



Religious Funda[mental]ism: The ego-maniac Messiah knocking on our door

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Abstract

Religious fundamentalism¹ has become ever more popular in recent years. Most notably through Islamic, Judaic and Christian Fundamentalism. In this article the author attempts through the application of analytical psychological theory, specifically the theory of Carl Gustav Jung and those of post-Jungians, to construct a psychological understanding of religious fundamentalists, and how their psychological tendencies influence those who align with their fundamentalist notions. Through an analytical psychological explanation, the author explains that individuals who are influenced by religious fundamentalists do not possess the necessary self-knowledge one should have and are thus easily influenced. The reason why others are easily influenced by religious fundamentalists is because of the negative impact of the trickster/shadow archetype that influences their rational thinking.

Key Words: Carl Gustav Jung, Archetypes, Trickster Archetype, Religious Fundamentalism
Collective Unconscious

Methodology

The researcher adopted a qualitative research methodology. Data was collected through primary and secondary sources. The researcher initiated the research by asking the question “who is a religious fundamentalist?” It was through these initial stages that the researcher first turned to the psychoanalytic theory of Sigmund Freud, as well as the theory of Jacques Lacan. The researcher then decided to turn to the theory that was used in a prior academic work of his, to provide a brief psychological understanding of a religious fundamentalist. The analytical psychological theory of Carl Gustav Jung is particularly fit for this explanation as his theory offers a more spiritual/’religious’ component. Data from both primary sources and from the researcher’s Master’s thesis was analysed to write this contribution in the area of understanding religious fundamentalism.

Introduction

At the outset it would be prudent to offer a clarification of the notion of fundamentalism¹. It typically has a religious association that indicates firm attachment to a set of intricate beliefs (Nagata, 2001). It has come to be applied to a propensity among certain groups—mostly, religious—that is characterized by a decidedly stringent literalism as it is applied to specific scriptures, dogmas, or even ideologies, and it maintains both ingroup and outgroup peculiarities (Hunsberger, 2005). It stresses the idea of purity and the yearning to return to a preceding ideal from which supporters believe followers have drifted. Fundamentalists generally oppose any diversity of opinion.

¹ It should be noted that Religious Fundamentalism does not distinctively refer to Christian Fundamentalism, although this article will mainly concentrate on Christian Fundamentalism, but also includes but is not limited to Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism etc.



Christian fundamentalism had its roots in the late 19th and early 20th centuries amongst mainly British and American Protestants (Robbins, 1995). It manifested essentially as a response to theological tolerance and cultural modernism.

Fundamentalists contended that some 19th-century modernist theologians had misconstrued certain doctrines and mainly biblical inerrancy, which they considered to be as fundamentals of the Christian faith (Sandeem, 1970).

"Fundamentalism" is reduced in Greek to "foundationalism" (fundamentum= themelion or "foundation"). It can thus simultaneously mean, a simple devotion to the "foundations" of faith, or an ideology, deliberated by the standard of genuineness and authenticity. It does however have negative baggage attached to it. Nonetheless, the church's loyalty to central things and its reference to Holy Tradition, involve neither fundamentalism, an unproductive control by tradition, an unwholesome appeal to the past, nor a legalistic approach (Agiokyprianites, n.d.).

*The blood dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere the ceremony of innocence is drowned;
the best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity.*
- W.B. Yeats

The quote above by Yeats explains in two short lines the understanding of religious fundamentalism. The innocent are not aware, at least not out rightly of the intensity that a religious fundamentalist pushes his 'agenda' on another. They sway the other² with symbolic rhetoric that falsely captures them in a state of symbolic expression.

Slavoj Zizek (2005) explains that for the fundamentalist "belief is displaced onto another, onto a subject supposed to believe". The fundamentalist through asserting his 'correct' belief onto another fails to realise that he in turn becomes the deceived in his own fantasy.

Salman Rushdie (cited in Schurer, 2004:19) explains that:

the fundamentalist believes that we believe nothing. In [their] world-view, [they] have absolute certainties, while we are sunk in sybaritic indulgences. To prove [them] wrong, we must first know that [they are] wrong. We must agree on what matters: kissing in public places [...] disagreement, cutting-edge fashion, literature, generosity, water [...] freedom of thought, beauty, love. These will be our weapons. Not by waging war, but by the unafraid way we choose to live shall we defeat them.

Vexen Crabtree (2016) states that "fundamentalism is an approach to a religion's doctrine where its beliefs are enforced so strictly and literally that they are no longer compatible with the real-world as it is today". Fundamentalist thought can arise because of the fundamentalist's revolt against the mindset of the modern world. He fears that the modern world will eliminate the traditional teachings of his religion and thus rebels by promising "enlightenment". Crabtree (2016) notes an "uncompromising attitude [which provides] a psychological boost [...] they will intentionally seek out areas of conflict between their own values and the values of those around them in order to publically highlight their own superior discipline".

Valerie Tarico a psychologist and writer in Seattle, Washington, and the founder of Wisdom Commons, is the author of "Trusting Doubt: A Former Evangelical Looks at Old Beliefs in a New Light" and she states:

Catholic and evangelical conservatives have made a high-stakes gamble that they can regain authoritarian control over their flocks and hold onto the next generation of believers (and tithers) by asserting orthodox dogmas, making Christian belief an all-or-nothing

² The other can be referred to in two different forms: the other meaning those outside of the traditional boundaries of a society or the Other which refers to a power higher than us (God).



proposition. Their goal is a level of theological purity that will produce another Great Awakening based largely on the same dogmas as the last one. They hope to cleanse their membership of theological diversity, and assert top-down control of conscience questions, replenishing their membership with anti-feminist, pro-natalist policies and proselytizing in the Southern hemisphere. But the more they resort to strict authoritarianism, insularity and strict interpretation of Iron Age texts, the more people are wounded in the name of God and the more people are outraged. By making Christian belief an all-or-nothing proposition, they force at least some would-be believers to choose “nothing.” Anti-theists are all too glad to help.

In an article written by George E. Demacopoulos (2015) titled *Orthodox Fundamentalism* he explains the fundamentalist approach of certain clergy of the church to the writings of the Great Fathers of the Church, and how their readings of the Great Fathers “never lead to God [but rather] only to idolatry”. Demacopoulos (2015) furthermore states that “Orthodox fundamentalists reinforce their reductionist reading of the Church Fathers with additional falsehoods”, claiming that the Church Fathers were anti-intellectual, resisted influence from the Western world and that the monastic community has “always been the guardian of Orthodox teaching. Each of these assertions is patently false for specific reasons, but they are all symptomatic of an ideological masquerade that purports to escape the modern world”.

A fundamentalist is not open to other interpretations of religious texts and how it feeds the individuals relationship with God. This reductionist view causes friction within the body of religion to the extent that individuals either leave their faith, in search of something ‘better’, or starts to fully and undeniably believe that of the fundamentalist; because the religious institution is unable to adapt to the needs brought forth by a changing world, and the insistent belief that their traditional forms of thinking is the *only way*. This ultra-egoistic view has caused many schisms within various religious groups and will, unfortunately, continue because of man’s inability to allow individuals to exercise any form of free thinking, as expressed by Salman Rushdie previously.

Archimandrite Cyprian Agiokypritis (n.d.) explains that an Orthodox fundamentalist:

refuses productive, brotherly dialogue and haughtily rejects those of a different mind-set, disdains the richness of any diversity in views and fanatically and tenaciously adheres to its unchanging and monolithic grasp of things, [they] do not grasp or desire to grasp the unity of diversity or the diversity of unity [...] the reactionism of the fundamentalist constitutes a fear of the forces of progress and renewal and, hence, a struggle, with fruitless tenacity and in egocentric insolation, for the maintenance of fundamentals or foundational things (as if foundations were established for the sake of foundations) while the collapsing structure awaits renewal and completion.

It can be said that the fundamentalist through applying the archetype of the trickster figure, as will be discussed below, believes he is above all and in turn manages to propagate his radical thinking on others through which he and they believe that their ‘leader’ is the only one who has knowledge of how to *truly believe*. Although not a religious fundamentalist *per se*, Hitler influenced the German people through a similar methodology.

“Fundamentalism is orthodoxy gone cultic.” (E.J. Carnell cited in Olson, 2014). Orthodoxy is a belief in universal dogmas of Christianity entrenched in Holy Scripture and commonly held and taught by all the church fathers and Christian Reformers. Fundamentalism is *inter alia*, adding other beliefs to basic Christian Orthodoxy as aspects considered vital for authentic Christian identity (e.g. biblical inerrancy, young earth creationism etc.). Fundamentalists thus believe others are tainted doctrinally and they promote doctrines which are far removed from Christian Orthodoxy. Sadly many fundamentalists are persuasive in traditional Christian spheres and cause confusion by claiming their doctrines are identical with Christian Orthodoxy (Olson, 2014).



Towards an Analytical Psychological understanding of a Religious Fundamentalist

In the *Undiscovered Self*, Carl Gustav Jung (2011:4-5) explains that the reason why individuals are easily influenced, in this instance through religious fundamentalism, owes to the fact that they do not have the necessary self-knowledge to help them distinguish between situations that are seen as potentially harmful and those that are not.

Jung (2011:5) states that “what is commonly called self-knowledge is therefore a very limited knowledge, most of it dependent on social factors, of what goes on in the human psyche”, noting that individuals will say that certain things won’t happen to them because it does not form part of their frame of reference. Jung (2011:5) continues to explain that: “in this broad belt of unconsciousness, which is immune to conscious criticism and control, we stand defenceless, open to all kinds of influences and psychic infections. As with all dangers, we can guard against the risk of psychic infection only when we know what is attacking us, and how, where and when the attack will come”.

Carl Gustav Jung explained that the human psyche can be divided into three parts; the ego, the personal unconscious and the collective unconscious. The ego envelopes consciousness and through this conscious knowing perceives the world. The ego is the ‘I’ of consciousness without the ego the conscious cannot create associations. The personal unconscious holds psychic matter which has been forgotten or repressed by the individual. Contents of the personal unconscious have to some extent been conscious at certain point, but due to certain factors such as memory failure or repression have fallen below the threshold of consciousness.

The collective unconscious “has never been in consciousness, and therefore has never been individually acquired, but owes [its] existence to heredity” (Jung 1990:42). It can be posited that the collective unconscious is the autonomous region of the human psyche, because the collective unconscious does not develop in any personal manner and contains no repressed fantasies or wishes. It is seen most importantly, as the inherited part of the human psyche. The collective unconscious contains psychic images that are known as archetypes (primordial images).

Archetypal ideas are particularly well known in mythology and fairy tales. Jung (1990:5) explains that these ideas have become conscious over certain periods of time, archetypes mainly manifest in dreams and visions, and are less understandable and “more naïve than myths”.

Modern man is experiencing an “archetypal angst”; individuals have lost contact with the meaning of life and the primordial mindset that seemed to govern individuals. With regard to “archetypal angst”, Jung (1990:47-48) differentiates between neurosis and neuroses, where the first mentioned refers to a “private affair [that has] its roots exclusively in personal causes, where archetypes play no role at all”. Neuroses, is, according to Jung, attributed to social phenomena, in which “the archetype corresponding to the situation is activated, and as a result those explosive and dangerous forces hidden in the archetype come into action, frequently with unpredictable causes. Jung (1990:48) explains that these individuals, who suffer from neuroses, “fall prey” to the power of the archetype.

The most influential archetype that relates to a religious fundamentalist is that of the trickster/shadow. The negative side of the psyche that we try to suppress. Jung (1990:255-272) explains that the trickster figure/archetype is found in various mythologies and that he can take on any shape or form, “a curious combination of typical trickster motifs can be found in the alchemical figure of Mercurius; for instance, his fondness for sly jokes and malicious pranks, his powers as a shape shifter, his dual nature [...] and last but not least – his approximation to the figure of a saviour”. Phillip Metman (1957:8) explains that: “[T]he trickster is not a person but a personification of unconscious contents as he, [the trickster], eventually



remembers that he is a god and a saviour. The question arises what the relation is between this particular figure and human life". Metman (1957:8) furthermore notes that the trickster "has no use for the existing canon of values and makes a mockery of it; second, he is utterly at the mercy of the [collective unconscious]".

Jung (1990:263) emphasises this when he explains that:

Anyone who belongs to a sphere of culture that seeks the perfect state somewhere in the past must feel very queerly indeed when confronted by the figure of the trickster. He is a forerunner of the saviour, and like him, God, man and animal at once. He is both subhuman and superhuman, a bestial and divine being, whose chief and most alarming characteristic is his unconscious.

Although the trickster is able to influence others, the psychic energy that is used for his endeavours cannot last, within his psyche a battle between his conscious and unconscious wages. Primitive forces encourage and drive him on, although as explained previously, the psychical energy that is needed to continue with his malevolence may extinguish, it can be taken up by another and continued through them. Thus, the trickster will always be able to reinvent himself, and adapt to his or her time period.

The reason why the trickster is able to reinvent himself, is due to repression, "repressed contents are the very ones that have the best chance of survival, as we know from experience, nothing is corrected in the unconscious" (Jung, 1990:265).

Jung (2011:12-18) in an essay *Religion as the counterbalance to mass-mindedness* lays the foundation for understanding religious fundamentalism. According to Jung (2011:12-18) one can distinguish between two different forms of religious understanding, i) religion and ii) creed. For Jung (2011:12-18) a religion and a creed:

gives expression to a definite collective belief, whereas the word religion expresses a subjective relationship to certain metaphysical, extramundane factors. A creed is a confession of faith intended chiefly for the world at large and is thus an intramundane affair, while the meaning and purpose of religion lie in the relationship of the individual to God (Christianity, Judaism, Islam).

We come to understand that this how the trickster (religious fundamentalist) is able to manipulate the masses. He has no regard of the individual relationship one has with God, for him, it's about the relationship the masses can have with him and how he can in turn trick them to believe that he is their "saviour". This theme is seen throughout the ages, the well-known example, is the serpent in the Garden of Eden who tempted Eve to eat the apple from the Tree of Knowledge.

This Biblical passage should not be read as literal but rather symbolical, an antagonist to the Creator. J.E. Cirlot (2002: 286) in *A dictionary of symbols* explains that the serpent: "symbolises the seduction of strength by matter [...] how the inferior can lurk within the superior, or the previous within the subsequent".

Jung (2011:16-18) explains forced religion, religious fundamentalism in this case, with reference to a Dictator State, and notes that "just as the addition of however many zeros will never make a unit, so the value of a community depends on the spiritual and moral stature of the individual composing it".

Conclusion

The moral stature of a religious fundamentalist as explained in this article is that of malevolence, trickery and deception. The fundamentalist achieves this by reaching deep into his collective unconscious and allowing the archetype of the trickster to take control of him.



Through this he can manipulate individuals into thinking that his thinking is in line with scripture, and ultimately changes himself to be seen as a god/saviour.

Even though as explained previously, the trickster's psychic energy extinguishes with time, the psychical energy can be transformed and rekindled in another individual, enabling this cycle to continue *ad infinitum*. The cycle seems difficult to end, as the archetypes that are found in the collective unconscious are primordial and dates back to the beginning of time. The dawn of a new age brings with it a new trickster, and while the mask may be different the trickery remains the same.

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