Critically assess the view that Fundamentalism is a revolt against modern secular society.

Introduction

In answering this question it is first necessary at some length to provide a clear context for the discussion. In order to do this there is first a look at the definitions of Fundamentalism, modernism and secularism. There is then an examination of how the answer to this question is strongly tied to the precise detail of our definitions. Lastly there is examination of how the answer to this question is related to the changing nature of modernism itself.

Fundamentalism or Fundamentalism*s*

The scope and meaning of the term "Fundamentalist" and "Fundamentalism" has broadened enormously from the original contextual emergence of the term in North American Protestantism between 1909 and 1920. This is primarily because of the academic paradigm of fundamentalism established by the *Fundamentalism Project* of the American Arts and Sciences. Its analysis within the ten-year study and the subsequent synthesis of the editors at the end of the project[1] attempted to provide an "empirical" definition of Fundamentalism that was based on "family resemblances" and an ideological analysis[2]. Fundamentalism came to be viewed as a trans-religious, trans-national and trans-cultural 'new emergent' phenomenon and was hence pluralised to *Fundamentalisms*. Thus, in essence, this was a universalising historical-reductionist process prefigured in Lawrence who had previously offered this definition of fundamentalism, "for fundamentalists Truth is always and everywhere one...there can only be one true text, one true reading of that text and one true community."[3] He had proposed this philosophically rather than empirically but was nevertheless thought, by Lawrence himself, to have provided the academic context for the vast majority of recent study, including that of the Fundamentalism project[4]. It is thus expedient to examine his conception in more detail before critiquing it.

Modernism and Secularism

Lawrence's central assertion was that Fundamentalism is a reaction to "modernism (the philosophy) and/or modernity (the industrialisation and the technology)"[5] which are normally fused together

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[1] Almond, G.A., Appleby, R.S. & Sivan, E. (2003), *Strong Religion: The Rise of Fundamentalisms around the World*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp9-14.

[2] Almond, G.A., Appleby, R.S. & Sivan, E. (2003), p9.

[3] Lawrence, B., 'From fundamentalism to fundamentalisms: a religious ideology in multiple forms', *Religion, Modernity and Post Modernity*, Heelas, P., Martin, D. & Morris, P. (Eds), 1998, pp88-101.

[4] Lawrence, B. (1998), p89.

[5] Lawrence, B. (1990), *Defenders of God: The fundamentalist revolt against the modern age*, San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, p27.

into the term "modern". The underlying epistemology and ideology is "secularism"[6]. Briefly, "secularism" conceived in such terms is:

a.   Concerned with the temporal "here and now material world of feelings and experience";
b.   Individualistic, the locus of life is the self;
c.   A scientific, materialistic view of knowledge;
d.   Associated with technology flowing from industrialisation as providing the liberation of the human being:

> "[it is] the search for individual autonomy...at its utopian extreme...it enthrones...consumer-orientated capitalism...as the means...that will also eliminate social unrest and physical discomfort"[7]

In other words it is an alternative meta-narrative of meaning to religion for human life. There is simply no longer any public role for religion and so "secular modernity" theologically becomes a synonym for "secular humanism": a-cultural, apolitical and *a*-theological. Thus, it serves well this universalising definition of Fundamentalism*s* as a reaction to "modern secular society".

Fundamentalism in context

However, there is a need to challenge this paradigm. Though it may be elegant and concise, this is a secular interpretation of Fundamentalism in the service of a thinker within secular modernity. By defining our terms in such a manner we cannot but agree that fundamentalism*s* are a reaction to modern secular society. Primarily, it is a non-spiritual and a non-theological definition of both secularism and modernity and ignores the cultural context of each fundamentalism for which the religious context may or may not be the essential component. The shortcomings of this approach are neatly summarised by the editorial committee of the *Fundamentalism Project* themselves, "There are numerous problems in applying the word "fundamentalism" beyond its *original historical use* [my emphasis] ... as a template for all other 'fundamentalisms'"[8].

Thus, in attempting to analyse in an Islamic, Jewish, Hindu or Buddhist context, the Fundamentalism Project had great difficulty with proving their case for the universal definition. The "religious" aspect was often shown to be a subordinate cultural feature and is only prevalent in so much as it serves the political aims of the movement or legitimises violence against the incumbent State[9]. Pope makes a similar observation:

> "the ethnic character of the society may determine whether a purely religious form of fundamentalism emerges or whether it is subordinated and intermingled with ethnic and nationalist purposes"[10]

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[6] Lawrence, B. (1990), pp23-42.

[7] Lawrence, B. (1990), p27.

[8] Almond, G.A., Appleby, R.S. & Sivan, E. (2003), p14.

[9] Almond, G.A., Appleby, R.S. & Sivan, E. (1995), 'Fundamentalism, Genus and Species', *Fundamentalisms Observed*, Chicago: UCP, pp414-423.

[10] Pope, R., 'Battling for God in a secular world: Politics and Fundamentalism', *Fundamentalism*, Partridge, C. (Ed), Paternoster Press (2001), p192.

Secondly, 'secularism' does not necessarily imply a non-religious ideology. 'Secular' may be understood as a rejection of the preconceptions of a medieval church-state hegemony but not necessarily as society with only private religious expression, the public sphere void of the spiritual and the sacred. It is frequently used simply in the descriptive sense of civil functions of 'the State' carrying no spiritual, moral or ethical sense.

The force of the challenge to the argument of Lawrence and his successors is that by attempting to universalise "Fundamentalism", the real character of "Fundamentalism" gets obscured. He has to enforce a sub-definition of secular to maintain his conclusion. Hence, the remainder of this essay concentrates on Fundamentalism in the original and subsequent historical context of Protestant Christianity and examines descriptively and then philosophically whether "anti-modern" and "anti-secular" are accurate descriptions of such Fundamentalism.

Classical Protestant Fundamentalism

Protestant Fundamentalists were self-titled Baptist and Presbyterian Protestants of North America in the period 1909-1920. Though they retreated from the public stage in 1925 after the humiliation of the Scopes "evolution" trial, their formulation of Fundamentalism is the direct theological and historical precursor to the "Fundamentalism" that characterised the re-emergence of the "New Christian Right" of American politics during the 1970s. At first sight it is indeed characterised as a re-emergence from the "enclave" to the "open revolt" because of the encroachment of the liberal hegemony and "secular humanism" [11] into the individual states that had previously enjoyed constitutional autonomy. The political agenda is described clearly by Bruce as sharing a broad political platform with secular conservatives in direct opposition to the contemporary secular liberalism.

> "...on issues of social and moral policy, geographical and cultural peripheries have become increasingly subject to the 'core' of cosmopolitan America.... where the [liberal] centre [imposes]...the maintenance or restoration of a Christian culture required God's people to 'come out of the closet'"[12].

The moral appeal was as "putative heirs"[13] of the original Puritan settlers, reclaiming the heart and soul of the nation by virtue of the Constitution being framed in Christian terms.

However, this is only part of the picture. The other dynamics were theological. Theologically, Fundamentalism had grown out of a reaction to the developments within liberal Protestantism which by the end of the 19th century was starting to deconstruct the traditional view of Scripture:

a. Secularisation of the study of scripture by both the 'lower' (textual) and 'higher' (source) literary critical methods of the Renaissance, which examined the Bible as literature;

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[11] Bruce, S., 'Modernity and Fundamentalism: The New Christian Right in America', *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (Dec., 1990), pp. 477-496.
[12] Bruce, S. (1990), p478.
[13] Pope, R., (2001), p215.

b. The theology of Schleiermacher which emphasised the religious experience as the spiritual experience of "absolute dependence" rather than assent to correct doctrine[14];

c. The emergence of Darwinism and the increasing authority generally of "science" as an alternative to the religious account of the origins of Man:

In all these ways, there was seen to be damaging attack on the integrity, inspiration and authority of the Bible. The conservative reaction, which culminated in the publication of the "Fundamentals" between 1909 and 1925, was anchored in the 19th century pre-millennialism of Darby, the systematic theology of Hodge and the apologetics of his successor Warfield. The characteristics of the movement became:

a. Pre-millennialism with its emphasis as God as the "God of history" excluded by definition "secular humanism" as an ideology for human *being*. It was living with an awareness of eternity that mattered, not the experience of the temporal here and now:

> "...the separation of religion and politics into different compartments governed by different criteria – with religion relegated to the private home world of leisure activity and the family – is exactly the 'secularization' of liberal Protestantism which fundamentalists reject."[15]

b. Hodge comprehensively re-envisaged dogma which gave birth to the systematic Princeton theological seminary which was to provide the intellectual foundation of Fundamentalism[16]. During the early years of the 20th century, Hodge's theology was refined by Warfield whose work more than any individual became the basis of Fundamentalist theology and ideology.

c. Where liberal Protestantism was prepared to cede ground to the modern scientific mood, fundamentalism drew circles around doctrine to be accepted as normative known as the non-negotiable "Fundamentals".

The Paradox of Protestant Fundamentalism

This descriptive analysis would seem to concur well that the Protestant Fundamentalists were simply "in revolt" against modernity and its "secular humanism...a synonym for evil"[17]. However in this section we make the most paradoxical of philosophical assertions: fundamentalists in rhetoric may appear "anti-modern" and "anti-secular" but are in fact both thoroughly modern *and* secular in their philosophy. In his *original* analysis of Fundamentalism, Lawrence used a synthesis of linguistics and philosophical analysis which cast Though in later work he heavily qualifies this by effectively aligning himself with the *Fundamentalism Project*, this thought is the one that helps reconstruct our understanding.

Similarly, Barr built a good, clear case for the philosophical and theological character of the Fundamentalist movements within the conservative Protestantism of North America, "It cannot, I think, be doubted what philosophical position they held: it was a pre-Kantian eighteenth-century

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[14] Cross, F.L. (1958), *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, London: Oxford University Press, "Schleiermacher, Friedrich Daniel Ernst", pp1223-1224.
[15] Bruce (1990), p484.
[16] Barr, J. (1984), *Fundamentalism*, 2nd Edition – 3rd impression, London: SCM, p278.
[17] Bruce (1990), p488.

empirical rationalism."[18] Let us examine these statements more closely. Lawrence identifies one of the key philosophical features of the Enlightenment was this belief in "objective truth"[19]. The Enlightenment put a supreme confidence in human reason, correctly applied, to be able to understand reality as it really was, devoid of subjectivity. It was a matter of observing the world in an empirical manner, categorising, organising and differentiating according to objective principles that would reveal universal truth.

The Princeton theology of Hodge was a direct response to the challenge of this modern demand for "objectivity"; "the high authority accorded to reason...marks off the Princeton theology...from preceding doctrinal understandings [of] the [Reformation] tradition"[20]. Hodge objectified theology into matters of facts in effect, a direct contradiction to human subjectivity and the ineffability of religious "experience". He centred theology not in subjective "faith" but in biblical infallibility and inerrancy:

a) *Infallibility* is the principle that the correct use of reason with regards to the biblical texts allows the discovery of objective principles with which to conduct oneself in this life and to enter into union with God through His Word. The Bible contains spiritual "facts" not opinions of the writers by the virtue that the scripture states about itself that it was "God-breathed".

b) *Inerrancy* is the objective principle that the <u>entire</u> biblical text is completely without error in matters of theology, historical fact or textual form. God is perfect and so *all* scripture must be perfect and harmonious as it is the work of the Holy Spirit.

This model of biblical inspiration, extended to the entire corpus of scripture, was a major departure from the Renaissance flavour of the Lutheran and Calvinist Reformation where both Reformers had accepted a hierarchy of scriptural authority. However, by such a comprehensive objective view of the entire Bible as without error and not tempered by human subjectivity, it provided the *rational* justification for the Christian faith demanded by the rational temper of the contemporary 19th century scientific modernity:

> "The inspiration of the Bible means that, though it is the product of identifiable human authors, it lies beyond the range of [their] human opinion...By accepting it as true and right one is accepting something that is objective...it is accepting the Bible's own 'view' of itself...[there is] a standard of absolute truth which stands entirely outside of [oneself]"[21]

Where 'scientific' literary criticism demonstrated errors or inconsistencies within the text, particularly with regards to the normative Authorised version to which was attached a special divine providence[22], this was explained away as "corruption" from the original autographs after the pattern of corruption that the literary critics demonstrated occurred within the manuscript evidence more

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[18] Barr, J. (1984), p272.
[19] Lawrence (1989), p41.
[20] Barr, J. (1984), p278.
[21] Barr, J. (1984), p311.
[22] Most fundamentalists will still read from the King James Version for this reason. It is still considered "the centrepiece of our translations" with an entirely demonstrably inaccurate mythology of accuracy and superior English.

generally – regardless of whether there was actually any *direct* evidence for corruption of the discrepant texts:

> "In many cases...there seemed to be a discrepancy between one biblical source and another...Warfield in his demand for 'proof' made absolute textual certainty his first condition: 'Let it (1) be proved that each alleged discrepant statement certainly occurred in the original autograph of the sacred books in which it was said to be found'"[23].

As the original autographs are lost, it was impossible to prove the errors were present in the text *as originally written*. By this positioning the inspiration in the texts "as originally written" it became impossible to refute that the lost original texts were not perfect and thus not God-breathed. This is a pseudo-scientific[24], supremely Rationalist, objective argument for the integrity of the text with no reliance on religious subjectivity or recourse to spiritual experience, "they rejected the 'mystical' tendency completely, while against the 'rationalists' they contested only the *misuse* of reason."[25] The logical force of the argument was designed to remove any possibility of criticism of the biblical text, to set it in an impregnable fortress of reasonableness. Thus, the intellectual character of this argument is clearly supremely *modern*, "a ...retrieval of early-modern abstractions, such as objectivity, certainty, reason, and, of...science."[26]

They are also *secular* in the sense that the key elements of the belief are rooted in a "scientific and materialistic view of truth"[27] exemplified in an absolute commitment to the Bible as an inerrant and infallible text that can be taken as *objective* truth, that is the truth of *common* [to all men] *sense:*

> "According to the Scottish Enlightenment, which latently influenced many fundamentalists, [Christian principles] are "common sense". ...Fundamentalism, despite claims about revelational authority, involves a process of discovery, change, and growth in one's perception of the material world."[28]

Knowing God is simply a matter of progressively knowing the objective realities of His Word in its "plain" sense (as opposed to symbolic or allegorical) and not a matter of experience beyond the reach of reason.

The impact of Postmodernity in our modern context

This latter analysis holds good for the original historical positioning of Fundamentalism within the American Protestant movement and still characterises the self-identifying North American "Fundamentalists" including the Western Pentecostal, "Word of Faith" and denominational charismatic movements.   However, when we move to redefine modern to mean "our current society" where modern now has to also encompass "post-modern" with it pluralistic and relativistic context, post-modern Fundamentalism can be of an entirely different character. It is only in "revolt"

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[23] Barr, J. (1984), pp280-281.
[24] "Pseudo-scientific" as a scientific statement is amenable to falsification or experimental verification. This cannot be classed as either.
[25] Barr, J. (1984), p272.
[26] Lawrence (1990), p89.
[27] Barr, J. (1984), *Fundamentalism*, p173.
[28] Lawrence (1989), p41

in the sense that post-modernity is in revolt against secularism. That is, the argument is that secularism no longer accurately describes "modern" society in most societies of the world outside of Europe. A distinct, post-modern form of Fundamentalism is found in "Third World" indigenous neo-Pentecostalism[29]:

> "Far from fading away as modernity bit, religion has acquired a new lease of life in the postmodern era [a] 'third force' Christianity based on the 'Gifts of the Spirit' [and] far from being the type case of the future, western Europe, with its ...vanguard of secularity...looks ever more like the exception so far as religion goes"[30]

Martin comments there has been a "second Reformation" [31] in the Catholic heartlands of Latin America and Asia. The Reformation has not emphasised inerrancy or infallibility but the *experience* of God and its tangible manifestation as a catalyst for social and economic change:

In other words, its dynamic is not the objectivity of scripture with "the Word" the centrepiece of Christian faith but the exuberant subjectivity of the joy located in the Holy Spirit. Scripture is viewed in a fashion much as the neo-orthodoxy of Barth in the first half of the 20th century: the written Bible only *becomes* the Word of God when it is Spirit-filled[32]. Barth viewed fundamentalism as in error because it uses the same 'liberal methodology' and 'natural theology' of its liberal opponents,[33] which is complimentary to the argument developed here.

Conclusion

The conclusions that are arrived at in this essay can only be described as counter-intuitive and against the tide of the common academic views of the relationship of Fundamentalism to modernity, whether that is modernity conceived in the Enlightenment sense or in the context of post-modernism. This is because the question has been approached philosophically rather than historically or empirically. In summary:

a. With the 20th century North American fundamentalism, it is a Rationalist reciprocal expression of that same secular modernity. Its apologetic is characterised by science, pseudo-science, logical positivism and materialism. The "Word of God" is taken in a literal, plain sense rather than an allegorical or symbolic sense[34]. This is still the dominant principle of those movements although there are large disagreements as to who has the "correct" interpretation of the "plain sense" of Scripture. The overwhelming unifying principle of such Fundamentalism, which makes it possible for them to co-exist and work together, is the idea that knowing God is essentially an

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[29] "Neo-Pentecostalism" is used to distinguish it from North American Pentecostalism and its rational apologetic of faith.

[30] Martin, B., 'From pre- to postmodernity in Latin America: the case of Pentecostalism', *Religion, Modernity and Post Modernity*, Heelas, P., Martin, D. & Morris, P. (Eds), 1998, p107.

[31] Martin, B. (1998). What is also very interesting is that it has, on the whole, bypassed the existing Protestant denominational churches that have remained small and enclave-like who maintain a "modern", intellectual view of faith.

[32] Barr (1984), pp214-215.

[33] Barr (1984), pp213-222.

[34] The "prophetic" stream of these movements may at first sight use allegory and symbolism or emphasise the mystical. However, "reason" is still the primary arbiter of faith and the gospel is always a rational response ('decision') to rational propositions.

objective process of engaging with His written Word and the contention here is that this objectivity implies a *secular* view of knowledge. *Secular* in the sense of having no recourse to the spiritual or historical, the anchoring of knowledge in temporal, empirical 'facts' about God.

The final conclusion is that it is not that Fundamentalists are in revolt and opposition to modernity *per se* but to a particular competing aspect of modern thought that emerged from the late-modern period of the 19th century and matured in the first half of the 20th century.

b. For 21st century Fundamentalism associated with Latin America and Asia, it is an integral feature of the post-modern modernity. It shares the post-modern disdain for fixed, immovable categories of knowledge preferring 'revelation' and experience to doctrinal assent to a creed. It demonstrates by witness rather than doctrine. The change in the social and economic position of its members is a key justification for it as an autonomous expression within a pluralist culture. It is tolerated and even encouraged within the (post) "secular" State because of its success where Marxism and/or Catholicism failed. Theologically, their use of Scripture is far closer to the 20th century neo-orthodoxy of Barth, where experience of God begins but does end with the Word, it must be "spirit-filled" and *become* the "living Word".

The final conclusion is that it is the religious corollary of post-modernity in the countries where it is found, a distinguishing feature of it, rather than in opposition to it.

Word Count: 3080

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