in Jesus. For Barr, this argument is not what faith means. The theory suggests the contrary, namely that faith is rational deduction from the principle of infallibility of the scriptures and dependence on a rational nexus. It makes common sense that if one's faith is personal, grounded in the person of Jesus, that faith cannot change or disappear because of the uncertainty of one part of scripture. If living by faith depends on having no doubts or anxiety about parts of scripture, then this is ample suggestion that fundamentalists are not living by faith in the person of Jesus. Faith for fundamentalists is faith in the scriptures rather than in Jesus. *The opposite of faith is not doubt. The opposite of faith is certainty.* One can understand why quantum theory or Einstein's theory of relativity (uncertainty) is a great threat to fundamentalism. The quantum theory and theory of relativity are about uncertainty, probability, entanglement, non-

²³ Tippet, *Speaking of faith*, 154.

²⁴ Barr, *Scope and Authority*, 79.

²⁵ Barr, *Scope and authority of the Bible*, 80.

causality and duality. Fundamentalism is all about certainty -not faith.

For fundamentalists, authority is not only in the Bible but also in human authority. Barr sees a similarity between Protestant fundamentalism and Roman Catholicism, especially in the place given to the Pope. The fundamentalist doctrine of biblical authority has a strong resemblance to papal infallibility which came upon the scene at the same time. Barr quotes a saying attributed to Pope Pius IX: *La tradizione sono io*, "It is I who am the tradition."²⁶

Fundamentalists view themselves differently from the way outsiders see them. Any description from the outside is always flawed, a misrepresentation by the practitioners of fundamentalism. Fundamentalist exiles, and those emerging from fundamentalism, see things differently. While fundamentalism presents a powerful, unitary, integral, propagandist center, voices against it are disparate and there is no unitary movement. There is a considerable need to balance the equation that only a careful and penetrating study of the subject and its impact on biblical study, theology and society can achieve. Fundamentalism is not just a doctrinal movement; it is also an ideology that is strict and narrow. This has political implications in the world and the church.

The modern fundamentalist belief of scripture must be dismantled. Barr points to three ways of doing this.²⁷ First, he proposes that a doctrine of scripture must be built from below and not from above. The transcendent way of building is the way of reading into it the evangelical doctrine of scripture, the opinions that some in evangelical Protestantism held about the Bible's inerrancy and infallibility more than two centuries ago.

Secondly, Barr thinks there should be no forcing the fundamental critical procedures and their results upon fundamentalists or anyone else. The reason is that critical approach is only a means to reading and appreciating scripture. For Barr, it is not the substance of the Christian faith. The Christian faith is an encounter, an inspiration of a mystical kind, an experience of rapture then rupture followed by transformation.

Third is the response to the institution of fundamentalism, its social and organisational structure, its network and societies, institutions, colleges, periodicals, newspapers, research centers, and so on. All these exist for the purposes of maximally resisting non-evangelical, non-fundamentalist opinion, especially in critical approaches to scripture and scientific theory. The most effective way of approach to helping fundamentalists is intellectual exposure. The formal academy is proving to be an instrument of salvation in this regard. One cannot downplay the effect of the informal academy of the 21st century, namely technology, the web, TV, ordinary conversation between people, and so on.

Fundamentalism in its conservative evangelical and conservative orthodox forms has enjoyed obscurity in the past and this has been its protection. The effects of its devastating work, the consequences of its ideology for humanity, especially on the suffering in the world, namely among women, gays, lesbians, the poor, the hungry, the sick, and so on, is now in the public gaze of the entire alert. Intellectual exposure may not change fundamentalists, and that is not the aim. The aim is to change the environment in which they reside. This will make a difference to all who are under pressure from fundamentalists; all who are seeking to exile themselves from the poison, prison and tyranny of fundamentalist religion. It is the perception of fundamentalists from those outside that will make the difference. It will be a world very different for the fundamentalists to succeed in, and for evangelicals in particular this may mean the adoption of a theological position that is not a mild deviation from the status quo fundamentalist ideology, but a real and radical alternative. The global transition has changed the cultural landscape. The web, TV, technology and advances in science have changed the intellectual landscape. These and other factors are making significant inroads upon the citadel of fundamentalism.

The 21st century and the way forward

Fundamentalists have built a proud, tall ziggurat that is an affront to the cosmos, the residence of the Divine. It exerts a powerful, tyrannical, conservative influence in the world, both sacred and secular. Progress in religion and science is sacrificed for the preservation of the status quo. The tentacles of conservative fundamentalism reach deep into the heart of every religious tribe. In Christianity, fundamentalism is embraced by Protestant and Catholic alike. It is not uncommon to see Catholic and Protestant present a united front of fundamentalist conservative attack on sensitive, crucial issues that affect the lives of real people.

What is abundantly clear is that conservative fundamentalism is a formidable structure of human rational ideology, devised to declare the scriptures inerrant and infallible, even in such matters of the beginnings of the cosmos, including the genesis of life, and the ethical and moral conduct of society.

²⁶ Barr, *Scope and authority of the Bible*, 85.

²⁷ Barr, *Scope and authority of the Bible*, 85.

Many see that this structure has begun to show signs of considerable wear coinciding with the end of the last millennium. According to Phyllis Tickle, institutions, including empires and religious institutions, have a lifespan of 500 years.²⁸ The painful history of South Africa, which began as an entrepreneurial economic enterprise of the Dutch and a political colonial extension of the British Empire, a period stretching from the middle of the seventeenth century to the late twentieth-century, is ample proof of institutions having a lifespan, then changing, if not disappearing. Fundamentalism, as a modern institution, has reached its 500 year mark. The institution now is unable to escape the intellectual tsunami. The tidal wave has already broken on the shore.

The children of every kind of fundamentalist religion are turning their backs on an ideology that is proving deadly to progress in a world that is vastly expanding and changing. The change is not by accident. The change is the natural decay of human systems and structures and the rise of new ones. The dynamics of change include the advancement of science, both hard and soft: enterprising experiments probing the vastness of space, studies of the cosmos of the mind, the experiments in quantum molecular physics, and biology, advances made in technology, the web, TV, a new universal spirituality and the ease of travel that brings one close to other landscapes and cultures. Our children are now agnostics affronted by a childish approach to fantastic myths and stories about the etiology of this world and its creatures, and fantastic stories of interfering heroes who deny individual responsibility and participation in shaping personal destinies. Our children are now neo-atheists who have come to an ideological and decisive conclusion knowing so little about this vast universe. Our children are possibilians unable to commit to just one religious story among competing others and the fact that so little is known about this universe. Our children are emergents, emerging from the compost heap of religion as a new kind of spiritual being in post-Christendom. Our children are now self-exiled from an institution whose hierarchical leadership has lost its credibility, because of an archaic system of control, and/or its human failings, or its lack of humanity, or its alignment with the centers of power, or its lackadaisical response to a world pregnant with new information. As such, our exiled children from religion are now the postmodern prophets of the day.

Harvey Cox²⁹ believes that fundamentalism, the bane of the 21st century, is in its death throes.³⁰ The resurgence of religion today is not fundamentalism but spirituality. This is a more sweeping change upon the world of fundamentalism with its insistence on obligatory belief systems, its nostalgia for what it was in the past, its mythical uncorrupted past, its claims to an exclusive grasp on the truth and at times its propensity for violence- Cox sees this as rearguard attempts to stem the more sweeping, tidal change in the world which is spirituality, the mutation of religion. People who have given up on religion are now saying: "*I am not religious, I am spiritual*"³¹. There are some who still maintain that they can hold onto religion and pursue spirituality. The emphasis in both scenarios is spirituality. It is fundamentalism that is the obstacle and enemy of both these ways. The criticism from fundamentalist circles is that the new spirituality does not accept the ideology of the inerrancy of scriptures. The new way of spirituality holds respect for the hard-won wisdom in *all* the scriptures of global religions.

Important to this conversation is the distinction that Cox makes between faith and belief. These are not two words for the same thing as Sam Harris believes. Faith is about deep-seated confidence, what Paul Tillich refers to as 'ultimate concern' or what Judaism refers to as the 'heart'. Belief, on the other hand, is more like opinion. A belief may be held lightly or with emotional intensity, but has more of a superficial, if not external, cerebral, propositional rather than a deep existential basis.³² Cox advises that we must understand this difference if we are to understand the tectonic shift in religion, from belief to Spirit. Faith is more primordial than belief. He makes this point in the story that illustrates that one does not even have to believe in order to pray, one needs faith without belief.³³ This is a more creative position which unleashes many possibilities. Tippet says that in the absence of belief or religion, faith and spirituality do not go away.³⁴

According to Cox, the tectonic shift in Christianity has gone through three stages in its history to the present. The first was the 'age of faith'. It began with Jesus and his disciples when faith was the basis for the movement. Faith meant hope, assurance, the dawning of a new age of freedom, compassion and healing. The second period was the 'age of belief'. In this age, church leadership formulated new orientation programs for catechumens. The emphasis was on beliefs. As early as this,

²⁸ Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence, How Christianity is Changing and Why*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2008), 16

²⁹ Harvey Cox, *The Future of Faith*, (New York, New York:HarperCollins,2009), 1.

³⁰ Cox, *The Future of Faith*,1.

³¹ Cox, *The Future of faith*,10

³² Cox, *The Future of faith*,3.

³³ Cox 2009:3f. Cox makes this point in the story he tells of Saint Manuel Bueno of Spain. A sick mother implores her unbelieving son to pray for her. He tells the priest that he cannot pray because he does not believe. The priest responds: One does not have to believe to pray.

³⁴ Tippet, *The Great Emergence*, 10.

the tension between faith and belief was evident. Towards the closing of the third century a clerical caste began to take shape and church specialists began to distill the various teaching manuals into long lists of beliefs. At this time too there was an acceptable heterodox of beliefs from place to place, and even at the beginning of the fourth century there was no single creed. A wide range of different theologies thrived. This turned when Emperor Constantine decided to support Christianity and used it to strengthen the Empire. Christianity aligned itself with the center of power and this marked the decline of the church. From an energetic movement of faith, Christendom hardened into a proud structure of beliefs. For Cox, this laid the foundation for all the fundamentalisms that followed. This age lasted approximately 1500 years and included the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, the secularisation of Europe, and the anti-colonial upheavals of the twentieth-century modern era, over most of the world. Even in this period, resistant faith and spirit was still present in individuals and movements that hoped for the reign of God. Many in this period rejected, with dire consequences, some of the dogma of the church. In the medieval period, officials saw the church rife with heresy and schism. One can say that because of resistant faith, the “age of belief” was at the same time a vital age of faith for many, especially those that perished.

Today many observe that we stand on the threshold of a new era in the Christian story. Christianity is in recession generally in the world, but in places such as South Africa, where the accent is on spiritual experience, discipleship (learning) and hopes, where less attention is paid to creeds, Christianity is growing phenomenally at a rapid pace. This age, Cox calls the ‘age of the Spirit’.

Fundamentalism has infected every tribal religion. There is not a soul that is not affected by this poison. The issue is not a question of whether fundamentalism arises from a particular part of the world. Some seem to believe it is a Western phenomenon, and therefore people outside the West have grounds to reject it. Well, in reality, fundamentalist people are born into and belong to every society in the world. They are all ages, all races, all faiths; they are doctors and teachers, farmers and bankers, soldiers and athletes; and whether we know it, or whether we acknowledge it, they are our family, our friends and our neighbors. They are also fundamentalists in the southern African context, more so because of the lack of information through the digital divide, the inaccessibility of the formal academy for many, the lack of modern forms of technology, like TV, the web, etc. Fundamentalism and the lack of information and ignorance are closely related.

Barr suggests practical ways of how to deal with the problem of fundamentalism in tribal Christianity.³⁵ Firstly, in the matter of handling the scriptures, he suggests a methodology that embraces a doctrine from ‘below’, rather than from ‘above’. This for me would be an approach that takes critical approaches in learning seriously and an interdisciplinary study of every discipline offered in the academy. The academy in the twenty-first century is not just restricted to the confines of the formal institution. The academy, given the web and technology, is everywhere and in every conversation that takes place on the street corners and living rooms. The wellness and wholeness of these conversations depend on the inclusion of all the disciplines and inclusion of the total global community.

History in the modern period has been the universally accepted, proper, allied discipline for scripture interpretation, a history of the perfect German and positivistic kind,³⁶ depending on just sensory perception, rejecting introspection and intuitive attempts to gain knowledge. This alliance has centered on questions such as, ‘What happened?’ or ‘Could it have happened?’ It is only in the last decades of the twentieth-century that the hegemony of historical criticism has been broken. This has largely been the work of feminists, and more recently liberationists and postcolonial interpreters. In these recent times, the allied disciplines are the social sciences, especially sociology, anthropology and science theory. The questions have now shifted to: “What is the text *doing*?” It is now recognised that the texts are not reports as in ‘What happened?’, nor are they conceptual theological representations, but acts of leverage in the practice of living. These acts do something in terms of social power, social ideology and social meaning. In this shift, the bedrock understanding is that the human problem is not the Cartesian idea of the way we think alone, but more action in regards to the human institutional systems of society, be they religious, social, political or economic. The global occupy Wall Street movement, the various movements of liberation in the present, the reality of the organic grassroots change in Egypt and Yemen are evidence of a reality that authority is no longer in the holy scripts alone, nor in the authority of mesmerizing gurus, nor in fearful controlling hierarchical institutional officers, but has shifted to the grassroots people. The future of religion will not be in the flawed containers of tribal religion but in a spiritual movement. This is already the trend in many places on this globe, in the questioning hearts of the spiritual everywhere.

³⁵ Barr, *The Scope and Authority of the Bible*, 88.

³⁶ Brueggemann, Walter, “Jeremiah: Pain and Promise,” *The Christian Century* 129, no.10 (2012),38..

The global reality of our existence and science presents another consideration in regards to scriptures. David Eagleman³⁷ points out that there are some 2 000 tribal religions in the world and, through their stories and beliefs, each claiming supreme superiority over others. The holy books of these various religions contain hard-won wisdom but were written in an era, millennia ago, by people ignorant of the size of the cosmos, the big bang of bacterial infection, DNA computation and the changing neighboring landscapes of different cultures. Our nervous systems absorb whatever cultures are poured into us when we are born. People are willing to fight and die over their particular stories. History has a way of dealing with these cultural stories. Ralph Waldo Emerson pointed out that the cultural religious stories of one generation become the literary entertainment of the next. No one is fighting over Isis and Osiris anymore. Casinos have machines decorated with Zeus, dispensing money to the lucky. Creation stories in other cultures are considered too fantastic, yet in Christendom, stories of forbidden fruit and talking serpents are unquestionably acceptable. Christians are prepared to fight to put such stories into school textbooks in the United States. Eagleman, a neuroscientist possibilian, makes a point for tolerance and the suspension of ideology in daily conversation and living, and especially when handling the holy texts of all religions.

Barr's second suggestion in dealing with Fundamentalism is that we cannot force fundamentalists to accept critical procedures.³⁸ These are the means we use to read and appreciate the scripture. Critical processes do not belong to the substance of faith and are always subject to revision, correction and, if necessary, replacement. We have now moved in critical studies from a historical approach to using the social sciences. Forcing ideology or principles on people does not work. Cultivation of personal love relationships may still be the answer.

Barr's third suggestion focuses on the organisational structure which exists in fundamentalism to provide the maximum resistance to non-fundamentalist opinion. He suggests that such opinions are filtered and then accepted into the organisation. The most promising way to do this is through intellectual exposure. Up until now, the phenomenon of fundamentalism has never been exposed. Given the development of the web, the informal loci of study centers, that is, wherever conversation about faith occurs, and easy accessibility to higher formal education, all these are helping change the landscape surrounding fundamentalists.. The purpose of intellectual exposure is not to make the fundamentalist change his mind but changing their environment will make a difference. It is the outside picture of the fundamentalist that will lead to inner change in them. For the fundamentalist it may mean developing a theological position that is not a mild deviation from fundamentalist ideology but a radical alternative. Sam Harris makes the point that one cannot be a moderate around fundamentalists.³⁹ If one does this, one is not helpful to them, but is patronising their cause of preserving ignorance about the new world. Krista Tippett: "There is richness when intelligence and faith intertwines."⁴⁰

Fundamentalism concentrates on the excesses of the externals and pays little attention to faith in God alone and spirituality. Many in this age are pointing to returning to spirituality. Cox has called this age of spirituality the "age of the Spirit". It is to spirituality that we must return. In the Christian and Buddhist traditions, theologians speak of spirituality beyond the externals of religion. New books are appearing with titles such as *Christianity after religion*.⁴¹ Harvey Cox cites Eckhart's student John Tauler (ca. 1300-1361) who openly denounced reliance on external ceremonies. He also mentions the followers of St. Francis who found the spirit in nature. Simone Weil found the institutional church more of a hindrance than a help in the spiritual quest. Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) writes from a Gestapo prison about a future "religionless" Christianity.

The term "Spirit" comes from Christendom. Using this concept of 'Spirit' may not be what God wants in a universalised global world. The landscape of God's activity has changed and now includes different lands, faiths and tribal cultures. If one tribal religion aligns itself again with the center of imperial power, and this is not far fetched, we will again be facing another 500 years of ghetto fundamentalism.

Einstein proposes a religion for the future. He says: "The religion of the future will be a cosmic religion. It should transcend a personal God and avoid dogma and theology. Covering both the natural and the spiritual, it should be based on a religious sense arising from the experience of all things natural and spiritual as a meaningful unity."⁴²

³⁷ Eagleman,

³⁸ Barr 1980:89.

³⁹ Harris, *The End of Faith*, 16f.

⁴⁰ Tippett, *The Great Emergence*, 13

⁴¹ Diane Butler Bass, Diana, *Christianity after religion*. New York, New York: Harper Collins, 2012)

⁴² <http://www.spaceandmotion.com/Theology-Albert-Einstein.htm>

Rabindranath Tagore⁴³ in his poem *Let My Country Awake*, suggests how we should go about achieving this new spirituality.

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high
Where knowledge is free
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments
By narrow domestic walls
Where words come out from the depth of truth
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way
Into the dreary desert sand of dead habit
Where the mind is led forward by thee
Into ever-widening thought and action
Into that heaven of freedom, [my Father], let my country awake.

Mystics in every age, in every faith, have blazoned a trail for us, sometimes at great cost. They propose a spirituality that is real, a holistic spirituality that is personally transformative, socially active and prophetically liberationist; one that will rescue us from the structures and systems that restrict and oppress. It is the liberationist spirituality that makes use of social sciences as a way of doing theology. It is here that mystic theologian and scientist find themselves being partners. Both scientist and mystic concentrate on the evolutionary development of humankind becoming a new kind of being. Both scientist and mystic are concerned with society being well, unified and at peace. Both scientist and mystic are concerned about the welfare and preservation of this world. For both scientist and mystic, humankind's very self-preservation depends on the preservation of this fragile world.

I began this paper by wishing that I might be a mystic theologian. I would like to correct that in the light of the evidence that this paper has uncovered. I would now like to be a mystic, scientific theologian. And I am encouraged by the words of David Eagleman, a possibilian neuroscientist evangelist, that living in this strange world, we must strive to live a life free from dogma, full of awe and wonder, celebrating possibility and praising uncertainty.⁴⁴ "Now I see through a glass dimly but then I shall see face to face."⁴⁵

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⁴³ http://allpoetry.com/poem/8516621-Where_The_Mind_Is_Without_Fear-by-Rabindranath_Tagore

⁴⁴ Eagleman, http://poptech.org/popcasts/david_eagleman_on_possibilianism

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