CHAPTER ONE

Fundamentalist Religion as an Intratextual Search for Meaning

> The distinctive nature of religious meaning is not simply that one thing is seen to represent another conceptually. Meaning is not just denotative, as a red light stands for "stop," or the image of a lily stands for purity. Much more specific to religion than cognitive representation is the participatory character of meanings and symbols. Religious symbols and words do not simply signify, they speak and perform—and in so doing they transform perception, punctuate the routine world with their own power, effect felt presences, and engage the participant. The purpose of religious language is not just to represent the world but to act one out. The sacred is enacted through words, stories, images, and the construction of consecrated space and time.
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> —PADEN (1992, pp. 97–98)

Religious fundamentalism has increasingly captured the concern of America and the world over recent decades. What began in the 1970s as a budding interest among social scientists in the rising political influence of fundamentalism in America has long since flourished into worldwide concern about its cross-cultural presence and sometimes militant role in international unrest, particularly since 9/11. Although historians, political scientists, and sociologists have carefully watched, and have assembled a massive literature on fundamentalism, social psychologists have had surprisingly little to say about the matter. Although we applaud what others have contributed toward understanding this compelling movement, we nevertheless feel the need to address what seems to be an obvious neglect from a psychological perspective, in an effort to

comprehend the movement more fully. What we offer here is a psychology of fundamentalism—but one based on a nonreductive approach that takes the fundamentalist worldview seriously, in hopes of providing more insight and larger understanding.

We begin the task in this chapter by introducing a social-psychological model based primarily on "intratextuality"—a principle that we suggest is directly linked to the centrality of a sacred text within its own tradition. More specifically, our model offers insight into how fundamentalists make use of this principle in coming to terms with a tradition-specific interpretation of what the divine author of the text intended as absolute truths to be lived out and guarded at all costs. To set an appropriate context, however, we first present a psychological framework for understanding how religion itself may provide a viable role in offering personal meaning and purpose in life. Within this framework, we then move toward presenting our own model and show how it makes possible such meaning and purpose for fundamentalists.

RELIGION AS A MEANING SYSTEM

One can reasonably ask why people choose to be fundamentalists. After all, not many people, even among religious conservatives, like being called "fundamentalists." Even though they adhere to similar religious beliefs and doctrines, many religious conservatives, particularly among American Protestants, also differentiate themselves from fundamentalists; they are apparently fearful of being embarrassed by association. Distinctions are made even among those self-identified as fundamentalists. Perhaps America's best-known fundamentalist, Jerry Falwell, distinguishes himself as a "real fundamentalist" to distance himself from the "extremist" snake handlers (Falwell with Dobson & Hindson, 1981, p. 3). The president of Bob Jones University, Bob Jones III, has suggested that, while remaining "unashamedly fundamentalist," the faculty and students of the university may begin to identify themselves as "Biblical preservationists" so as not to be lumped with Islamic fundamentalists ("Bob Jones Wants to Shed," 2002). "Fundamentalism" is thus for many a "theological swear-word" (Packer, 1958, p. 30) if we keep in mind that the significance of a swear word is not so much "what it means, but the feeling it expresses" (p. 30). It is among the latest of a whole litany of a vocabulary of insult directed toward religious groups, frequently from others who themselves are expressly religious. For example, "Puritan" was a name coined by others to identify religious conservatives of the early 17th century who sought greater "purity" within the English church. "Methodist" was a name rudely given to the follow-

ers of John Wesley as a comment on Wesley's own methodical piety. The effects of such labels, of course, are that their use results in great oversimplification of understanding, and that they often take on stereotypical overtones. Such stereotypes of fundamentalists include being narrow-minded, poorly educated, low in socioeconomic status, and simplistic—hardly a flattering profile. Though some social scientists believe that this stereotype has been empirically confirmed (and therefore that fundamentalists *are* indeed narrow-minded, poorly educated, etc.), critics of this literature have identified such claims as overstated, and at least partly as reflecting the prejudice of social scientists toward fundamentalists (Hood, 1983; Stark, 1971).

Despite an inhospitable culture that maintains these negative stereotypes, fundamentalists choose to take what they refer to as the "road less popular" and insist that it will lead them to know all truth. To outsiders, this insistence appears to be stubbornly misguided and based on an outmoded relic; to fundamentalists, however, it is an inspired revelation that others are unable to grasp. To help us understand this mindset, we operate from the underlying premise that religion provides the structure for an implicit belief system that creates meaning and through which purpose is experienced. In this section, we attempt to provide a general framework whereby religion is a worldview; that is, it becomes a primary meaning system through which all of life is viewed and understood. In the next chapter, we explore more fully how fundamentalist religion in particular serves as an unusually powerful meaning system.

Before examining the religion-as-meaning premise further, two important qualifiers must be noted. First, we do not identify as fundamentalists all people who take religion as a primary meaning system. What distinguishes fundamentalism from other religious profiles is its particular approach toward understanding religion, which elevates the role of the sacred text to a position of *supreme* authority and subordinates all other potential sources of knowledge and meaning. Second, we do not wish to imply that our (or any) psychological framework necessarily explains away the truth claims of any religious system. We find such a position philosophically untenable and naïve. Social scientists have failed to explain even fundamentalist religions away, though they often declare they have (Hood, 2003; Preus, 1987). In fact, social scientists continue to express surprise and bewilderment that among the strongest and most successfully growing denominations worldwide are those that are most fundamentalist, including those that support theological and moral absolutes (Kelley, 1972). Rather, we hope that our framework will complement the work of sociologists and other social scientists, and even religious teachings themselves, in demonstrating why religious fundamentalism remains surprisingly strong in many cultures (including those such

as the United States, which are otherwise thoroughly secular). First, however, we consider the importance of meaning and a sense of purpose to psychological well-being. Our review highlights some well-founded and empirically supported theoretical positions that serve as a useful framework for understanding how fundamentalists may find meaning through their religious systems.

Meaning Systems

A "meaning system" can be thought of as a group of beliefs or theories about reality that includes both a world theory (beliefs about others and situations) and a self theory (beliefs about the self), with connecting propositions between the two sets of beliefs that are important in terms of overall functioning. This is a basic premise of several psychological theories, which suggest that meaning systems aid individuals in setting goals, regulating behavior and experiences, planning activities, and sensing direction or purpose to life, and allow them to make self-evaluations in relation to all of these experiences. Examples of such psychological theories include Higgins's (1987) theory of self-discrepancy, Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory, Carver and Scheier's (1985; Scheier & Carver, 1985) theory of self-regulation, and Epstein's (1973, 1994) cognitive–experiential self theory (CEST). For example, Higgins's distinction between the "ideal self" and the "ought self" as two different standards to which a person compares the "actual self," and his description of how discrepancies between the actual self and each standard lead to distinctly different negative emotional states, necessarily invoke a meaning system. The aspirations and hopes of the ideal self and the responsibilities, duties, or obligations of the ought self are defined only within the context of a personal meaning system. That is, the person's perception of hope, aspiration, responsibility, or obligation must be contextualized within some sort of implicit but coherent belief system. Similarly, Epstein's CEST postulates four implicit belief systems that are developed to fulfill four basic needs: (1) the degree to which the world is perceived as benevolent or malevolent (associated with the basic need to maintain a favorable balance of pleasure and pain); (2) the degree to which the world is perceived as meaningful or meaningless (associated with the need to develop a coherent conceptual system); (3) the degree to which people are comforting, trustworthy, or dependable (associated with the need for relatedness); and (4) the degree to which the self is worthy or unworthy (related to the need to see the self in a favorable way). These theorists argue that such meaning systems are necessary for an individual to function well in the world, particularly when coping with adversity.

Dittmann-Kohli (1991, as quoted in Wong, 1998) summarizes the importance of a personal meaning system to overall functioning quite well:

> It [a personal meaning system] is a dynamic, centralized structure with various sub-domains. It is conceived as a cognitive map that orients the individual in steering through the life course. The personal meaning system comprises the categories (conceptual schemes) used for self and life interpretation. It is a cognitive–affective network containing person-directed and environment-directed motivational cognitions and understandings, like goal concepts and behavior plans, conceptions of character and competencies, of internal processes and mechanisms, various kinds of standards and self-appraisals. (Wong, 1998, p. 368)

In short, a personal meaning system is "an individually constructed cognitive system that endows life with personal significance" (Wong, 1998, p. 368) and consists of cognitive, motivational, and affective components. Of course, the question left unanswered is this: What is capable of endowing life with personal significance? For the self-identified religious person (fundamentalist or not), the search for meaning and significance involves the sacred (Pargament, 1997). For such people, religion is considered worthy of veneration, devotion, and ultimate commitment, and therefore is uniquely capable of providing a meaningful purpose to life. For psychologists and other social scientists of religion, identifying what is sacred is often difficult; a sense of personal growth, an ethic of altruism, and one's communion with nature could all be conceptualized as sacred. Hill et al. (2000) concluded that the sacred "is a socially influenced perception of either some sense of ultimate reality or truth or some divine object/being" (p. 67). Although such a definition may be useful to the social scientist who studies religious behavior, it is unnecessarily pedantic to the fundamentalist. The fundamentalist will identify the sacred as quite simply what has been ordained by the Divine Being through the sacred text. Protestant fundamentalists, for example, are quick to claim that the Bible alone is the direct and literal revelation of God, and that it is therefore the totally sufficient source of meaning and purpose to life. Islam makes similar assertions about the centrality of the Quran as the direct revelation of Allah.

The Search for Significance

A major contention of this book is that religious fundamentalism provides a unifying philosophy of life within which personal meaning and purpose are embedded. In short, for fundamentalists, religion is a total

way of life. This is not unique to fundamentalism, for others can be just as committed to a faith that is vitally and centrally important to their existence (e.g., intrinsically motivated believers). For fundamentalists, however, religion is a systematized and complex system that requires an authoritative base capable of subordinating to itself all other elements of human experience. As we shall see, subordinating all else to a supreme authoritative text is an important defining characteristic of fundamentalism. Its psychological staying power is its ability to create a unifying philosophical framework that meets personal needs for meaning and provides coherence to an existence that may otherwise seem fragmented. It is therefore not surprising that the most successful religions, in terms of both growth and maintenance of membership, are those with absolute, unwavering, strict, and enforced normative standards for behavior (Iannaccone, 1994). Such standards are characteristic of fundamentalist religions worldwide.

Personal Needs for Meaning

Baumeister (1991) points to four overlapping needs for meaning: "purpose" (seeing one's life as oriented toward some imagined goal or state), "value" (seeing one's actions as right or justifiable), "efficacy" (having a sense of control over events), and "self-worth" (seeing one's life as having positive value). It is clear that a well-developed religious meaning system, imbued with power and rooted in an authoritative base, is capable of meeting all four of the meaning needs identified by Baumeister. For the fundamentalists (as well as many nonfundamentalists) in most religious traditions, there is the promise of a blissful afterlife whereby people can live in God's presence and glorify God (need for purpose) as a result of living righteous and God-fearing lives here on earth (need for value). A recognition of and surrender to a sovereign God may enhance a sense of control (need for efficacy) and may provide a personal sense of value and importance (need for self-worth).

There is evidence (Sethi & Seligman, 1993) that religion may promote optimistic explanations of events. Smith and Gorsuch (1989) found, for example, that the attributional logic of religious conservatives may encourage optimism. Specifically, they (1) attribute greater responsibility to God for everyday life events, especially those that are positive in nature; (2) view God as active through multiple channels, rather than through a single modality (e.g., God may "speak" to a person through various means); and (3) see God as working conjunctively with or through natural causes, including their own personal behavior (i.e., they see themselves as "agents" of God). Such reasoning helps meet the needs for efficacy and self-worth.

A Sense of Coherence

A common conception is that much contemporary life is characterized by a stressful sense of fragmentation, which is not conducive to psychological well-being. Antonovsky (1987) has proposed that people who are best capable of coping with such fragmentation are those with a well-developed "sense of coherence," formally defined as

> a global orientation that expresses the extent to which one has a pervasive, enduring though dynamic feeling of confidence that (1) the stimuli deriving from one's internal and external environments in the course of living are structured, predictable, and explicable; (2) the resources are available to one to meet the demands posed by these stimuli; and (3) these demands are challenges, worthy of investment and engagement. (p. 19)

Antonovsky has further identified "generalized resistance resources," such as money, social support, preventive health orientation, and cultural stability, which have the potential to provide individuals with three key components of a sense of coherence: comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness. We suggest that religion could be added as another such resource. Indeed, the sense of coherence provided by religion may serve as an important mediating variable in what has now become a well-established linkage between religion and both mental and physical health (George, Ellison, & Larson, 2002; Powell, Shahabi, & Thoresen, 2003; Seeman, Dubin, & Seeman, 2003; Seybold & Hill, 2001). We also suggest that fundamentalism enhances generalized resistance resources through its clarity of belief rooted in absolutes.

Emmons (1999, in press)—drawing upon the work of existentialist theologian Paul Tillich (1957), who posited "ultimate concern" (singular) as the essence of religion—proposes that people are constituted to strive for goals and purposes to help satisfy "ultimate concerns" (plural). Fundamentalists return to *an* "ultimate concern" (singular), supporting Antonovsky's (1987) view that their strivings toward this concern not only may be influenced by their own sense of coherence, but in turn may help further solidify that sense. That is, given that religion provides "an ultimate vision of what people should be striving for in their lives" (Pargament & Park, 1995, p. 15), religion provides a coherent global orientation that establishes the framework through which goals and purposes are identified and defined. In addition, the establishment of goals and purposes may help crystallize the sense of coherence derived from religion.

From a psychological perspective, religion's lure for many is that it provides moral certainty and stability, thereby contributing to a sense of

coherence in an otherwise chaotic world. For some people, this is a primary function of religion. To understand this further, we find Wuthnow's (1998) distinction between a spirituality of "dwelling" and one of "seeking" helpful:

> A spirituality of dwelling emphasizes *habitation*: God occupies a definite place in the universe and creates a sacred space in which humans too can dwell; to inhabit sacred space is to know its territory and to feel secure. A spirituality of seeking emphasizes *negotiation*: individuals search for sacred moments that reinforce their conviction that the divine exists, but these moments are fleeting; rather than knowing their territory, people explore new spiritual vistas, and they may have to negotiate among complex and confusing meanings of spirituality. (pp. 4–5; emphasis in original)

Wuthnow (1998) explains that a dwelling spirituality stresses security, provides clear distinctions between the sacred and the profane, promotes a sense of community and interrelatedness, and emphasizes a spiritual home. A seeking spirituality, by contrast, stresses faith as a quest, makes fewer distinctions between the sacred and the ordinary, and offers individuals greater freedom from the restraints of community expectations.

In terms of the dwelling–seeking distinction, fundamentalists are spiritual dwellers: Their religion produces a sense of certainty and stability. Dwellers are also often surrounded by others with similar beliefs, who constitute a community where conformity of belief and behavior to the values and "rules of the house" is stressed. People with a dwelling orientation may best achieve their sense of meaning or purpose through "measuring up" to certain moral standards as outlined by the religious belief system. Such standards can be conceptualized as striving toward the positive (e.g., obedience to religious laws or performing the "right" behaviors) or as avoiding what is unhealthy (e.g., striving to overcome sin). Meaning-related virtues or character strengths may also be developed. For the dweller, the development of temperance or self-control over sinful tendencies (e.g., the Biblical notion of "lusts of the flesh") is an important marker of spiritual maturity; it thereby meets what was designated by Baumeister (1991) as the need for a sense of efficacy.

Social support may be another factor that draws people to a spirituality of dwelling. Legitimation by other dwellers is offered to assure believers that they are engaged in the right search for the sacred; this provides a certain level of security. In addition, research has shown that people connected to others in religious settings (which often tend to be settings of concern and care) display less loneliness, depression, and anxiety (see Ch. 15 in Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2001). A spirituality

of dwelling or habitation means that the dweller, as part of a family or community, both derives privilege from and bears a responsibility to the collective body. Meaning may thus also be gauged in terms of the dweller's generativity or contribution to the collective welfare of the community. This is a particularly strong theme in Amish society (Chapter 6).

Religion's Ability to Provide Meaning

While it is true that many meaning systems meet personal needs for meaning and provide a sense of coherence, it can be argued that religion, especially of the dwelling type, is a unique source of meaning on the basis of at least four criteria: as a comprehensive system, as an accessible philosophical orientation to the world, as a means of transcendence, and as a direct claim to have meaning and purpose. Though our primary purpose is to describe the fundamentalist criteria and methodology for determining how religion becomes a meaning system, here we want simply to stress how religion and spirituality are unique sources of meaning, whether applied to fundamentalism or not. We briefly consider religion's uniqueness as a provider of meaning in terms of each criterion.

Comprehensiveness

Religion is perhaps the most comprehensive of all meaning systems and can subsume many other sources of meaning, such as creativity, personal relationships, achievement, work, enduring values and ideals, and so forth. It is in this sense that Baumeister (1991) identifies religion as a "higher-order" meaning system. That is, it has a longer time perspective and contains a large number of associative links with other objects or events in life.

An Accessible Philosophical Orientation

Since religious meaning systems are comprehensive, they often function as philosophical orientations to the world. Thus religion can be thought of as a "core schema" (McIntosh, 1995) that may be born out of the need to comprehend many of life's deepest existential issues (Geertz, 1973). At the very least, it helps people cope with many of life's questions and dilemmas (Pargament, 1997), and it has been empirically established as a sufficient meaning system to deal with such issues as chronic pain (Kotarba, 1983), breast cancer (Baider & Sarell, 1983), serious spinal cord injuries (Bulman & Wortman, 1977), and bereavement (Park & Cohen, 1993).

Furthermore, within many traditions, religion is a philosophical orientation that is readily available and often promoted. For example, it is not unusual within the Christian literature to see emphasized the importance of a Christian worldview—"a complex of knowledge, opinions, assumptions, and so forth that determine the way we view the world around us" (Curtis, 2000, p. 186). Curtis claims:

> We [Christians] need an awareness of the process by which our worldview is established and refined in order for us to filter out extraneous elements that do not belong in the value system of a Christian. We also need such an awareness in order to focus our attention on principles and methods that will establish biblical truth more solidly in our hearts. (p. 6)

Thus religion not only meets personal needs for meaning and alleviates a sense of fragmentation, but it also provides a worldview (or what psychologists might call a "schema"—see McIntosh, 1995) through which experience is interpreted.

Issues of Transcendence

Religion, more than any other system of meaning, focuses on that which is "beyond me." "At the end of the road," claims Clark (1958), "lies God, the Beyond, the final essence of the Cosmos, yet so secretly hidden within the soul that no man is able to persuade another that he has fulfilled the quest" (p. 419). For many, religion may be the most satisfying meaning system, if for no other reason than its belief in a transcendent and perhaps sovereign God, and in many cases the affirmation of an afterlife (Wong, 1998).

Direct Claims of Meaning and Purpose

By its very nature, religion claims to have meaning and purpose. Within other systems, meaning or purpose is often imposed on the event or object, but for religion, meaning is contained within its sacred character. For example, when Jesus claimed in John 14:6 that "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (King James Version[1]), he was making a bold statement about what is ultimately meaningful and in which the religiously penchant may find sufficiency.

On the basis of these four criteria, it is not surprising that religion functions as a primary meaning system for many individuals, and thus we find claims such as Clark's (1958):

> Religion more than any other human function satisfies the need for meaning in life. . . . The journey is unending, and the quest is capable of subordinating to itself all other human activities. . . . He [a person] is baffled when he broods over that which may best explain his sojourn among the living, whence he has come, and whither he is so swiftly hastening. But more often that any other explanation it is religion that seems to satisfy his restless spirit. (p. 419)

We concur with Clark that religion is perhaps the most satisfying system of meaning for a good many individuals, even in an age of secularization. Fundamentalists are no different, in that they too find religion as a most capable provider of meaning. Indeed, it is our contention that fundamentalists differ from other religious persons not so much in *whether* they derive meaning from religion, but in *how* they derive that meaning.

We have maintained up to this point that a religious belief system serves as a convincing and unifying philosophy of life for many individuals. Religion provides a framework that both meets personal needs for meaning (Baumeister, 1991) and helps people cope with an otherwise personal sense of fragmentation (Antonovsky, 1987; Emmons, 1999) by establishing a cognitive "schema" (McIntosh, 1995) or "worldview" centered on issues of moral certainty and stability. Religion, as revealed in the sacred text, is *uniquely* capable as a primary meaning system, in that only it can comprehensively meet these needs. In Chapter 2, we suggest that religion's capability to provide meaning is perhaps most powerful when expressed in fundamentalist forms that to outsiders seem closed-minded at best. We propose, however, that fundamentalism can be viewed in another light, and we hope to provide that light with our model of intratextuality. It is to the presentation of this model that we now turn.

A NEW APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING FUNDAMENTALISM

If the focus is on a sacred text, then it is obvious that a proper understanding of fundamentalism has no need to find explanations for deviant or strange beliefs. Rather, we must look at the texts that fundamentalists hold dear and describe how the text molds the belief, the commitments, and even the character of those who adhere to its words. In this sense, the centrality of the text is what permits us to understand fundamentalism from within. Many of the recent studies of fundamentalism that offer most insight are textually based. These include Boone's (1989) sensitive effort to read the text *with* fundamentalists, Crapanzano's (2000)

comparison of the more "literal" readings of the Bible with those of the U.S. Constitution, and Harding's (2000) perceptive study of the use of scripture by Jerry Falwell. Each of these works in its own way has advanced the study of fundamentalism by taking seriously what fundamentalists take as axiomatic: that there exists an objective truth—revealed, recorded, and adequately preserved—illuminating an original intent that can be grasped and valued as the foundation for understanding all of life. In short, we must go to the text to understand why so many fundamentalists refuse to leave what, according to modern and postmodern thought, is at best a quaint and outmoded way of understanding what words are about.

An Intratextual Model

We contend that a model based on the principle of intratextuality is essential to understanding the psychology of fundamentalism. Figure 1.1 presents this intratextual model of fundamentalist thought. Observe that the model makes no reference to belief content. Our concern is to understand both the structure and the process of fundamentalist thought. We assume that fundamentalists are correct when they argue that a reader must go into the text and allow the text to speak for itself. In terms of the dialogic nature of sacred texts, an openness to what the text actually says and intends is crucial. It can, within fundamentalist thought, come only from within the text. Thus our model is intratextual.

The bold circle in Figure 1.1 encapsulates three necessarily interrelated phenomena. The first is the principle of intratextuality, which focuses on the process of reading a sacred text. The logic of this principle refers not to content, but to process: The text itself determines how it ought to be read. Thus no discussion of fundamentalism can proceed meaningfully if it refuses to enter into the text and be obedient to the imperatives of the text (Boone, 1989; Bruce, 2000).

Associated with the principle of intratextuality are two related content claims: a sacred text and absolute truths. Note that we do not specify what the sacred text is (the Quran, the Bible, etc.) or what absolute claims are made. The reason is that only the principle of intratextuality can specify what text is sacred, and only a sacred text can specify what truths are absolute. Thus the tautology is apparent but not vicious. In other words, reading the Bible in terms of the principle of intratextuality will both determine that the Bible is the Word of God (a sacred text) and indicate what truths are to be held as absolute (e.g., there is no other God than the Christian God). Similar claims can be made for the Quran.

The process within the bold circle involves a dialogic encounter that emerges between the reader and the text—based on the principle of

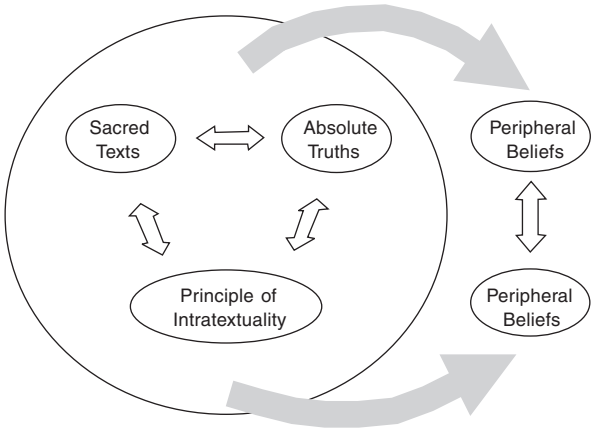

FIGURE 1.1. The structure of fundamentalist thought.

intratextuality—in which the revelation of the Divine Being becomes illuminated in the form of absolute truths. What emerges as absolute truth is whatever is of immediate necessity for maintaining the fundamentalist worldview. No sources outside the tradition (e.g., other texts based on other authorities) are consulted or are even necessary for this to occur; the authoritative text is sufficient in and of itself toward this end, according to the principle of intratextuality. As absolute truths are revealed in the interpretive process, they harmonize and are generalized into an objective reality for the reader (Marsden, 1980, p. 55). This constructed reality is considered to exist beyond the reader as an *objective* fact, and it provides a basis for the individual to attribute meaning to all other aspects of the world.

For example, the person in this stance has gained access not only to self-knowledge in relation to the Divine Being (say, as a redeemed child of God), but also to a means of perceiving elements in the world as being either good or evil, sacred or sinful, spiritual or worldly, and so forth. Since the only objective reality for the person is that which is based on belief in the authoritative text, all who do not share this same belief cannot participate in the same reality and are thus viewed as outsiders and as sources of opposition. Even the Divine Being of the text is mysterious: Without the fixed and enduring text itself, this being would be an ambiguous, inarticulate revelation, and thus knowledge would be uncertain—hence the importance of the written text.[2] Oral traditions are authoritative, but most so when fixed in a sacred text. For instance, as we

note in Chapter 7, the orality of the Quran remains crucial to a tradition whose recitation of what was once only oral is now both oral and written. It is the written text that is recited. Likewise, Christianity was once an oral tradition. Fundamentalist Christians may preach, but the criterion is always to be "in the word." Thus the acceptance of the text as sacred gives it status as an "overarching symbol" that serves to protect and sanction the worldview shared within the fundamentalism (Barr, 1977, pp. 314–315). As suggested earlier, the principal characteristic of this symbol is textual authority, which leaves room in the constructed world only for those who subscribe to its belief. Critics and unbelievers are eliminated or kept at a distance, for all who refuse to embrace the text as the sole authority are perceived as a threat to the security and purity of the fundamentalist worldview.

Not only does the closed circle indicate an exclusion of other interpretive factors; it also suggests that absolute truths derived from the dialogic process are themselves protected from outside influences and are not subject to outside criticism. An example of an absolute truth among fundamentalist Muslims (Shia) is that there is no God but Allah. For them, this truth is above criticism and not subject to debate. As absolute truths emerge from the interpretive process, they extend (as represented by the one-way arrows in Figure 1.1) into the objective world, which includes less certain truths known as "peripheral beliefs." Since peripheral beliefs exist outside the circle, they are subject to modification based on their relation to absolute truths, personal experience in the world, and even interactions with other peripheral beliefs, as indicated by the two-way arrows. Furthermore, these beliefs include all beliefs (both religious and nonreligious) outside absolute truths. An example of a peripheral belief among fundamentalist Pentecostals is that believers are to trust God for divine healing of illnesses. Although some might hold this as an absolute truth (and be willing to die from an illness while trusting *only* God for healing), those for whom it is a peripheral belief might allow personal experience of illness to modify the belief in some way and thus justify the use of medicine in conjunction with faith healing. As we shall see in Chapters 4 and 5, the early Church of God and the contemporary serpent handlers of Appalachia eventually parted ways on their understanding of what for some is still an imperative to handle serpents. The point here, however, is that neither peripheral beliefs nor external factors are allowed to penetrate the bounded psychological process that produces and maintains absolute beliefs among fundamentalists.

The encircled dynamic, involving the principle of intratextuality and the general content claims (a sacred text and absolute truths), allows us to resolve an issue that has perplexed researchers at the conceptual

level—how to interrelate belief content, structure, and process. For instance, although fundamentalists need not have authoritarian or dogmatic *personality traits,* their belief systems are "authoritarian" in that sacred texts often demand absolutes, as we have seen, that are derived from the dialogic relationship. This ideological authoritarianism is inherent in a belief system that emerges from the principle of intratextuality, which allows a sacred text to speak authoritatively.

Fundamentalists are not "closed-minded," but rather seek to search their sacred text for all knowledge. Ammerman (1987, p. 51) cites the amusing case of a fundamentalist who was pondering whether to purchase a tent. At Sunday school, he recounted how upon reading Deuteronomy 14 (which lists animals permissible to eat), he found the word "roebuck"—and hence went to Sears, Roebuck & Co. to purchase a tent. We cite this example because it is illustrative of several things. First, neither our readers nor many fundamentalists would perceive this as other than the idiosyncratic interpretation of a scriptural directive. However, its humorous nature should not distract us from the more interesting fundamentalist view that scripture is a guide for everything in life and ought to be the overarching guide. The use of scriptural verses as "decision guides" in specific instances has powerful as well as trivial exemplars.[3] We note more powerful exemplars in subsequent chapters of this book.

In any case, our model sensitizes us to expect that fundamentalists will use their sacred text as the framework and justification for all thought and action, however trivial some such uses may appear from the outside. Our earlier discussion of the psychological structure and process of peripheral beliefs is helpful here and allows a common misunderstanding of fundamentalist thought to be clarified. Fundamentalists do, in fact, support other forms of knowledge, including science and historic criticism. Indeed, fundamentalism in the United States is almost synonymous with education—from the days of the dominance of fundamentalists at Princeton Theological Seminary, to their struggles within such schools as Fuller Theological Seminary and Wheaton College, to their marginalization in readily identified "fundamentalist" schools such as Bob Jones University and Liberty University. What makes fundamentalists unique is their insistence that whatever peripheral beliefs emerge (in our model's terms), they must be ultimately judged and seen as harmonious with what is contained within the bold circle—the interrelation between absolute truths and the sacred text as maintained by the principle of intratextuality. Our model allows us to explore the conditions under which particular fundamentalists may or may not find various peripheral beliefs' claims problematic. Interesting differences among fundamentalists on such issues as evolution and abortion are seldom appreciated a priori, and unless the beliefs of a specific fundamentalist group

are considered, little meaningful can be said. The result is the continuing use of stereotypes about these people. Such stereotypes then serve to provide "explanations" that ultimately say more about those who describe fundamentalists in this manner than about what actually determines fundamentalists' thought and behavior.

The Intertextual Alternative

It will be helpful to understand the *intra*textual model of the structure of fundamentalist thought by contrasting it with what we refer to as "*inter*textual models," as presented in Figure 1.2. Observe that we do not offer a specific structure to contrast with fundamentalism. Rather, we suggest that intertextual models virtually define modernity and are what fundamentalisms oppose. Instead of a firm, bounded circle, there is a broken circle, indicating that very permeable boundaries exist in the thought processes of nonfundamentalists.[4] Thus the principle of intertextuality maintains that no single text speaks for itself. All texts are authoritative and interrelated, and may be consulted in the process of deriving truth, which is more properly understood as relative truth.

In further contrast to fundamentalist thought, the broken circle in Figure 1.2 suggests that factors external to the dynamic also influence the interpretive process. The larger two-way arrows are meant to illustrate not only that relative truths extend outwardly to peripheral beliefs, but also that peripheral beliefs may filter back into the interpretive process and exert continual influence on the understanding of texts and relative truths. Hence, no single sacred text is esteemed in the dynamic process. Instead, a multiplicity of authoritative texts suggest various relative truths, each tentatively held as long as the "evidence" is supportive. Thus the structure of intertextuality permits and fosters change and openness; it is much less bounded than fundamentalist thought. The bidirectional arrows also reflect the basic assumption of the principle of intertextuality: that a plurality of authoritative texts and relative truth claims is inevitable when a single text no longer defines truth. In this sense, even an authoritative text claiming to be absolute falters when placed alongside other texts making similar claims. A sacred text is uniquely authoritative only when it is viewed intratextually. Otherwise, it becomes, at best, only another authoritative text. This is to some the basic insight of fundamentalism, and to others its fatal flaw.

A comparison of the intratextual and intertextual models indicates that both rely on authority and authoritarian (in an ideological, not personality-related, sense) systems of belief. However, authorities in intertextual systems are tentative, contingent, and continually susceptible to change. This is a characterization virtually synonymous with mo-

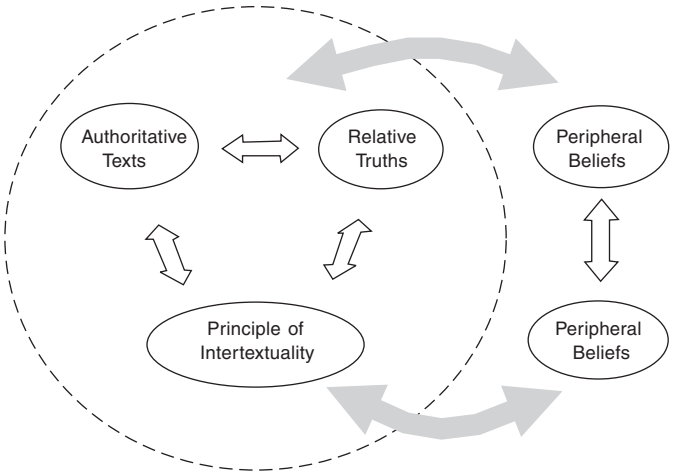

FIGURE 1.2. The structure of nonfundamentalist thought.

dernity and with "knowledge," as many have come to know it within modernity. It is only when *all* authoritative texts and claims to knowledge are challenged by postmodern claims that supporters of modernity and its approach to knowledge become as defensive as fundamentalists became in the face of the challenge posed by modernity. It is as if the chickens have come home to roost in a manner that may help those of us who are distant from fundamentalism to be more sympathetic to their quest.

On the other hand, intratextual structures of thought are open in a very powerful sense. It is another stereotype to think that fundamentalism has a closed system of thought, consensually held and forever fixed. As many who study fundamentalism have observed, nothing is more variable than the perception of absolute truth! Sociologists have focused on various "megachurches" and have identified fundamentalism with its various national advocates, appropriately appreciating the successful institutionalization of this movement. However, they tend to ignore the smaller congregations and the numerous isolated fundamentalists within organizations, for whom their sacred text provides the very structure of their thought and lives. Part of the latent potential of religious thought is that fundamentalism can coexist in congregations that would neither identify themselves nor be identified by others as "fundamentalists." Fundamentalists easily separate when they disagree on what their sacred text says, indicating that, like all who seek to understand, they are open to change and interpretation. Note that in both our models, the princi-

ples of intratextuality and intertextuality emerge from the use of texts and their respective claims to truth. This allows for their basic assumption and guiding principle: that sacred texts can proclaim themselves as religious authority—holistic and absolute—and can thereby resist either criticism or reduction to other basic categories of explanation (Machen, 1923). Hofstadter (1962) quotes the famous fundamentalist D. L. Moody as saying, "I have one rule about books. I do not read any book, unless it will help me understand *the* book" (p. 108; emphasis in original). Hofstadter goes on to quote from James B. Finley's autobiography a less extreme, but nonetheless similar, sentiment: "I have wondered if the great multiplication of books has not had a deleterious tendency, in diverting the mind from the Bible" (p. 125).

CONCLUSION

It seems that much of the difficulty for scholars in reaching a consensus on a definition of fundamentalism stems from the rich diversity of thought and belief claims made by fundamentalists, even within a given faith tradition. The principle of intratextuality is no easy assurance of agreement among fundamentalists, for at least two reasons: First, it applies across various sacred texts; second, it can be applied with much variation within a single sacred text. Differences among fundamentalists themselves may reflect deeper or more meaningful appropriations of truths that remain as much assured and absolute as they are evasive and problematic. This aspect of fundamentalism has yet to have its proper hearing in the more scholarly and academic community. We hope to remedy this problem with this book.

The employment of our model ought to reveal aspects of fundamentalism ignored in the existing empirical literature. In each one of the last three decades of the 20th century, scholars committed to an empirical and measurement-based social psychology have found the literature on fundamentalism to be so consistent with cultural stereotypes of fundamentalism that they have become suspicious of this literature (Hood, 1983; Kirkpatrick, Hood, & Hartz, 1991; Stark, 1971). In the first decade of the new century, scholars are repeating the same suspicion (Bruce, 2000). The *Encyclopedia of Fundamentalism* (Brasher, 2001) accepts the arguable claim that "fundamentalism" (originally a term applied to Protestantism in America, as we discuss in Chapter 3) can legitimately be applied to other faith traditions as well. This encyclopedia seeks to encourage comparative work among fundamentalist movements within a variety of faith traditions, such as Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism.

To this end, we briefly examine the historical and cultural contexts of each of the fundamentalisms discussed in this book, with a more complete description of the history of Protestant fundamentalism in Chapter 3. Before looking at that context, however, we revisit the primary psychological tenet of this book—that fundamentalism provides a source of meaning for its adherents.

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