
What is Fundamentalism and Where Did It Come From?

Samuel G. Candler
For: The Symposium
Atlanta, Georgia
18 January 2022

Genesis

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. (Genesis 1:1-5)

Perhaps you recognize these famous words from what is easily the most quoted and widely read book of Western civilization. The story of creation, and the first day, the second day, and so on!

I feel sure that everyone here has heard that story. So, here is a contest question for us tonight: an opening question, from that story. "According to the Bible, who was made first? The animals or the people? The animal creatures or humankind?"

Surely, some of you said, "Animals." And some of you said "People!" And let me tell you, that according to the Bible, you are both correct! (According to Genesis 1, the creatures were created first, and finally on the sixth day God created humankind. But, according to Genesis 2, Adam, the first human was created first, and God made the other animals afterward to see if they could provide companionship for him!)

It doesn't take long to discover outright contradictions in the Bible. Start at the beginning. Begin with the Book of Genesis and read it as literally as possible. Contrary to what earlier liberal scholars might want us to believe, I believe that human beings always read literally -- *at first*. That is our predisposition. If we pick up any unknown document, our initial way of reading is for the literal and plain sense of the text.

And, as we all know, to read the first three chapters of Genesis is to encounter immediately a cosmology foreign to that of modern science. Nevertheless, merely because the Genesis cosmology is foreign does not mean it is contradictory to that of modern science. The difference between myth and modernity, our ancient stories and our modern science, is the context for my paper tonight. The controversy between myth and modernity is what lay behind the legal case of Tennessee versus the high school biology teacher, John Scopes, in 1925; and I will take a look at some of that trial later tonight.

"What is Fundamentalism, And Where Did It Come From?"

There exists a phenomenon in the religious community known as fundamentalism, which has, as its root characteristic, the inability to live comfortably or creatively with contradiction and critique. For tonight, my working definition of the word, "fundamentalism" is: the inability, or refusal, to live comfortably with contradiction or critique. Further, as we will see, at the root of fundamentalism is the inability to live with modernism, the progress of science and technology and civilization. Tonight, I explore fundamentalism, where it comes from, and what it is.

Most of us, of course, have heard the term "fundamentalism", and we have probably used it – often as a favorite term of opprobrium and vilification. Words such as "stubborn" and "obstinate" pale to the power of calling someone a "fundamentalist." Very few folks admit to liking the word; it automatically seems to confer contempt and even stupidity.

Here is where the term comes from. At the end of the nineteenth century, modern and critical religious scholarship, which had been simmering for years --even centuries-- began to boil over into popular religion itself. Clergy actually began to use critical scholarship in their sermons and church teaching.

By "modern and critical religious scholarship," I mean the directing of critical and cross-disciplinary theory to such sacred objects as scripture and the Church. In the popular mind, at least, the Church and her Scriptures had always seemed to be protected from the rogue speculations of the academic community. I say "in the popular mind," because this has never been true throughout the depth of any religious community.

In the Christian Church, by the turn of the twentieth century, the folks who would become "fundamentalists" were worried about the effect of Darwin and the theory of evolution upon the interpretation of the Book of Genesis. And they were worried about the dramatic modernistic changes of the industrial and scientific world.

They were worried about those who would examine Scripture objectively, from beyond a stance of faith, as if Scripture were like any other writing. They were worried about a scientific world-view which, by definition, prohibited the occurrence of miracle. They were worried about modern historical theory. Inevitably, the growth of cities after the Industrial Revolution had also meant a re-defining of community and order, social structures in which the religious community had always played a part.

The Fundamentals

From the years 1909 to 1913, there appeared a series of twelve religious tracts, written by various authors, which sought to define and claim the "fundamentals" of Christianity in a world where so much was changing. This theology was chiefly reactionary, representing a rejection of Darwinism, higher literary criticism, and, in fact, a retreat from the rising social issues of the day. Apparently, these tracts were financed by two wealthy Californians, Milton and Lyman Stewart.

Milton and Lyman Stewart had grown up in Titusville, Pennsylvania, where oil had been discovered. They established a number of oil-related enterprises, and in 1886, their "Adams Canyon #16" was the first successful well in California. Their investments mushroomed, and they started the Union Oil Company of California.

They were also devout Christians (Presbyterians, actually). In 1894 Lyman Stewart attended one of the many revival bible conferences which were growing across the country, the Niagara Bible Conference. They began to devote their resources to the promulgation of bible religion, and they started the Bible Institute of Los Angeles, today's Biola University. They also contributed money to the development of the Scofield Reference Bible, which interprets the bible according to dispensations.

Dispensationalism is a theory of biblical interpretation attributed to John Nelson Darby, who had died in 1882. It has various forms, but generally claims that there are three or four or seven or eight or ten "dispensations" of time that the Bible covers, and each dispensation requires a different way of administering biblical verses.

B.B. Warfield (1851-1921) and Gresham Machen, of the so-called Princeton theology, drank deeply of the wells of dispensationalism, and they would become leading voices of conservative fundamentalism.

Dispensationalism still ranks, in my estimation, as one of the most cerebral, logical, and non-biblical ways of interpreting the Bible ever! The Scofield Reference Bible, published first in the early 1900's, is still used by some folks. When it was first published, it carried a weighty notes alongside the text, which most people read as if they themselves were part of scripture.

One such note purported to name the actual date of the creation of world! It used the calculations of one Archbishop James Ussher of Armaugh, Ireland, who in 1650 had determined what year the world was actually created. In fact, he figured it was not only the year 4004 BC, but it was October 23, 4004 BC. That date was listed in the Scofield Reference Bible in the 1900's. If folks read it in the Bible, it must be true!

Anyway, in 1909, one of the Stewart brothers, Lyman attended a service at Chicago's Moody Church and was

convinced by the pastor, A.C. Dixon, that something had to be done to respond to what he called the "infidel professors" at the University of Chicago. It was Lyman's idea to create a huge series of publications to discredit modernism. The publications "would be distributed to every pastor, missionary, professor, theology student, Sunday school superintendent, and religious editor in America and Britain. The bellicose Dixon, Lyman believed, would be the perfect editor. Dixon listened to the oil baron's plan and replied, 'It is of the Lord. Let us pray.'"^[1]

They titled this set of publications, *The Fundamentals*. "A few months later, the first of twelve volumes of *The Fundamentals* was sent to 175,000 addresses. (From 1910 to 1915, the publishers printed about 250,000 copies, pressing 3 million altogether.) The books contained 90 articles that defended the authority of Scripture and other Christian doctrines."^[2]

In these tracts, five points, or fundamentals, became the delineating marks of orthodox Christianity for the fundamentalists. These were the principal matters of belief which one had to believe in:

- 1) The Verbal Inspiration of the Bible (some said inerrancy of the Bible)
- 2) The Virgin Birth
- 3) The Substitutionary Doctrine of the Atonement
- 4) The Miracles of Jesus, and
- 5) The Physical Character of the Resurrection

Without discussing the intricacies of each of these points, it is worth summarizing that these fundamentals became the popular reaction to the Enlightenment itself. The Enlightenment principles of rationality and idealized objectivity were finally eliciting, in the twentieth century, a popular response in the wider religious community. Great and wonderful clashes were occurring between fundamentalists and liberals.

From those early days, the word "fundamentalist" entered our popular vocabulary with a number of definitions. One of those definitions is that a fundamentalist is someone who refuses to take the Bible, or Scripture, in any way except literally. Fundamentalists take the Bible literally, we say, while the rest of us enlightened people do not.

This definition, however, is wrong; it fails to account for the principle which I noted at the outset of this paper. Most folks begin the study of a text, by taking its words in the plain and literal way. In fact, the rise of liberal critical theory began with scholars who were unafraid to interpret the Bible literally. It is only because they took the Bible literally that they needed to account for its contradictions.

When reading the Book of Genesis literally, one immediately asks the question, "Why does chapter 2 differ so much from chapter 1?" It is because there was so much literal distinction in the texts, that critical scholars began to posit the theory of different authors -- that the Book of Genesis was not written as a whole by Moses at all -- but that it was a compilation of all sorts of early faith accounts, and that, indeed, it had taken a great and faithful editor to bring all the stories together.

It is my contention that the entire Bible, an assembly of some sixty-six different books, is assembled this way. There are individual passages and individual books placed there specifically to respond to what was just written there. Sometimes those responses are outright contradictions to what the reader just read! They are there in order to provide another point of view.

I make this analogy: Reading the Bible is like listening to the conversation at the family Thanksgiving dinner. Aunt Matilda tells a story. Then, Uncle Bill says, "No, that's not the way it happened. Here is what really happened!" And then Cousin Mary provides still another version, another point of view. All of them are family; they have different stories, and they all have the truth. That is also how the Bible is put together!

Upon what we might call secondary and reflective reading, it is easy to admit that no one --not even the fundamentalists-- interprets every word of the Bible literally. When confronted with the question whether God literally created the world in six days as we know days, some fundamentalists might say "yes," but others would admit that perhaps the word "days" is not meant in the literal sense that we know 24-hour periods today. Or, take something as silly as the notion that Jesus is the Lamb of God. No one would argue that Jesus was literally a lamb. In fact, early Christian theologians argued over whether Jesus was literally a human being.

No, it is not "literal" interpretation which constitutes fundamentalism. It is "inerrant" interpretation. "Inerrancy" is the unfortunate key to fundamentalism, not "literalism.". Inerrancy means, of course, to never be wrong. For the fundamentalist, the sacred scripture can never be acknowledged as weak or contradictory or wrong. Nor can one's religious principles be admitted as weak or contradictory or wrong. The true mark of fundamentalism is an absolutist and sometimes fanatical internal consistency, so much so that a fundamentalist will actually switch back and forth between literal and non-literal interpretations in an effort to claim inerrancy.^[3]

This twisted and convoluted dancing has resulted in some quite clownish claims. For instance, the story of Jesus angrily cleansing the Temple is fairly well-known, but it occurs at the beginning of Jesus' ministry in the Gospel of John and in the last week of Jesus' ministry according to the other three gospels. True fundamentalists who bother to examine this difficulty at all have claimed that the incident must have occurred twice. The same with Jesus' ascension into heaven. The Gospel of Luke seems to say that Jesus ascended into heaven on the very day of his resurrection, while the Book of Acts expressly has it occur forty days later. Fundamentalists who note the difficulty at all have claimed that Jesus must have ascended once, returned, and then ascended again.

For the fundamentalist, this line of reasoning applies to the Hebrew Scriptures as well, which is supposed to be just as much "without error" as the Christian New Testament. There, entire books, such as Samuel and Kings differ dramatically in their details from the Chronicles; yet, both sets of accounts are describing the same episodes of David. Here, the crazy justification of inerrancy is that these events also must have happened twice.

The reality, however, is that most "rank and file" fundamentalists do not have to read the Bible at all to remain loyal to their belief in its inerrancy. They are more loyal to the claim that the Bible is inerrant than they are to what the Bible is actually saying. It is a particular claim to which they are loyal, and they let that claim determine much wider distinctions --such as "who is truly a Christian and who is not?" "Who is truly one of the saved, and who is not?" The answer to those questions is often determined by one's belief in the inerrancy of the Bible itself, not in any deeper belief about God.

Many religious persons have discovered that critical scholarship is far from being an enemy of faith, that, in fact, it has given faith a way to live in the modern world. It is the fundamentalists, however, who create their own problem by stumbling upon the categories of scientific error and consistency in their scriptural interpretation. They are guided not by a principled biblical interpretation at all. They are guided by a vague but insistent notion that what they believe is not subject to criticism or intellectual discussion. Furthermore, any reading of religious history quickly becomes naive for fundamentalists, resulting in such strained conclusions as the claim that Jericho must have fallen to Joshua, been re-built, and then fallen again to Joshua.

Intellectually, and sometimes culturally, fundamentalists are also separatists; they are outright hostile to any modern theology or to anything modern at all. Yet, in actuality, the behavior of fundamentalists is fairly modern and secular; they easily use such modern communication devices as radio, television, mass mailing, and, of course, the internet. Moreover, fundamentalists are strangely modern in an intellectual sense. They have assumed that the standards of modern logical positivism and scientific empiricism are the same standards used to evaluate the truth of scripture.

The John Scopes Trial of 1925

All these features of fundamentalism were present in the famous, and fabulously funny, trial of John Scopes in 1925, often titled "The Scopes Monkey Trial." In January of 1925, the state of Tennessee had passed the so-called Butler bill, stating that, "It shall be unlawful for any teacher in any of the universities, normals, and all other public schools of the State ... to teach any theory that denies the story of the Divine Creation of man as taught in the Bible, and to teach instead that man has descended from a lower order of animals." Any teacher found guilty of the misdemeanor would be fined between \$100 and \$500.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) advertised to pay the costs of a test case, to test the statute in court. A mining engineer in Dayton, Tennessee, George W. Rappelyea, convinced John Scopes, a mathematics-turned-biology teacher, to admit to violating the statute.

So, Friday, July 10, 1925, 9 A.M., in Dayton, Tennessee, a small mountain community of about 2,000, the trial began, the State of Tennessee versus John Thomas Scopes. It was a fantastic media extravaganza, because of the subject matter and the characters, of course; but also because it was the first American trial to be

nationally broadcast on the radio. Clarence Darrow represented Scopes, and the elderly statesman, William Jennings Bryan spoke for the state.

The transcript of that trial has some hilarious moments, especially when, weirdly, Bryan ended up taking the stand and was interrogated by Darrow. Here are some of those moments:

Darrow opened by asking, "You have given considerable study to the Bible, haven't you, Mr. Bryan?"

"Yes, sir, I have tried to."

"Do you claim that everything in the Bible should be literally interpreted?"

"I believe everything in the Bible should be accepted as it is given there," Bryan said. "Some of the Bible is given illustratively. For instance, 'Ye are the salt of the earth.' I would not insist that man was actually salt, or that he had flesh of salt."

Darrow questioned Bryan on the story of Jonah, and then moved to the story in the Book of Joshua, in which God is said to have made the earth stand still.

"Mr. Bryan, have you ever pondered what would have happened to the earth if it had stood still?"

"No."

"You have not?"

"No," Bryan replied. "The God I believe in could have taken care of that, Mr. Darrow."

"I see. Have you ever pondered what would naturally happen to the earth if it stood still suddenly?"

"No."

"Don't you know it would have been converted into a molten mass of matter?"

Bryan snapped, "You testify to that when you get on the stand. I will give you the chance."

Darrow then pressed Bryan on the date of the Flood. "What do you think that the Bible, itself, says?" asked Darrow.

"I never made a calculation."

"What do you think?" pressed Darrow.

"I do not think about things I don't think about," quipped Bryan.

"Do you think about things you do think about?" snapped Darrow.

"Well, sometimes." The court rippled with laughter.

After a bit, Darrow asked, "Mr. Bryan, don't you know that there are many other religions that describe the Flood?"

"No, I don't know," Bryan replied.

"You have never examined any other religions?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you read anything about the origins of religions?"

"Not a great deal," replied Bryan.

After Bryan mentioned he had studied Confucianism, Darrow asked, "Do you know how old the Confucian religion is?"

"I can't give you an exact date."

Darrow persisted. "Do you know how old the religion of Zoroaster is?"

"No, sir,"

"Do you know they are both more ancient than the Christian religion?"

Bryan replied, "I am not willing to take the opinion of people who are trying to find excuses for rejecting the Christian religion."

Darrow jumped on Bryan: "You don't care how old the earth is, how old man is, and how long the animals have been there?"

"I am not so much interested in that," replied Bryan.

Darrow's interrogation kept cycling back to the age of the earth.

"Mr. Bryan," Darrow asked, "could you tell me how old the earth is?"

"No, sir, I couldn't."

"Could you come anywhere near it?"

"I wouldn't attempt to," Bryan said. "I could possibly come as near as the scientists do, but I had rather be more accurate before I give a guess."

When at one point prosecuting attorney Stewart complained, "What is the purpose of this examination?" Bryan interrupted, "The purpose is to cast ridicule on everybody who believes in the Bible, and I am perfectly willing that the world shall know that these gentlemen have no other purpose than ridiculing every Christian who believes in the Bible."

Darrow snapped, "We have the purpose of preventing bigots and ignoramuses from controlling the education of the United States and you know it, that is all."

Bryan replied, "I am simply trying to protect the Word of God against the greatest atheist or agnostic in the United States," and the crowd applauded.

Darrow barked, "I wish I could get a picture of these clackers."

A little later, Darrow and Bryan went at it again, "Mr. Bryan, do you believe the first woman was Eve?"

"Yes."

"Do you believe she was literally made out of Adam's rib?"

"I do."

"Did you ever discover where Cain got his wife?" Darrow asked.

"No, sir," snapped Bryan. "I leave the agnostics to hunt for her."

"Does the statement 'The morning and the evening were the first day,' and

'The morning and the evening were the second day' mean anything to you?"

"I do not think it necessarily means a 24-hour day," said Bryan.

Darrow kept pressing Bryan to admit the days were literal, 24-hour days, but Bryan only replied, "My impression is that they were periods."

"Have you any idea of the length of the periods?" asked Darrow.

"No, I don't."

"Do you think the sun was made on the fourth day?" asked Darrow.

"Yes."

"And they had evening and morning without the sun?"

"I am simply saying it is a period."

Darrow ragged on, "They had evening and morning for four periods without the sun, do you think?"

"I believe in creation as there told," replied Bryan, "and if I am not able to explain it, I will accept it. Then you can explain it to suit yourself."

"Mr. Bryan, what I want to know is, do you believe the sun was made on the fourth day?"

"I believe just as it says there."

"Do you believe the sun was made on the fourth day?"

"Read it!" snapped Bryan and then turned to the judge. "Your Honor, I think I can shorten this testimony. The only purpose Mr. Darrow has is to slur at the Bible."

"I object to that," replied Darrow. "I am examining you on your fool ideas that no intelligent Christian on earth believes!"

The judge had heard enough, and he adjourned the trial for the day. The next morning, he refused to let the questioning of Bryan continue because he believed Bryan's testimony would "shed no light" on the trial.

Knowing the trial was a lost cause, Darrow, on the final day of the trial, asked the judge: "I think to save time we will ask the Court to ... instruct the jury to find the defendant guilty."

After only eight minutes of deliberation, the jury returned a verdict: Scopes was guilty of violating the Tennessee statute. The judge fined Scopes \$100.^[4]

Fundamentalism exists beyond Christianity

So, the word "fundamentalism" has its etymological roots in Christianity, but surely we can admit that instances of such absolutism and rigidity and separatism are present in other religions as well. Every faith community has its share of participants who simply cannot understand the values of historical or intellectual criticism, or who resist any counterpoint to their claims. We may be aware of such distinctions within Judaism. It is a tragic mistake, however, not to admit that such distinctions also exist within that third great Western religion, Islam.

It is a mistake to make the naive American claim that Islam is purely a fundamentalist religion. It is no more so than Judaism or Christianity. In fact, progressive Western intellectual civilization owes much to the great Moslem scholars of the 10th, 11th, and 12th Centuries, who re-kindled interest in Greek philosophy and in Aristotle in particular. (Remember Ibn Rushd, 1126-1198, known as in the West; and Ibn Sina, 980-1037, known as Avicenna in the West). They were modernist Muslims, in their time.

Popular American sentiment is often afraid of the particular political action of fundamentalists, and it is that association that we fear in Moslem thinkers who call for a revival of Islamic culture. They do not always mean, however, political action. At least one thinker, Mohammed Arkoun, born in Algeria and teaching at the Sorbonne twenty years ago, called for a re-integration of Islam and Western cultures, just as Koranic revelation and Greek rational philosophy were once united (*Rethinking Islam*). He thinks that this would be possible in the West, since few present Muslim societies permit intellectual criticism.

It may be true that religions who make some text or scripture the centerpiece of their faith are more susceptible to the virus of fundamentalism. This is inevitable. And most of the world's established religions have such texts. Even the Eastern religions, especially Hinduism and Buddhism, can trace their evolution through arguments about how inerrantly the ancient texts are to be followed. Mahayana Buddhism --The Great Vehicle-- developed as a response to Theravada Buddhism --the Lesser Vehicle-- because the Lesser Vehicle was simply too narrow a way of following the scriptures. One way of explaining the development of Buddhism itself is that it grew out of a personal experience, that of Siddhartha Gautama --the Buddha-- rejecting the authority of the Hindu scriptures, the *Vedas*.

In fact, we may be aware of certain fundamentalist views within each of our fields of work or discipline. It is fundamentalism which arrogantly assumes only its own truth and refuses, sometimes, even to participate in mutual discussion and critique. Again, this is because the chief characteristic of fundamentalism is not literalism, but a clinging to inerrancy at all costs --even to the point of losing contact with the overall goal at hand. (A type of fundamentalism may be the source of the legal theory of constitutional interpretation known as "originalism.")

Fundamentalists are those clingers to inerrancy who find some internal and seemingly consistent response -- convoluted and spasmodic as it may be-- to every possible objection or question to their theory. The fundamentalist system, in whatever field it may appear --religious, historic, scientific, conservative or even liberal-- is a closed system, inherently hostile to any critical scholarship or outside thinking. This is what makes fundamentalism the very antithesis to what I consider a "liberal arts education." One of the purposes of education is to learn to use rationality and intellectual critique. Fundamentalists cannot participate in such intellectual critique.

I cannot close without considering a critical fact and, indeed, folly, of fundamentalism. It is this: Most of us carry about, within us, the virus of fundamentalism all the time. Most reasonable people are not merely open minds, susceptible to every new theory or speculation which comes to their attention. There are lines in our religious faith, or our atheistic faith, there are lines in our cosmology, lines in our fields of research, beyond which we cannot argue. They are simply our starting lines, our metaphysical presuppositions, which we cannot prove. At those lines in our discussions --when one is asked something like "why read scripture anyway?" or "what happened before the Big Bang?" or "isn't there something faster than the speed of light?" or "why follow the U.S. Constitution at all?" or "how does physical healing really occur after surgery?" -- at those lines, we must rely on answers outside of our system.

We are all of us, to some degree, fundamentalists, content to work within our own system, but sometimes quite afraid of anything beyond it. This is one reason fundamentalists irritate us so much; they reflect so naively and baldly what can be true about all of us. They show us our own fear of exploring anything beyond our own system of belief.

Still, I believe that fundamentalism might be far more easily tolerated if it were not so fearful and hostile. This is usually how healthy folks treat their own principled life or their self-awareness of the fundamentalist virus. We laugh it off at the perimeters, refusing to be threatened by our inability to explain things beyond our own system.

That is why I am heartened by the story told about the philosopher, Alfred North Whitehead, who died in 1947, and who gave a lecture about cosmology and the beginning of the world. At the end of his talk, a young woman came up and said, "You can't fool me, Dr. Whitehead, I know that the world really rests on the back of a giant turtle" Whitehead smiled and asked the simple question, "Well, then, what does that turtle rest on?" The woman replied, "Another turtle!" "And what about that second turtle? What does he stand on?" Whitehead pressed on. Then it was the woman's turn to smile, "Oh, Dr. Whitehead," she said, "you can't fool me. It's turtles all the way down."

For fundamentalists, it's turtles all the way down, and nothing we say might prove it otherwise.

Mythos and Logos

Karen Armstrong, a former sister in a Roman Catholic religious order, and now a very comprehensive writer on comparative religion, presented some valuable insights on fundamentalism in her book of a few years ago, titled *The Battle For God*. It is almost a tour de force, tracing the elements of religious fundamentalism, in all three of the monotheistic religions, all the way back to 1492, which she describes as a beginning of modernity. She describes how Ferdinand and Isabella, of Spain, in trying so forcefully to modernize their country, ended up creating harsh reactions.

Ferdinand and Isabella were aggressive modernizers who sought to suppress all dissidence; but their inquisitorial methods led to the formation of a secret Jewish underground and to the first declarations of secularism and atheism in Europe. Later some Christians would become so disgusted by this type of religious tyranny that they too would lose faith in all revealed religion. But secularism could be just as ferocious and, during the twentieth century, the imposition of a secularist ethos in the name of progress has been an important factor in the rise of a militant fundamentalism, which has sometimes been fatal to the government concern.^[5]

This pattern of competing secularism and religious conservatism seems to repeat itself, generation after generation. Armstrong says that, "Secularists and fundamentalists sometimes seem trapped in an escalating spiral of hostility and recrimination."^[6]

Most importantly, Armstrong discusses two classical ways of thinking, in human history: the way of *mythos* (myth) and the way of *logos* (practicality, we might say). Here are her words:

We tend to assume that the people of the past were (more or less) like us, but in fact their spiritual lives were rather different. In particular, they evolved two ways of thinking, speaking, and acquiring knowledge, which scholars have called mythos and logos. Both were essential; they were regarded as complementary ways of arriving at truth, and each had its special area of competence. Myth was regarded as primary; it was concerned with what was thought to be timeless and constant in our existence. Myth looked back to the origins of life, to the foundations of culture, and to the deepest levels of the human mind. Myth was not concerned with practical matters, but with meaning. Unless we find some significance in our lives, we mortal men and women fall very easily into despair.^[7]

...Myth could not be demonstrated by rational proof; its insights were more intuitive, similar to those of art, music, poetry, or sculpture. Myth only became a reality when it was embodied in cult, rituals, and ceremonies which worked aesthetically upon worshippers, evoking within them a sense of sacred significance and enabling them to apprehend the deeper currents of existence.^[8]

To ask whether the Exodus from Egypt took place exactly as recounted in the Bible or to demand historical and scientific evidence to prove that it is factually true is to mistake the nature and purpose of this story. It is to confuse mythos with logos. Logos was equally important. Logos was the rational, pragmatic, and scientific thought that enabled men and women to function well in the world.

We may have lost the sense of mythos in the West today, but we are very familiar with logos, which is the basis of our society. Unlike myth, logos must relate exactly to facts and correspond to external realities if it is to be effective. It must work efficiently in the mundane world. We use this logical, discursive reasoning when we have to make things happen, get something done, or persuade other people to adopt a particular course of action. Logos is practical. Unlike myth, which looks back to the beginnings and to the foundations, logos forges ahead and tries to find something new: to elaborate on old insights, achieve a greater control over our environment, discover something fresh, and invent something novel.^[9]

Armstrong makes the claim that fundamentalists try to turn mythos into logos, trying to make the truths of myth follow the same criteria for truth as scientific positivism.

So, how does a modern person of faith, who wants to be true to both mythos and logos, answer fundamentalism? Reviewing the fundamentalists in Judaism, and Christianity, and Islam, Armstrong says that,

Suppression and coercion are clearly not the answer. They invariably lead to a backlash and can make fundamentalists or potential fundamentalists more extreme. Protestant fundamentalists in the United States became more reactionary, intransigent, and literal-minded after their humiliation at the Scopes trial. The most extreme forms of Sunni fundamentalism surfaced in Nasser's concentration camps, and the shah's crackdowns helped to inspire the Islamic Revolution. Fundamentalism is an embattled faith; it anticipates imminent annihilation. Not surprisingly, Jewish fundamentalists, be they Zionist or ultra-Orthodox, are still haunted by fears of holocaust and anti-Semitic catastrophe. Repression has bitten deeply into the souls of those who have experienced secularization as aggressive, and has warped their religious vision, making it violent and intolerant in its turn. Fundamentalists see conspiracy everywhere and are sometimes possessed by a rage that seems demonic.^[10]

How do we answer fundamentalism? Armstrong says,

...First, it is important to recognize that these theologies and ideologies are rooted in fear. The desire to define doctrines, erect barriers, establish borders, and segregate the faithful in a sacred enclave where the law is stringently observed springs from that terror of extinction which has made all fundamentalists, at one time or another, believe that the secularists were about to wipe them out. The modern world, which seems so exciting to a liberal, seems Godless, drained of meaning, and even satanic to a fundamentalist.

... Second, it is important to realize that these movements are not an archaic throwback to the past; they are modern, innovative, and modernizing. Protestant fundamentalists read the Bible in a literal, rational way that is

quite different from the more mystical, allegorical approach of premodern spirituality.^[11]

So, to conclude, which came first, the animals or the human beings? Which came first, mythos or logos? Modernism or fundamentalism? Will one side dominate the other? Personally, I hope not. Our healthy future depends upon the mutually respecting ways of mythos and logos. I like the story of the world resting atop a giant turtle. And, it is turtles all the way down. However, I prefer to turn it the other way around. It's turtles all the way up, when we encourage the growth of both mythos and logos. It's turtles all the way up, as we grow into progress without abandoning the myth of the past!

Here endeth the paper.

Samuel G. Candler
Atlanta, Georgia

[1] from Ted Olson and Mark Galli, "The Monkey Trial and The Rise of Fundamentalism," in *Christian History* magazine, issue 55, 1997.

[2] Ibid.

[3] See James Barr, *Fundamentalism*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press: 1978) pp. 40 ff.

[4] Transcript taken from David Goetz, "The Monkey Trial," in *Christian History* magazine, issue 55, 1997.

[5] Karen Armstrong, *The Battle For God: A History of Fundamentalism*, (New York: Random House, 2000) 16.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Armstrong, *The Battle for God*, Kindle edition, location 249.

[8] Armstrong, *The Battle for God*, Kindle edition, location 268.

[9] Armstrong, *The Battle for God*, Kindle edition, location 285-286.

[10] Armstrong, *The Battle for God*, Kindle edition, location 365.

[11] Ibid.