1 *Boswell's Life of Johnson* (London: Oxford University Press, 1931), I, 290.
2 Yves Simon, *A General Theory of Authority* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, [1962]1980), 152.
3 J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers* (New York: Ace Books, 1965), 25.
4 G. K. Chesterton, *Heretics* (New York: John Lane, MCMXIV), 38.
5 Josef Pieper, *Happiness and Contemplation*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Pantheon, 1958), 38-39.
6 Boswell, *ibid.*, II, 150.
7 Stanley L. Jaki, "The Intelligent Christian's Guide to Scientific Cosmology," *Catholic Essays* (Front Royal, VA.: Christendom Press, 1990), 164.
8 "The human intellect, knowing the essence of some created effect, does not know anything of God except whether He exists; not yet has His perfection attained simply to the first cause, but there remains to him still the natural desire of inquiring about the (first) cause. Hence he is not yet perfectly happy. For perfect happiness, then, it is required that the intellect attain to the very essence of the first cause. And thus he (man) will have his perfection through union to God as to an object, in which alone the happiness of man consists."
9 Yves Simon, *An Introduction to Metaphysics of Knowledge*, trans. by V. Kuic and R. J. Thompson (New York: Fordham University Press, 1990), 24-25.
10 G. K. Chesterton, *Saint Thomas Aquinas* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday Image, [1933] 1954), 135-36.
11 St. Leo the Great, "Sermo 6 de Quadragesima," 1-2, *Roman Breviary*, Second Reading, Thursday after Ash Wednesday.
12 *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, *ibid*, I, 590.

Fundamentalism

Michael Dummett

The term "fundamentalism" was originally applied solely to Christians who insisted on interpreting the Bible, and particularly the Old Testament, as quite literally true in every word. This was how, until recent times, all Christians interpreted the Bible. True, they also interpreted it figuratively: they took events recorded in the O.T. as symbolically prefiguring events in the life of Our Lord and of the Church. But they nevertheless understood the former events as having actually happened in the way they were described in Scripture. Thus in the *City of God* St. Augustine explained the greater antiquity claimed by Egyptians for their monarchy than what he took to be the age of the world reported by the Bible as due to the vaingloriousness of earthly kingdoms. Catholics, among most other mainstream Christians, have abandoned such a literalistic interpretation of Scripture. But Christian fundamentalism in this sense is still very much with us.

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It is hard for a Muslim to avoid fundamentalism in this sense, since he takes the Qur'an to have been not merely inspired but dictated. It is thus for him more directly the word of God than any Christian takes even the Gospels to be; some go so far as to hold the Qur'an to be uncreated. Nevertheless, there are Muslims who believe that an Islamic society ought to adapt to modern conditions and to prevalent ideas of personal freedom; and hence Muslim fundamentalism, as opposed to such accommodation, can be understood as analogous to a literal understanding of the Bible, for instance in the call to impose *sharia* law, including the stoning to death of women for adultery.

As remarked, we Catholics have long abandoned a literalist interpretation of Scripture. But its abandonment does not dissolve all difficulties. It is easy to accept as the word of God the passages from the O.T., often very beautiful, read at Mass on Sundays. It is easy to regard the account in Genesis of the creation and fall as intended to be understood allegorically. It is easy to accept that the Book of Jonah was written as a fiction with a moral, and not as a historical account. But how should we think of the capital punishments — the stoning to death of women for adultery, etc. — enjoined in a law supposedly given by God? Or of the blessing invoked in Psalm 137 (136) on one who dashes the heads of Babylonian babies against a rock? Or the rejection of Saul for failing to kill all the Amalekite men, women, children and animals? Does not the slaughter that reportedly accompanied the entry into the promised land uncomfortably recall the treatment of Palestinians by the present state of Israel? Can the Old Testament really be in its entirety the word of God? I am afraid I do not have, and have never read, a good answer to this question. But we have not yet reached the heart of fundamentalism.

It has become common to refer to Hindu fanatics as Hindu fundamentalists; but they do not qualify as fundamentalists by the criterion of literal interpretation of their scriptures. They are rightly called 'fundamentalists', all the same, because they qualify for a deeper reason. A feature of all fundamentalisms is again something that, until quite recently, adherents to most religions, and particularly to Christianity and Islam, shared. That is a belief that those who do not accept one s own religion, but follow some other, are 'unbelievers', walking in total darkness and with very little, if any, chance of salvation. Their religion, preached or practised, is nothing but an obstacle to the propagation and acceptance of divine truth It should therefore be opposed, discouraged and, if possible, suppressed. We can cite exceptions to this: the Jesuits in China and India, and

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other Catholics in India who studied the Vedanta with sympathy; and we can cite Hindu followers of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda who strongly proclaimed a doctrine of many paths to the same eventual goal. But by and large the exclusivist standpoint has been the general attitude of most religious believers towards those who do not share their beliefs. This attitude is an essential ingredient of fundamentalism, Christian, Muslim and Hindu. It is what underlies their cruelty; and it is what has historically underlain the many cruelties of the past inflicted in the name of religion, and above all the cruelties of Christians towards Muslims and Jews. Its vestigial remnant informs the widespread hatred of Islam prevalent in Europe today.

Now, led by the present Pope, Catholics no longer think in that way. We now see adherents of non-Christian religions as our allies against the tide of atheism sloshing round the world. We are generally confident of the chances of salvation of those with beliefs diverging from ours. We think of their teachers as among the divers means through whom God has spoken to their fathers, even though imparting only a partial message. At least we so think of those who predated Our Lord, though we have not yet solved the theological problem of who Mohammed was. Moreover, we sincerely demand freedom of religion, not only for ourselves, but for the devout of all faiths; we no longer jib, on the ground that the virtue of faith can have only a Christian content, at using the word "faith" in the plural.

We have greatly changed in this regard. But we seldom reflect on how immense is this change in us, or on how profound a difference it makes to our conception of God's plans for mankind. It transforms our view of human history, and our view of mankind at large. It does not, of course, destroy our acknowledgement of the need to propagate our religion, though doubtless it to some degree diminishes our sense of the urgency of doing so. But it also transforms our understanding of our religion, and our conception of the God we worship.

We seldom invoke our new outlook on rival religions in what we say to others: I do not know why not. We seldom combat fundamentalism among Christians by urging our new-found tolerance upon its exponents; still less do we urge it upon those who follow other religions. But if there is to be dialogue between the religions, what more pressing matter can we discuss? Perhaps the division between fundamentalists, of whatever religion, and those who repudiate fundamentalism is the greatest religious gulf of the present age.

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