

The Psychology of Christian Fundamentalism

By WALTER A. DAVIS

"I know you're a Christian, but who are you a Christian against."

Kenneth Burke

In *Apocalypse*, a patient study of Christian fundamentalism based on extensive interviews over a five year period with members of apocalyptic communities Charles Strozier identifies four basic beliefs as fundamental to Christian fundamentalism. (1) Inerrancy or biblical literalism, the belief that every word of the Bible is to be taken literally as the word of God; (2) conversion or the experience of being reborn in Christ; (3) evangelicalism or the duty of the saved to spread the gospel; and (4) Apocalypticism or Endism, the belief that *The Book of Revelations* describes the events that must come to pass for God's plan to be fulfilled. **[1]** *Revelations* thus becomes an object of longing as well as the key to understanding contemporary history, to reading the news of the day and keeping a handle on an otherwise overwhelming world. Each of these categories, Strozier adds, must be understood not doctrinally but psychologically. What follows attempts to constitute such an understanding by analyzing each category as the *progression* of a disorder that finds the end it seeks in Apocalyptic destructiveness.

Before undertaking that examination a note on method. My goal is not to number the streaks of the tulip with respect to Christian fundamentalism but to get to the essence of the thing by offering a psychoanalytic version of the method Hegel formulated in the *Phenomenology of Mind*. My effort will be to describe the inner structure of the psyche implied by fundamentalist beliefs by examining those beliefs in terms of the psychological needs they fulfill. The examination of each belief will reveal its function in an evolving "logic" that traces the sequence of internal operations required for the fundamentalist psyche to achieve the *form* required to resolve the conflicts that define its inner world. The difference between my method and Hegel's is this: Hegel's effort was to describe the sequence of rational self-mediations required for the attainment of absolute knowledge. Mine is to record the sequence of psychological transformations that must take place for another kind of certainty to be achieved: one in which, as we'll see, *thanatos* and not reason attains an absolute status, freed of anything within that would oppose it. In effect, my goal is to offer fundamentalists a self-knowledge they cannot have since it is precisely the function of the belief structure we shall examine to render it unconscious and all the more powerful and certain of itself by virtue of that fact. What after all is religion but a desire displacing itself into dogmas all the better to assure the flock that what they desire is writ into the nature of things?

Who does the structure we'll examine describe? George W. Bush and some of those closest to him? The 42% or 51% of those Americans who now call themselves fundamentalists? The 80 or 90% of practicing Christians, the over 1 billion viewers worldwide, who found Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* a singularly compelling expression of their faith and who are thus already far more fundamentalist in their hearts than they realize? The power of any religious belief system derives from how deeply it taps into collective needs and discontents. In this regard we may already be living in a fundamentalist *Zeitgeist* with the collective Amerikan psyche now defined, even among those who have never (or seldom) seen the inside of a church, by the emotional needs and principles of operation that find their most

seductive realization in fundamentalism. We may in fact find the same "faith" informing a project that initially appears to have nothing to do with fundamentalism--global capitalism.

Though he does not share their beliefs Strozier often comments on the charity and gentleness of his interviewees seeing in that a sign that we should always temper any criticism of fundamentalism by acknowledging the good things it does for people, many of whom would be lost or miserable without it. Be that as it may, in terms of the psyche a far different condition might maintain with a pronounced dissonance between the sincerity of the surface and the depths where something quite different has taken hold of the psyche. Moreover, in the psychoanalysis of a belief system the primary concern must be not with the sheep but with the Grand Inquisitors. Or, to put it in psychoanalytic terms, with those who fashion the Super-ego which is the agency essential to the hold that any religion assumes over its followers. Our concern, in short, must be with fundamentalism not as a pathetic phenomena, a halfway house for drug addicts and a panacea for those who find in it the infantilization they seek, but for those who have fashioned in it what Nietzsche would call (though with horror) a strong valuation, an attempt to take up the fundamental problems of the psyche and fashion a will to power out of one's *resentment* by developing a faith that will make one strong and righteous in that resentment, like Falwell, smug in its smug certitudes like Dubya, confident in the right to rule over those it reduces to the status of sheep, dumb and blissful in their blind obedience to the will that is collectively imposed on them.

Religion remains of course the one thing we are enjoined to treat with kid gloves as if this is the one area of life where criticism and a rhetoric that tries to energize the force of criticism is *verboten*. Violating this rule is also the quickest way to lose what current statistics indicate will be the 93% of one's audience who say they believe in God. It is thus important that I indicate up front that this is not a contract I can honor. Like Freud, I think it can be demonstrated that religion is a collective neurosis. In fact one implication of the following examination is that Freud didn't go far enough. But let me reformulate this hypothesis in a more convivial spirit. Let's bracket the whole question of whether religion has an object. On second thought, let me concede it, the utter ontological truth of all the basic beliefs, ever each one. Only then perhaps can we focus on the question that constitutes the inherent and lasting fascination of religion. *Not what people believe, but why*. The consideration of religion as a psychological phenomenon-and as such perhaps the one that offers the deepest insight into the nature of the psyche and its needs.

I. Literalism

"I don't do nuance."

Dubya

Literalism is the linchpin of fundamentalism; the literalization, if you will, of the founding psychological need. For an absolute certitude that can be established at the level of facts that will admit of no ambiguity or interpretation. (Fundamentalists, ironically, are the true positivists.) But to eliminate ambiguity and confusion one must attack its source. Figurative language. That is the danger that must be avoided at all costs because in place of the literal figurative language introduces the play of meaning. The need to sustain complex connections at the level of thought (not fact) through the evolution of mental abilities that are necessarily connected with developing all the metaphoric resources of language. The

literal in contrast puts an end to thought. It offers the mind a way to shut down, to reify itself. It thereby exorcises the greatest fear: interpretation and its inevitable result, the conflict of interpretations and with it the terror of being forever bereft of dogmatic certitudes. A metaphor is the lighting flash of an intelligence that sees, as Aristotle asserts, connections that can only be sustained by a thought that thereby liberates itself from the immediate.

Literalism is the attempt to arrest all of this before it takes hold. It's innermost necessity is the resistance to metaphor. For with metaphor one enters a world that has the power to unravel the literal mind. Let me offer one example. "There is no God and Mary is his mother." In this great aphorism Santayana asserts an ontological impossibility and a psychological necessity. I once tried it out on some fundamentalist friends. They were at first puzzled by the unintelligibility of the statement then amazed that Santayana and I were so dumb we couldn't see the contradiction. Finally the light went on, almost in chorus, the literalist deconstruction of the statement: "If he wasn't a God how could she be a mother?" All attempts to suggest that the statement wasn't meant to be taken literally only produced further confusion then frustration then anger. Santayana's statement made no sense precisely because it was a *koan*, a paradox intended to produce reflection, even introspection. It was there I suggested that one would find the key to its meaning; not in the assertion that its meaningless constituted evidence that Santayana was perverse or mentally unbalanced. We were, of course, talking at irretrievable cross-purposes with no way to bridge the gulf between us. Which was, of course, the point of the exercise.

Literalism is the first line of defense of a mind that wants to put itself to sleep. A sensibility that like Nietzsche's last man can only blink in blank incomprehension at anything that can't be immediately understood. It is the great protection against a world teeming with complexities. Literalism offers a way out, a way to keep the mind fixed and fixated at its first condition. The way: the refusal to comprehend anything that exceeds the limits of the simple declarative sentence. Two reductions thereby feed on one another: the world is reduced to facts and simples; the mind reduced to a permanently blank slate.

Fundamentalism feeds on and fosters this reduction of the mind to the conditions of the immediate. For in fundamentalism literalism is raised to the status of a categorical imperative. It is the law that assures deliverance from all confusion. There is a single text, the *Holy Bible*. It contains clear, simple direct messages-proclamations-that establish the Truth once and for all. All of life's questions and contingencies are resolved by statements that are beyond change and interpretation. Literalism reduces reading and interpretation to the Cratylean dream: one need only point to the appropriate passage and "Pouf" all doubt and ambiguity about what one should think, believe, or desire on a given situation vanishes. One need no longer wrack one's brain or one's heart or live in the terror that the world exceeds one's grasp. The Book's unequivocal meaning and Life are adequated to one another in a relationship of stark and simple imposition. You see God has a plan for us and unlike secularists and post-structuralists He speaks in clear and unmistakable terms.

When approached literally the Book of necessity takes on a number of other characteristics. Everything in it must be factual and nothing outside the book can contradict those facts. The very possibility of scientific investigation is sacrificed *a priori* to the need to proclaim the text's inerrancy. Every word of it must be the unalterable and unchanging word of God, which of course can contain no contradictions. One of the ironies of fundamentalist reading is the rather considerable constraints it places on the deity. He proclaims and what he says remains so forever, beyond growth, development, change, revision. Whatever abomination of sex hatred one unearths from *Leviticus* must remain gospel today. The Book cannot be

read progressively or retroactively, despite Christ's repeated claims to cancel the old law. An eye for an eye remains true for all time however out of keeping with the law of charity. After all, "It's in the Bible." That repeated assertion expresses the essence and fundamental paralysis of the literal mind. The idea of reading the Book along the pop-Hegelian lines pursued by Jack Miles as the story of how as He develops God changes his mind, softening his prematurely hardened heart is anathema. God's role is set by the limitations of the literal "imagination." His job is to lay down the law, once and for all, and in no uncertain terms; to be that super-ego who operates by the only *logic* that literalism permits-*binary opposition*. All conflicts and confusions must be resolved into a sharp, simple, and comprehensive opposition between Good and Evil. Else comes again the fit of contingency and ambiguity. Binarism is the realization in logic of the literalist attitude toward language. The reduction of language to the declarative statement is matched in binarism by a logic that turns everything into an abstract allegory.

The most interesting reach of literalism comes, however, in the interpretation of the prophetic writings, especially *Revelations*. Here confronting what even it must see as image and metaphor, literalism performs the only operation that makes sense to it. *The metaphoric is literalized*. Armageddon must take place on the plain of Jezreel near the ancient military fortification of Megiddo (35 miles southeast of Haifa), even though this patch of land "is not tomb enough and continent to hide the slain." Gorbachev must be the Beast (how else account for that red swath on his forehead); Saddam Hussein must be the Antichrist-or Arafat or Bill Clinton. Anything and everything that happens in the Middle East must be scanned as a sign that we are indeed moving toward the Tribulation. When he speaks prophetically God is playing a little game with us, to activate what in fundamentalism passes as the exercise of imagination. To make sense of the text requires the precise matching of its ornate and expressionist images to persons, places and events which are thereby assigned the only meaning they can have. Mapped onto history the Bible offers us an absolute certitude about history, thereby vanquishing the greatest contingency. In dealing with the Middle East, for example, we need not confuse ourselves with the messy details of political history or develop a *nuanced* appreciation of Islam. Such things only breed confusion. All we have to do is literally match a prophecy to a contingency and *Voila!* we have attained literal certitude or, what amounts to the same thing, the fantasmatic imposition upon reality of what we want to believe. [2]

In all these operations sustaining a literal interpretation of the Bible is a desperate necessity. Once let go of that and the Book slips away into the hands of those who eventually will find anything in it-liberation theology, Bonhoeffer's religionless Christianity, a searing message of love-since they will be guided in their reading by nothing but the attempt to sustain a heart in conflict with itself using a book to pry open the deepest and most conflicted registers of its own interiority. Who can tell, perhaps this approach could even lead to the discovery that the Book hates the simple minded; that it is indeed Kafkaesque in offering parables and prophecies that only deepen our burden by demanding an intelligence equal to the complexity of the human heart.

Literalism is a cardinal necessity of the fundamentalist because it *guarantees* the primary psychological need. For a certitude that in its simplicity puts an end to all doubt, even to the possibility of doubt. That is what one must have and once attained what nothing can be permitted to alter. The literal meaning of words one need only point to for that meaning to be established must be imposed on the world without a blink of hesitation, a shadow of doubt, and when necessary beyond any appeal to the simplest claims of our humanity. Two examples. Perhaps the most chilling moment in a recent CNN special on fundamentalism occurs at the end of an interview with a young girl-between 8 and 10-who was saved at an

earlier age (3) and is now so firm in every article of the faith that she is no longer in need of her parents or teachers. Earlier when the mother was asked if she'd ever let the children watch *South Park* the young girl chimed in: "I wouldn't want to watch a program like that." The interview ends with this question: "what happens to those who don't believe?" Like a trumpet call, in the blinking of an eye, even less, without batting an eyelash the child answers: "They go to hell" What made this statement so chilling was the absence of the slightest sign of doubt or pity. If there is an innocence left here it lies in the possibility that, unlike her parents, the child has not yet started to feast on images of the damned. She is however already in league with where fundamentalism will take her because she's attained the correct posture: the assumption of an absolute certitude in which there is and can be no conflict of the heart with what it is told to believe, no possibility of wondering about a God who is capable of the titanic condemnation she's just asserted as an assured article of faith. Nor of course is there the possibility of the only legitimate choice such a "truth" would demand--the rejection of such a God. $2 + 2 = 5$. Whatever one is told the Book says becomes the truth. One then clutches it to one's bosom with literal precision, locking in step to its every command, *Kadavergehorsamkeit*. My second example comes from poor Mel Gibson who judging from a TV interview accepts with apparent indifference the belief that barring conversion to Catholicism his own wife (mother of his 7 Catholic children) will suffer eternal damnation. Such is the literal nature of his faith and the ability of that literalism to seal off everything else in him so that we need not fear that Gibson will ever find himself in the place of Milton's Adam who choose death because he couldn't bear the thought of an eternity apart from the woman he loves. Literalism protects the heart from everything, even its own deepest urgings.

There is something terrifying in our first example; something appalling in our second. Together they reveal the emotion in which the literalist passion is grounded. Hatred--of all complexities; of anything that can't be reduced to the simplicity of absolute dogmas and the need to impose that hatred upon the world in a totalizing way. It is sometimes alleged that fundamentalists are just like the rest of us, confused by the world and seeking something to hang onto as a portal in the storm. This view is invalidated by the nature of the answers that the fundamentalist finds: answers that annihilate the problem, turn the desire for knowledge into a farce, and make of confusion the motive for self-infantalization. (By their answers ye shall know them.) Literalism is the way, but hatred is the through line. That is why fundamentalist certitude always becomes rectitude with the Bible mined for all the things one can label abomination. Thereby a sensibility that wants to have nothing to do with the world takes revenge upon it. On the surface literalism looks like a characteristic of fundamentalism free of psychological motives; on investigation it reveals itself as one of the clearest signs of the psychological need in which the entire project is grounded. Literalism is the first realization of the psychological root of fundamentalism: a fear and hatred of the contingencies that constitute being in the world. That is the first threat that must be vanquished. The second is found at a more intimate register.

II. Conversion

"But if a man is to become not merely legally but morally a good man this cannot be brought about through gradual reformation but must be effected through a revolution in the man's disposition. He can become a new man only by a kind of rebirth, as it were a new creation."

Immanuel Kant

This category is best approached through narrative. Fundamentalism is in love with a single and common story it never tires of telling. This story is the key to the nature of the transformation it celebrates and the absolute split that transformation produces. A subject finds itself lost in a world of sin, prey to all the evils that have taken control of one's life. A despair seizes the soul. One is powerless to deal with one's problems or heal oneself because there is nothing within the self that one can draw on to make that project possible. The inner world is a foul and pestilent congregation of sin and sinfulness. And there's no way out. One has hit rock bottom and (so the story goes when it's told best) teeters on the brink of suicide. And then in darkest night one lets Him into one's life. And all is transformed. Changed utterly. A terrible beauty is born. Before one was a sinner doing the bidding of Satan. Now one is saved and does the work of the Lord. The old self is extinguished. Utterly. One has achieved a new identity, a oneness with Christ that persists as long as one follows one condition: one must let him take over one's life. Totally. All decisions are now in Jesus' hands. He tells one what to do and one's fealty to his plan must be absolute. There can be no questioning, no doubt. For that would be the sign of only one thing—the voice of Satan and with it the danger of slipping back into those ways of being that one has, through one's conversion, put an end to forever. The person or self one once was is no more so complete is the power of conversion. A psyche has been delivered from itself. And it's all so simple finally, a matter of delivering oneself into His will, of following His plan as set forth in the Book and of letting nothing be within oneself but the voice of Jesus spreading peace and love throughout one's being.

The most striking thing about this narrative is the transparent nature of the psychological defense mechanism from which it derives and the rigidity with which it employs that mechanism. *Splitting*. Which as Freud and Klein show is the most primitive mechanism of defense employed by a psyche terrified of its inner world. *The conversion story raises that mechanism to the status of a theological pathos*. Though the story depends on recounting how sinful one's life once was (often in great even "loving" detail) the psychological meaning of conversion lies in its power to wipe all of that away. Magically one attains a totally new psyche, cleansed, pristine, and impermeable. One has, in fact, attained a totally new self-reference. The self is a function of one's total *identification* with Jesus. Consciousness is bathed in his presence. It has become the scene in which his love expresses itself in the beatific smile that fills one's face whenever one thinks of one's redemption, the tears that flood one's blessed cheeks, the saccharine tone that raises the voice to an eerie self-hypnotizing pitch whenever one finds another opportunity to express the joyous emotions that one must pump up at every opportunity in order to keep up the hyperconsciousness required to sustain the assurance of one's redemption. The whole process is a monument to the power of *magical thinking* to blow away inner reality, and as such a further sign of the primitive nature of the psychological mechanisms on which conversion depends.

The power of conversion to produce a saved self makes the Catholic confessional the operation of rank amateurs. There through forgiveness one gets temporary relief from sins that in all likelihood both priest and penitent know one will commit again. One gets a momentarily cleansed psyche but not a lasting transformation. Through conversion, however, one achieves an absolutely new beginning. One's life is divided in half. Split between B.C. and A.D. Everything one once was is washed away. Everything one now is is its antithesis. Such was the miracle that came upon Dubya by the end of his walk along the beach with Billy Graham. The man George W. Bush was is no more. It was merely the stuff the dream of conversion was built on and now has vanished leaving not a rack behind. Dubya is reborn to the very depths of his being. And everything that follows becomes a pure

expression of the new self he now has. Thanks to Jesus. For that's the key both to conversion and its aftermath. One has finally little or nothing to do with the transformation. Agency is the Lord's. He enters one's psyche and performs precisely what the psyche could not do for itself. Moreover, the new agency that results from conversion is also his. All that one now does derives from his Will. One has become the medium through which the Diety achieves its purpose. One's own will finally has nothing to do with it. One is but the servant of his Will, doing what he tells one to do as He makes that purpose known. That's also why error is inconceivable, when when asked Dubya is unable to discover any mistake he's made as President. And of course that must be so in service to a deeper exigency. It is His will that put one in the position of the most powerful man in the world and He must have done so because He had something special in mind.

Such for the fundamentalist is what it means to have a self. To live an abstract allegory. Devil before, god after. With the self dissolved under the force of the one agent or the other. And never the twain shall meet. Except as absolute antagonists. One could say that conversion transforms the self, but it would be more appropriate to say that it annihilates it. That is in fact its function. For salvation to occur the self is precisely that which must be rendered powerless then transcended through a transformation that can only come from without. That transformation accordingly produces a split that is absolute and must be maintained at all costs. For it is what the psyche depends on to deliver it from everything disruptive and unstable in itself. Even if at times one finds oneself again a sinner, that sinfulness is all the work of the Big Other, Satan. Salvation is deliverance and such is the fundamentalist despair over the self that deliverance must be total.

Conversion is thus the antithesis of what happens in an authentic psychoanalysis. A contrast between the two will bring out what happens within the psyche when it embraces conversion. The key to an authentic analysis is the assumption of full responsibility for who one is through the attainment of a concrete and intimate knowledge of one's psyche, of the unconscious desires and conflicts that have structured the history of one's life. Attaining such knowledge entails three steps. (1) Recognition that one is the author of one's condition; not Satan, not the parents, not demon rum in its effects on a pre-existing physiological condition. The state of one's psyche in its bankruptcy is the function and fruition of a desire. That is why, as Freud said, one must listen to the details of one's illness-not the appeal of remote and general causes-because it is in those details that much that is of value to one's future life must be derived. (2) Through the second recognition: that the problem of the psyche is not to extinguish desire but to reclaim it by freeing oneself from the self-defeating ways one has lied to oneself about it. To do that one must see that the trauma or traumatic event that has produced a crisis or breakdown in the psyche is the fulfillment of its own plan for itself. It is the thing one has brought upon oneself, like Oedipus, through one's effort to avoid it. *As such it is what first puts one in the position to know oneself. As a being defined by conflicts that cannot be transcended but must be sustained..* The task is not to escape them but to enter into them in the right way. Conflict is and remains the reality and burden-of the psyche. (3) Which begets the third recognition. The recognition that one never escapes one's psyche nor achieves some form of ego-identity that guarantees a stability outside or beyond conflict. *Change* requires a radically different discipline-and change is what psychoanalysis is all about. What it teaches is that the possibility of change involves taking on a total responsibility for one's psyche. One does so not by fleeing one's conflicts but by deepening one's engagement in them. Life is a process of becoming responsible for oneself by deepening one's awareness of all that within oneself for which one must assume responsibility. A genuine analysis turns on the assumption of a tragic agency; it "ends" when that agency has become the relationship that one lives to oneself. One is not freed from one's disorder but delivered over to it. The depth of the interrogation one continues to pursue about one's psyche becomes the basis of the

agon one continues to have with oneself. That is the ethic that psychoanalysis makes possible, an ethic of *existential* change that is terminated only with one's death. To exist is to be in the difficulty of what it is to be a subject burdened with itself.

Working through (*Durcharbeit*), the most important part of any analysis, is essentially an education in the process of assuming a tragic relationship to oneself. It is the art of learning to sustain tragic emotions—the kind we're told we must avoid or shed as quickly as possible since all they can do is make us sad—as the emotions that put the subject in touch with its inner world. Depressive melancholy must become, for example, what Keats saw it as: "the wakeful anguish of the soul." The route to self-knowledge is a progressive deepening of a knowledge of one's disorder through the suffering of it. This possibility depends on a single circumstance: the concrete and bitter immersion in the particulars of one's life and one's responsibility for those particulars. No satanic agency caused one's condition and no messianic agency will come to blow it away. One must know and accept the concrete causes in oneself that have shaped the self-lacerating history of one's heart. One is not delivered from it; one is delivered over *into it*. There is only one source of inner strength and it is found in a full acceptance of relating to oneself in depth by sustaining the suffering that relationship entails. The answer to the problem of the psyche lies in the maximization of the problem. Self-analysis is based on the recognition that there is no deliverance from desire and inner conflict. Satan, in contrast, is the blank check that puts an end to that process before it can begin. Consider the contrast between two statements. "I was a lustful man and a fornicator who worshipped the Beast within me." "I was a man who hated women and used sex to injure them psychologically in order to feed the emotional conflicts of my relationship with my mother." The difference between the two statements is enormous. The first obliterates the need for further description, exorcising the possibility of self-knowledge and genuine responsibility. The second is but the overture to the painful problem of taking on responsibility for every word of it.

Conversion is the flight from that action. The psyche is safely delivered into the hands of abstraction. One was under Satan's power when one did all those terrible things. That's how He works. He invades a soul like a thief in the night and under his power we do all sorts of things that are against our nature. But once we let Jesus in we are cleansed. Born again. All before was the work of an otherness that invaded us. It is now burnt and purged away. We can of course feel remorse but at the same time those we harmed should know it was not really our doing. The cause is not in ourselves but in the virus that invaded our soul.

Psychoanalysis delivers the subject over to itself as the one relationship that cannot be transcended. Conversion delivers the subject from itself. What one was is not the depth of a disorder one must plumb concretely in the full horror of all one must come to know about oneself as author. It is rather all that one can blow away through one's conversion! Such is the power and pleasure of splitting as a mechanism of defense. In the absolute reliance on that mechanism fundamentalism renders up its secret.

Here, then, is the real truth of conversion. Fear and hatred of the psyche and a desperate desire to be rid of it. The psyche is that which one must find a way to escape and then to deny. Any sign of its continued presence after conversion produces panic anxiety. That is why for conversion to work one must maintain a carefully limited subjectivity given over to the self-hypnotic iteration of all the signs or behaviors one maintains in order to reassure oneself of one's salvation. The presence of anything else within fills the fundamentalist with terror and loathing and the need for a fresh exorcism. *The psyche is the problem in fundamentalism not because it's sinful but because it's exacting.* Sustaining a relationship with it requires the constant opening of oneself to the suffering of truths not about the devil

but about oneself; not about evil but about the actual things one has done to other's harm, which is the bottomless discovery that psychoanalysis inflicts on us as the price of remaining human. Such a tragic discipline can have no meaning for the fundamentalist except as the condition one must be delivered from. How perfect then to find a way to be done with the whole thing, to shed one's former life the way a snake sheds its skin and then be reborn in the conviction that one has consigned it to the past. But the only way to sustain that state is by living the life of a subjectivity under surveillance needing and giving itself constant reassurance that it is saved by pumping up all the positive emotions (and happy talk) that witness one's oneness with the Lord while guarding against the expression of any of the old, negative emotions that would suggest the opposite. Expressing the emotions of the saved has become an obsessional necessity. One thing alone is needful. Giving the proof at all times-especially to oneself-that one is on God's side.

To be saved is to enter a condition in which one only has "positive" emotions, Christian emotions, which are always played "over the top" because the primary purpose of the performance is to engage in an ongoing act of self-hypnosis. In keeping with a duty that cannot be shirked: *one must become the walking embodiment of one's simplest version of the love that God has for you* since any other kind of love would be exacting whereas this one offers the bliss of self-infantalization. That's the source of the monotonous sameness of the fundamentalist congregation, the aping and mimicking of one another; the identical smile of mindless bliss, the tearful displays, the saccharine tone in the proselytizing voice, the need to constantly proclaim how wonderful it feels to be saved and to bear witness to that fact by turning every possible occasion into a chance to inflict a bevy of dimensionless emotions and sentiments on others as if being a Christian amounted to being a walking Hallmark card. In all this one labors under a manic necessity. But it isn't enough. That mania must find a *practice* that will offer lasting reassurance by enabling one to repeat (as it were) the process and content of one's conversion.

III. Evangelicalism

" This is deadly work."

Clov in Samuel Beckett's **Endgame**

Evangelicalism is the manic activity whereby the split in the psyche that conversion creates is projected onto the world. Thereby one confirms the identity one has attained through a fresh exorcism of the one that conversion vanquished. Evangelicism offers the fundamentalist the only way to sustain the reborn self: by trying to recreate the experience of one's conversion in others in order to reenact an unending exorcism. In the other one locates the split off self one once was now placed totally outside oneself. It becomes the fantasm of what must be the condition of one's auditors, of those who, whether they know it or not, are lost, wallowing in error and sin, their minds awash in the torrents of secularism, dumb to the clarity that comes from the Words one now speaks to bring them enlightenment, could they but hear. This is the root cause of the frustration that quickly comes if we make the mistake of bidding entry when the fundamentalist knocks on the door. We offer discourse in vain to those who are seized by a necessity. It's not just the repeated literal citation of the Bible as absolute truth ("do you know that satan was once an angel close to God; that's why he's so powerful") or the repeated refrain that puts an end to all discussion ("well I believe the Bible and the Bible says"); or the inability to hear anything we say except as a sign that we've not yet grasped the truth that's galling. It's the

recognition that despite the charitable demeanor, evangelical activity is based on a total lack of respect for the minds of those they are trying to convert.

That lack of respect is, however, necessary. Anything less would be a confession of doubt. Which would make the other a threat when they can only be one thing: an image of what one was prior to conversion, of what the world in its unregenerate condition represents. Namely, the place where one projects all that conversion supposedly removed from the psyche. Through evangelicalism one engages in the *repetition compulsion* that has become one's innermost necessity. *The only way to prevent a return of the projections is through their continued projection.* By locating them outside oneself and waging an "attack" on that externalization one is delivered from the fear of what can no longer be within. Everything bad is now outside oneself and one must do everything to keep it there. One can share with one's auditor the confession in the abstract that one is a "sinner" too but the discussion better shift quickly to the evils of the world: to homosexuals and abortion and the entertainment industry and best of all the imperiled state of a nation bereft of "moral values." One is well tuned then. The manic drive has been unlocked and sweeps to a revenge upon anything that can be even remotely *associated* with one's former self; for one has entered a dream state and readies desire for wrathful discharge upon a world drenched in sin. Evangelicalism offers the psyche a chance to be cleansed again of everything that may still fester deep within somewhere, longing to break out. This is an operation fundamentalism shares with its most famous offshoot-Alcoholics Anonymous. Though splitting and projection produce denial, one is always in danger of slipping. One needs a ritual to reestablish who one is by again exorcising what one was. What the meeting does for the alcoholic proselytizing does for the fundamentalist.

It should now be evident that what looks at first like the least important of the four characteristics of fundamentalism fulfills perhaps the deepest psychological necessity. Without this activity the fundamentalist psyche would *implode*. The obsessional need to preach the gospel, to find a way as soon as possible to let every stranger one meets know that one is a Christian, born again, are practices that derive not from a lack of social skills but from a manic necessity. For the saved there is and can be nothing but the story of their salvation. It is the master narrative to which all lives must conform, the tale one must tell as often and ardently as the Ancient Mariner tells his. Though for antithetical reasons. The Mariner tells his tale to relieve an inner pain by injecting it into the consciousness of listeners who will be existentially individuated by the tale. Evangelists tell theirs to reassure themselves about their "identity" by trying to compel others to participate in it. Structurally and psychologically, however, both tellers labor under the same necessity. Repetition as the attempt to retain an identity in order to flee something else-in the Mariner's case a suicidal depression; in the fundamentalist perhaps the same thing -- that is of necessity buried deep in the unconscious. One piece of evidence in support of this hypothesis: without the chance to engage in evangelical activity the fundamentalist psyche sinks into a state of empty boredom.

Thus the lassitude of Dubya before 9-11 and the hectic messianic energy that has defined him since. 9-11 gave him what he needed-the chance to transform a stalled Presidency by adopting an evangelical stance toward the entire world. Preemptive unilateralism is not just a political credo. It's an evangelical article of faith. The world must of necessity be divided into Good and Evil. And one must bring that message to the world in the same way the fundamentalist visits the doorstep of the unconverted. If those one addresses-the United Nations, other countries, members of the Republican party-aren't converted to the Word that can only be a sign of their error. Or worse. As Ashcroft never lost an opportunity to remind us, their complicity with the enemy. The whole world is either with us or against us.

And nothing anyone says can have any other meaning. We cannot let our message be altered by doubts or fears. The fundamentalist mind, closed off from discourse by its own certitude can only project itself upon the global stage in the way demanded by inner psychological necessity. *Manic activity under the guise of certainty as the proof that one has triumphed over all inner conflicts.* And thus the beckoning of a new necessity. The need to extend the opposition between Good and Evil as far as possible—from Afghanistan to Iraq to the Axis of Evil to the 60 nations identified as supporters of terror—in the assurance that God has chosen one for a mission not just to convert the World but to wage war on whatever one labels evil, the only certainty being that one will always find fresh targets because doing so has now become the projective necessity of a mania that drives toward the *omnipotence* it seeks by pushing the war on terror toward an ultimate realization. Moreover, whatever one must do in waging this war is justified without the possibility of any appeal to conscience. Thus another doctrinal innovation that distinguishes Dubya from all previous Presidents: the assertion of the right for a first strike use of nuclear weapons and with it the developments now under way to create a host of new "tactical" nuclear weapons. To deliver the world from the spectre of nuclear war we must ready ourselves to wage a nuclear war on the world. (Paranoia thus projects the possibility of an omnipotence beyond MAD as policy.) And so we should all indeed be trembling in our boots to know the mind-set that now has its finger on the nuclear trigger. Happiness is a warm gun.

The war on terror has many meanings, not the least of which the blank check to disseminate an Orwellian fear whenever the Administration desires. Perhaps its deepest meaning, however, is to mark the founding moment in which *politics in Amerika becomes inseparable from the projection of a religious ideology.* 9-11 told Dubya that the time was ripe for a mission that the Deity *elected* him to perform. A seamless transition thus offers itself to us, from an evangelical presidency to the fourth characteristic of fundamentalism, the one that, as we'll see, informs and completes the others taking us to the heart of the disorder, the innermost necessity that hallows all its dreams.

IV. Apocalypticism-The Heart of the Ulcer

"Devout believers are safeguarded in a high degree against the risk of certain neurotic illnesses; their acceptance of the universal neurosis spares them the task of constructing the personal one."

Freud

Apocalypticism is the capstone that completes the process of fundamentalist self-fashioning. Without it, as we'll see, the entire edifice would crumble. In the Apocalyptic moment the disorder at the core of the fundamentalist psyche achieves a final form, thereby passing over to the register of the sublime. The sublime is the register of the psyche that is reached when the informing desire is given an unbounded expression. All conflicts are then resolved in a release of tension that is total and constitutes what Lacan means by *jouissance*. The psyche has found a way to fulfill and complete the desire that structures its inner constitution. As we'll see, each structure described in the previous sections requires Apocalypticism and achieves completion in it. In the Apocalyptic fantasm an ultimate expression is given to the conflicts that define the fundamentalist psyche through an action that brings an end to those conflicts.

The necessity of Apocalypticism is a direct outgrowth of the psychological mechanism on which fundamentalist relies to structure the world. *The only way to prevent a return of the projections is through a final evacuation.* This desire can only come to fruition with the picturing of a world beyond redemption held under the brand of an all-consuming wrath. That image finalizes the split that defines the psyche by giving sublime expression to the way one must view the world when seeing it from the standpoint of one's salvation. Apocalypticism thus brings to completion the psychological operation that has been employed *repeatedly* from the beginning. First, one cleanses oneself by projecting one's disowned desires unto the world. The resulting split must then be maintained rigorously with nothing allowed to fall outside its scope. The psyche must be voided of everything save the serenities of the saved. For that to happen, however, the world must become the object of an unstinting attack on all that one has externalized there. This act must be endless lest the projections return. By its internal logic fundamentalism is thus driven ineluctably to a need for *quantitative* expansion through the discovery of greater, more insidious forms of evil. The mathematical sublime beckons, the need to produce greater and greater magnitudes. The world becomes the polluted chamber of one's foulest imaginings with no way to check the demands of that vision. Within the psyche an even greater transformation occurs. One craves the constant exercise of an emotion that one must just as strenuously disclaim. Hatred. One needs fresh supplies of it as badly as the U.S. needs to ransack the globe for fresh supplies of oil. No matter how loudly one proclaims one's salvation, purified in the blood of the lamb, hatred has become the innermost necessity to which one is wedded. And that necessity has now broken loose of any containment. Hatred of one's former self is no longer sufficient. One now hates the world and is driven to seek out everything in it that one can claim caused or can cause an inner condition other than the purity of the saved. One hates, that is, everything that resists surrender and absolute obedience to the system of literalism and literal commands to which one has committed oneself. As the scope of what one hates grows apace it finds fruition in the *binary opposition* that is essential to it. Good and Evil divide the world in two, giving ontological form to the rigidity of the split that defines the fundamentalist psyche. All differences, all particularities, all complexities must give way to the demands of a comprehensive abstraction. And the fury of that abstraction can and will brook no exceptions. Everything thus resolves itself into the ultimate necessity required by the informing hatred. One longs for and demands an end to all the contingencies that have from the beginning been sources of fear and confusion. It is what one has always sought. To be done with all of it. With the contingency of the human. To be done with all ambiguity and complexity and confusion. Done with the feeling that history has no purpose other than chaos or meaningless repetition. Done with embodiment itself- and all the unwelcome desires it imposes on us. Done with the very sources of all that one hates and fears. To locate it all ontologically in a single principle-evil-and then be rid of it all once and for all through the triumph of that force that has the power to extinguish it all.

Literalism tried to keep the world at bay by reducing everything to the simplest formulas, the mind itself to the most unproblematic blink of consciousness in stupified adherence to the narrow fixations needed to banish metaphor, ambiguity, and uncertainty. But it wasn't enough. The world keeps seeping it. There must be a way to be done with it, once and for all. To find what one has craved from the beginning. The end. And a proper end-one that will give sublime expression to the desire that has fed the whole thing. Death. The longing for death transformed into a sublime celebration of death. Life in its complexity demands too much of us. *That in a nutshell is the fundamentalist message.* Only death can deliver one from the threat life poses. Only when life is done is one safe from a return of the projections and an eruption of the repressed. One has always longed for deliverance into a realm free of desire and all its temptations. Death alone offers the comfort one seeks. The resentment in which the psyche has centered itself demands no less. One must work one's

hatred of the world into a frenzy and feed that hatred with sublime images of evil in order to bring it to a fevered pitch. Release and satisfaction then come with the delivery of that world over to the hands of an angry God expressing his wrath in an orgy of pure destructiveness. Thank God for *The Book of Revelations*. For the only way both to satisfy and to purge one's hatred is to express it on a massive world-shattering scale. The death one seeks projected into the death one delivers. The self is thereby done with life and freed for transport of the saved split off self to a realm of bliss freed from all cares. A psyche wedded to thanatos has found in thanatos the final solution. One's resentment against life has been turned into a righteous and of necessity cosmic attack upon it.

In *Transformations* Wilfred Bion tries to conceptualize a destructiveness "that goes on working after it destroys personality, time, and existence." Such is the desire that feeds the fundamentalist fixation on *The Book of Revelations*. A psyche wedded to thanatos seeks sublime expression of that desire. It finds it satisfied repeatedly in *Revelations*, as if its author, like the director of the next disaster movie, keeps seeking the perfect image to feed the underlying venom or to bring it, with each repetition, closer to that image in which destructiveness will find its objective correlative. One makes allowances of course for the author of *Revelations*, what with his people under genocidal persecution at the hands of the Roman Empire. But how account for the fixation on such images, as if they were the only real source of pleasure, of those whose greatest fear is that their wife will find the G spot or that Mommie's little darlings will see MTV before the V chip is installed? How account for the persistent unscrutable itch for picturing the great Whore of Bablyon and anticipate the delicious synesthesia of the golden cup "in her hand filled with abominable things and the filth of her fornications? How account for the thrill that comes as one reads again the rich description of all the plagues that will be visited upon the earth? And how else account for the necessity of the grand crescendo to which it all moves as the enraptured reader approaches Armageddon and the final battle that will put an end to that folly, human history, giving the reader the true pleasure of the text since one has known all along that history could have no purpose or meaning other than its destruction? One loves this book and longs to see the coming to pass of all it promises in fulfilling on a cosmic stage the very process that has given structure to one's psyche, as if the apocalypse one suffered on the little stage were but a prefigurement meant to whet one's appetite for the Big One.

Here then a reading of the function that *Revelations* plays in the fundamentalist psyche. In the depths of its psyche fundamentalism is ruled by catastrophic anxiety, a self tottering on the brink of a dissolution in which it will fragment imprisoned in a world that will impose all of its terrors and evils upon it. We will fail to understand fundamentalism as long as we resist seeing how close it is to a psychosis. Fundamentalist rage is the attempt of a subject to hold itself together in the only way it can: by waging war on all that terrifies it. The psyche commits itself to destructiveness to allay a destruction that already threatens it from within. That condition results in a paradoxical situation that finds its only possible solution in *Revelations*. *Destructiveness must be given a full, unchecked expression and the psyche must somehow survive that act.* The drive toward death repeats itself in increasing magnitudes as it moves toward a final conflict that obliterates all future conflict and transports the self to a realm of unending bliss. The slight textual support (1 *Thessalonians* 4:17) notwithstanding, the Rapture is a psychological necessity. It embodies the magical thought that the coming of global destruction is also the coming of salvation. One has always longed for a feast of destructiveness as the signal for one's transport to a condition free of the world. That's why when that moment comes it is impossible to prevent the surfacing of a long suppressed and twisted sexual desire. As destruction approaches so too does ascent to a realm in which one is free to project a marriage consummated in the sky with Christ serving as the Bride. The delights of that image should not prevent us from seeing what has happened here. The longing for death has been turned into an ecstatic

embrace of it; a rapture so complete in its *jouissance* that one can no longer disguise the fact that all of one's libidinal energies have gone into the quest for such a complete and final unbinding, an extinction within consciousness of all save the ecstatic recognition that one is saved and that all the connections that once bound one to the world have been severed once and for all. *The psychotic attack on linking finds its apotheosis in Apocalypticism*. The Rapture must be interpolated into *Revelations* at precisely this point because one's salvation corresponds with the arrival of something else—the dawning of the cataclysmic aggressions that must be vented in order to bring destruction upon the earth and usher in the millenium. In the clouds, safe with Jesus, one can continue to rejoice free of life or cast a cold eye upon it from time to time like one looking back on the moment just before one's conception but free now (an angelic Onan) to nip it in the bud. Or to spend the 1000 years millenium assured that though peace reigns it will come again, one last time, the dead themselves resurrected so that they can be slain again in a greater destruction than has ever been visited upon the earth (*Revs.* 19-20) and then, as if that isn't enough, consigned to torment day and night forever. Only then is the rage that informs John's text discharged. And only then can love be expressed without leading to a new burst of rage. **[3]** Only then can a new heaven and a new earth be celebrated in language admittedly of great beauty with God himself wiping away all tears, putting an end to death, pain, and sorrow, making all things new, delivering believers from realities that they could never see as anything but arguments against life, *Revelations* confirming this fact long before Nietzsche conceptualized it. The great love feast—it's a pretty fantasy. As if once rage fashions its masterpiece the heart will open and what has been frozen for so long will become a warm and virgin spring.

Historically the great transformation in the use of Apocalypticism to incite fundamentalist believers to political action came in the 1980's, during the Reagan years, when Jerry Falwell (to cite but one example) shifted from the pre-millenarian belief that the faithful can do nothing but spread the gospel and wait as the modernist evil that will bring about the Tribulation runs its course to the *activist* position that fundamentalism must become a political force, indeed take over the country if possible, and make it a Christian Nation worthy of being spared as well as the one chosen to advance the movement toward that long sought, long delayed, deeply longed for and blessed Apocalyptic event. George Herbert Walker Bush was finally a man of restraint with a keen appreciation of the realities of global politics. Dubya labors under no such restraints. His is a mind unencumbered by an countervailing pressure that the world might offer to his singleness of vision. Thus there's no telling where the faith will lead now that Dubya has his mandate and must deliver to satisfy the grandiose conception of what God himself elected him to do. Even perhaps find a straight shining path from the cataclysmic future that defines that paranoid present that constantly recedes before us unless, that is, the Apocalyptic future can become the Evangelical present? Under Dubya that is now one term for reading what is going on in the Middle East.

It is hard to conceive the extent of the contempt for life that informs fundamentalism. As a final example, however, a testimonial to the environmental policies of the Bush Administration, consider the quaint piece of fundamentalist folklore known as "dominion theology." This tenet of the faith was openly professed by former Secretary of the Interior James Watt, the mentor of the current Secretary Gale Norton. Dominion theology holds that the Bible commands us to use up the earth's resources. We glut ourselves not just for capitalist greed but by biblical mandate. Indeed, as the end approaches it is our duty to do so globally since there's little time remaining to complete the job and thereby bring that final day ever closer. Besides, why bother preserving the planet. After the Second Coming none of it is going to matter. And so with each new success—the hole in the ozone, the melting of the ice caps, drilling in the national wildlife refuge, the Alaska pipeline - we give further proof that history is moving in the right direction. Since all is yellow to the jaundiced

eye, the only thing the fundamentalist, like the capitalist, can see in Nature is that which must be conquered, used up, then subjected to disposal. The oft-chronicled battle of fundamentalists against environmentalism is dictated by the demands of the manic triad. Triumph, contempt, dismissal. Thereby destructiveness is projected onto life itself. The sublime for the fundamentalist is not found in the rain forest, but in its ravaging. Through such acts one finds another way to project one's hatred of life onto another object that has the power to deepen our entry into and love of it.

It is hard to know which is colder, crueller: the logic of fundamentalism or the logic of capitalism? But then that question assumes they are different in some fundamental way. And let's face it we want to hang on to that difference because it offers reassurance, even a guarantee, that we can play the two off against each other. Those currently in charge of our country suffer from no such illusion. Maybe that's because they know the secret we need to fathom if we're to *historicize* the connection that Max Weber saw between Christianity and Capitalism and thereby learn that Christian fundamentalism and Global Capitalism correspond to one another because they derive from the same seedbed and feed on the same destructive violence.

In concluding I offer a summary of how thanatos works in the fundamentalist psyche binding everything to the necessity for a sublime discharge. Apocalypticism expresses both the final *evacuation* needed to prevent a return of the projections and the *jouissance* required to fulfill the demand of thanatos for that complete unbinding that can only come by putting an *end* to everything. The hatred in which the psyche is grounded requires no less: it is total in its control over the inner world and thus demands a matching totalization. In the images of destruction that warm its heart one sees externalized the process that has ravaged the inner world. In that sense fundamentalism is the most extreme act of sado-masochism toward oneself that has yet been devised. As such it offers us perhaps the deepest insight into the super-ego as the force of death in the psyche, as an agency that is satisfied with no less than soul-murder, the bending of the entire psyche in blind service to its commands. Literal obedience to literal commands is merely the tip of that iceberg. It is within that the true process of soul-murder takes place. In a psyche that is willing to sacrifice everything in itself in order to placate an authority that is vindictively cruel in the wrath it directs on the slightest opposition to its will. In an attempt to achieve *identification* with that force the psyche wages war first on itself and then upon the world. The former act reveals the power of the super-ego; the latter act offers a way to confirm one's identification with it. In sacrificing everything in oneself to the super-ego one attains the right to become the walking embodiment of its wrath. The fundamentalist can loudly proclaim his or her love of God but the fact of the matter is that one fears Him because terror is the only relationship He permits. Fear-that is the thing one has never been able to overcome. That is why all transgression or the mere thought of transgression unleashes an overpowering guilt under which the psyche unravels. That guilt is the power of the super-ego to maintain control over the psyche. *Super-ego guilt is thanatos in its immediacy ravaging the psyche by punishing it with the loss of a "love" that is indistinguishable from hate so absolute is the sacrifice it requires.*

But how does such an agency come into being? On what must it draw to create the enormous energy that gives it such power over/within the psyche. Could it be that this too has and must have its beginnings in love? We have traced the effects of the destructiveness to which the fundamentalist psyche is wedded but we have not yet considered the cause. Sections 1-4 trace the dialectical progression of a disorder that we must now consider in its *genesis*. To do that we need to strike through the sound and fury of fundamentalist rage and get at what Ahab called "the little lower layer" by showing how *thanatos* first takes root

in a soul and why it continues to ulcer there until it finds fulfillment in Apocalyptic expression.

Before turning to that examination a brief summary of the psychoanalytic understanding we've developed of the four characteristics that Charles Strozier isolates as fundamental to fundamentalism. (1) Inerrancy as the need to reduce all complexities to the literal in order to confine the mind to its simplest operations; (2) Conversion or the use of the primitive psychological defense known as splitting to establish an absolute separation of the saved psyche from the damned; (3) Evangelicalism or manic activity as the way to sustain and project that split; (4) Apocalypticism or thanatos incarnate as the desire for an event that will satisfy the hatred and the death-drive that has come to define the fundamentalist psyche. In discussing these characteristics I deliberately withheld the issue of sexuality until now not in order to minimize its importance but to maximize it by creating the context of characteristics that only make sense once we grasp the sexual disorder that informs them. Fundamentalism will then emerge in its proper meaning, as one of the clearest examples of the old and oft forgotten Freudian insight that sexuality is at the center of the human psyche and the dialectical opposition of eros and thanatos at the center of culture. The previous sections describe a super-ego "morality" grounded in thanatos. The following section attempts to describe the sexual roots of the disorder and thereby offer an explanation of how thanatos can take over the life of the psyche and channel all energies into its service.

V. Sexual Roots of the Fundamentalist Psyche

"Think of the depressing contrast between the radiant intelligence of a healthy child and the feeble intellectual powers of the average adult. Can we be quite certain that it is not precisely religious education which bears a large share of the blame for this relative atrophy?" -- Freud

My goal is to plumb the root cause of phenomena that are well-known. Fundamentalists live in a world obsessed with sexuality. It provides the primary texts of Biblical citation. It's the concrete referent of the fulminations against secularism, secular humanism, post-modernism, ethical relativism, feminism, deconstructionism, etc. It's also what the vaunted claim of "moral values" is all about. Morality is not about a life of charity, or the pursuit of justice, or the opening of oneself to the depth of human suffering. It's about avoiding certain sexual sins and fixating on that dimension of life to the virtual exclusion of everything else. Battling sex is apparently what life is all about as if the primary plan of the creator were to put us on earth so that we'll be tempted by that in us that we must condemn in order to win salvation. By the same token, each new scandal reveals the consequences of sexual repression: the brutal abuse of young boys by a legion of pedophile priests; the sexual license of Jim Jones and David Koresh; the sadomasochistic bondage rituals that Jimmy Swaggart significantly could only enact with prostitutes; the epidemic of physical, sexual, and psychological abuse that is the untold story of the fundamentalist family. The repression of sexuality has as a necessary consequence the brutalization of the other.

All such phenomena are variations on the same tired story. Sexual repression breeds foul imaginings. Which of necessity fixate on the sexual. What has been rendered foul within runs amuck in the world. Following the dictates of a punitive super-ego the psyche becomes obsessed with the attack on sexuality. The purpose is to render evil virtually everything

connected with sex until life itself is reduced to an allegory in which the battle of good and evil is all about the temptations of the flesh, as if nothing else in life matters so complete is the vindictive fixation of the Deity on the human genitals.

The eroticization of thanatos necessarily has a flip side: the demonization of eros. The libidinal economy on which fundamentalism rests is as simple as it is devastating. Eros must be turned into evil, sin, pollution. So that all of one's desire can go into thanatos. Or vice-versa. Once destructiveness has been eroticized all one's energies become fixated on the erotic since it poses the greatest threat to the resentment one feels toward life in general. The chicken-egg question of temporal priority misses the necessary dialectical connection. The only way to triumph over eros is by eroticizing death. And the only way to secure that eroticization is by projecting guilt, sin, resentment and punishment into every aspect of human sexuality. Such is the basic logic to which the fundamentalist project is wedded.

To understand why that is so, however, requires answering two questions.

(1) What must sex be for it to assume such importance?

(2) And what must happen to it for the fundamentalist mind set to assume control over the psyche?

What is needed is an account of the *genesis* of fundamentalism through a description of the sequence of formative experiences through which thanatos by invading sexuality assumes control over a psyche.

Fundamentalism fixates on sex not by accident or divine decree but by the exigencies of immediate experience. Eros is that force which binds us to life as that blessing which can be lived and loved as an end in itself. It is the spontaneity that weds the child to an innocent and unbridled curiosity; the vitality that resists any restraints imposed on the outpouring of an affective embrace of life in all its forms; the ability to experience the natural prior to and free of the ethical, as a matter of fascination and exploration. Eros is that in us which wants to incarnate itself fully, to expend oneself in investing all of one's energies into life. And when all of this becomes overtly sexual it discovers its innermost meaning: to open oneself to another and incarnate in the body the depth of feeling that two subjects can have toward each other. Sexual pleasure is the temple of a holiness that neither wants nor needs other worlds so completely has it found fulfillment in this one. Such an erotic valuation becomes in poets like Whitman and Blake the prime agent of all human perception; it is in Plato the source of noble laws and institutions; and in Freud it is that which pits itself against the forces of death. It is also, of course, that which rises up at puberty and at crucial crises throughout life in rebellion against the controls that those who hate and fear it have placed upon desire.

Because it poses a comprehensive threat to the fundamentalist project eros must be poisoned at early as possible. Ironically there is, however, only one way this project can succeed. Through love. To summarize briefly a concept I've developed at length elsewhere, parenting is the act through which the parent's conscious and unconscious conflicts and desires become the psyche of the child. This transmission is the act through which the child's psyche is born. The child's unconditional love is the condition that makes it all possible. To put it in more concrete terms, from an early age one must be indoctrinated by those one trusts and loves in the primary lesson: that obedience is the price one must pay to retain love. And so deep must become one's need for this love that one becomes willing to make any sacrifice it requires. Thereby the condition is set for the greatest

transformation. The energy from which the very life of the psyche springs has been invaded by a virus that attacks the subject from within. *The process that will issue in the super-ego has taken root.* In Lacanian terms, one's desire has become the desire of the other with that condition set as the way one will experience both oneself and the world. Good and evil can now be bred into everything. The body has become the scene of ethical instruction. All natural functions are turned into matters of intense preoccupation. All innocent curiosities nipped in the bud. Spontaneity itself becomes a source of inhibition. The reign of the literal is born. That which most intimately attaches us to life becomes the thing upon which a ceaseless attack is waged. All natural instincts must become evidence that the only way to experience the body is as a site of sinful desires. Embodiment itself must become something one hates and fears, a condition in which something evil and disgusting is always at work. Everything that desire opens up in the subject must be turned back against itself. Sin, shame, and guilt must come to define the relationship that the subject lives to itself. The goal of fundamentalist child-rearing is to create a subject preoccupied with waging war on itself, with battling against its own desires under the gaze of a judgmental, punitive super-ego. [4]

The super-ego maintains this power because internally a fundamental transformation has occurred. All of one's desire has been channeled into one's service to the super-ego. It is thereby empowered to wage an attack on anything in the subject that would oppose or threaten its reign. The super-ego is as Freud noted harsher than the actual parents. It is so because it fuses prohibition with the quest for love. What is the first and perhaps the deepest attachment of one's life is bound to a force opposed to the very thing from which it draws its energy. *Sexuality of necessity brings this conflict to a head.* For in it one experiences at its greatest intensity the clash of the two principles that constitute the psyche: (1) that in us that would break free of the super-ego and constitute a desire independent of it and (2) the power of the super-ego, as a result of the love one has invested in it, to crush the opponent. This conflict is inescapable for the simplest of reasons. Operating upon sexuality was precisely how the super-ego was formed. It is in one's sexuality, accordingly, that one experiences the true virulence of a force that has the power to turn the inner world into a place of self-torture. All one has to do is desire what it forbids. One then learns the truth. *That capitulation under the unrelenting pressure of that self-torture is the triumph of a fundamentalist education.* In the war on sex the process of formation completes itself. Its product is a subject living a relationship to itself defined by self-contempt, self-punishment, and self-unraveling. Any attempt to break with the super-ego only serves to increase its power. **A**ppearances to the contrary, the super-ego isn't about morality. It's about power-and the irresistible privilege that comes with power: to torture, in fact to erect torture as the relationship the subject lives to itself.

How could it be otherwise? What else could child-rearing be for the parents but the chance to prove themselves to the Lord by taking whatever measures are required to assure that His commands assume total control over the child's psyche. Getting the child to internalize a super-ego that makes guilt over one's desires the primary relationship the subject has to itself assumes in fundamentalism the status of a categorical imperative. Life must be filled up with inhibitions and prohibitions in order to assure that sexuality will always be experienced as a fall into sin. Internally that experience is guaranteed by the condition that lays in wait to assault the transgressive psyche, even when the transgression is only in thought or fantasy. Transgression, one discovers, floods the psyche with guilt, shame, and the conviction of a fundamental badness that can only be purged by an attack on oneself. *That attack is the nuptial offering that seals one's marriage to the super-ego.* It is the way one restores one's communion with it. In punishing oneself one experiences the joy, the libidinal pleasure, of a union that feeds on destructiveness. Thereby one reveals the truth: that thanatos has taken control of the psyche. A subject at war with itself has been created,

one that will experience desire itself as a sign of guilt and will loathe it as that within oneself that one must strive to extinguish. Thanatos has created a psyche dedicated to soul murder-to the murder of one's own soul. The power that death-work has assumed in the psyche now ravages the psyche. In three interconnected ways. (1) So great is the power guilt has assumed that any opposition to the super-ego unleashes an attack that threatens with psyche with self-dissolution. Such is the true power of the super-ego: unending torment with no exit save suicide or psychotic self-fragmentation. (2) **Ego identity** thus becomes the active, constant effort to spy out and combat everything in itself that could be labeled a source or occasion of sin. (3) In the **body** consequently a condition now maintains in which every desire becomes the overture to a war that must be waged until the very sources of desire have been conquered, until everything that might once have been natural has been rendered thoroughly unnatural. *Sado-masochism has come to define the subject's relationship to itself.* The only pleasure lies in the coldness and cruelty of an unrelenting attack upon one's sinfulness and the pleasure one gets from making oneself the abject object of that wrath. A world of perfect self-hatred has been created. A culture of pure thanatos has been installed as the unity of a psyche that must project good and evil, sin and punishment, damnation and salvation into everything until life itself becomes the doleful and guilty passage of a shriveled and shrunken (but saved!) subjectivity toward the only thing it can desire. The End-the death of desire itself, the unending struggle against it, and the ever-present danger that one will slip and find oneself in the clutches of the damned. The Apocalyptic desire is born.

Sexuality has been transformed into the festering wound out of which *resentment* is born. For every time desire rises up one experiences again one's powerlessness to break the strangle-hold the super-ego has over one's sexuality. A jaundiced eye then casts its gaze on all who have succeeded where one failed Envy rises up, offering one the only exit from inner conflict--hatred of the sexual and an unending war upon it. That war has become one's deepest necessity. Envy begets hatred begets rage. The only way to relieve that rage is by projecting it onto the world. That act has an added charm: it is the way one achieves *identification* with that super-ego that has never stopped assaulting one from within. As avenging angel damning a sinful world one reclaims as resentment what one has had to sacrifice as desire. The transformation is complete. One is no longer a child tortured into submission by a punitive super-ego. One has become an adult projecting that destructiveness upon the world. For a psyche so bound to hatred requires a constant supply of fresh objects and occasions on which to vent itself. It is wedded to the search for a sublime fulfillment of the rage that defines it. And because everything within the psyche opposed to this project has been killed there is no way to halt it. Death has become absolute and craves that total unbinding that can come only with a totalizing Apocalyptic projection. (The destructiveness analyzed in section 4 is the necessary outgrowth of the sexual condition this section describes. That inversion is the circle the fundamentalist psyche is unable to break out of.)

The process I've just described is not a disorder restricted to the reddest neck in the reddest state. It is a portrait drawn from what also typified a Roman Catholic childhood in the late fifties and early sixties. What Freud struggled to comprehend Roman Catholicism throughout its history has known instinctively and with a thoroughness that enabled it to raise the whole thing to the level of a system based on the most fundamental of recognitions: that working upon human sexuality is the way to attain complete dominance over the psyche. The systematic perfection of that labor depends on a single insight : wounding someone in their "soul" is the way one gains the greatest power over them; and one does it best when one takes what is most open, vulnerable, and loving in a child and exploits it to forge the bonds that will enslave that psyche, perhaps forever. The super-ego draws its force from that desperate love it has solicited so that it can appropriate the

energies invested in that love in order to wage an attack upon the psyche and thereby eventually on life itself.

Given the genius of Catholicism it should come as no surprise that Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* is the most popular fundamentalist work of our time, hailed and promoted by fundamentalist preachers. What seems odd at first given the fact that Gibson is not strictly speaking a fundamentalist but a reactionary Catholic on the warpath against Vatican II makes perfect sense when seen in terms of the libidinal structure of Gibson's film and the psychological needs it fuels. The long standing fundamentalist hatred of Catholicism is misplaced. Equally misplaced is the attempt to confine fundamentalism to preachers in the Bible-belt. Fundamentalism is on the rise today and takes many forms because it speaks to something that has long been active in Christianity, something that the old Church exemplified and that we may find impossible to expunge from Judeo-Christianity in general because the truth of the matter is the existence of a *contium* that finds fundamentalism in the position of the Hegelian Notion, the *telos* and immanent *logos* that develops through the course of Judeo-Christianity until it achieves in fundamentalism its proper and final form. Orwell offers the following definition of liberty: "Liberty is telling people what they don't want to hear." Is it time to extend that principle to religious belief in all its forms? A New Year's Resolution.

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ENDNOTES:

(1) Charles Strozier, *Apocalypse: On the Psychology of Fundamentalism in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994).

(2) Fundamentalist readings of *Revelations* are an exercise in interpretive ingenuity in service to an ox-like stupidity. Every image in the text must be literalized and attached to a specific event or person. So that in the grandest feat of fundamentalist interpretation everything in *Revelations* squares with specific details of contemporary history. But of course this effort requires its own revisionism since this operation must be performed repeatedly, as it has been in America by fundamentalists since the 1840's. The same drama, ever approaching, ever delayed (and more's the pity), with history and its participants made stock figures in an abstract allegory. In service to the fundamentalist dream: that grand day when it will all finally fall into place, no more disappointing prefigurements, but the real thing. The act of interpretation in such a framework is both mechanical and mad. The frantic search is always on for events that will tie down and confirm the bizarre images of *Revelations* since they provide the secret code to the meaning of history. Thus the fundamentalist as reader driven half-mad in the constant mental gymnastics required to puzzle the whole thing out then just as constantly revise the thing, as events dictate, with no way to stop playing this game.

(3) It would be interesting to do a complete reading of *Revelations* as a psychological text; that is, one where the psyche of the author projects in the action of the text the inner drama that defines it. In John's case we have a repetition compulsion in which each attempt to express love is overcome by an eruption of rage. This rage, however, can never be successfully discharged. As a result it expands with each repetition. Only with a cataclysmic

projection of total destruction can John finally rid himself of it in a way that enables him to end his book with an expression of love. But that love exacts a terrible price: it is only possible after this world has been destroyed.

(4) Often for this to work a lot of sex is necessary. Under one condition : it must always be experienced as a fall into sinfulness, the disgust that the fornicator must feel toward him or herself as well as the other with whom one performs the act of darkness. This also offers an explanation of a new mutation in fundamentalism: the young college age fundamentalist who reportedly are also enjoying a frequent if not lively sex life on campus. Since their conversion came before they had a chance to sin, they must experience both sin and salvation at one and the same time in an idyllic space that is beyond the principle of contradiction. Thereby they become all the more fervent in their saved status the more they experience the mindlessness of a sinfulness they cannot permit to enter their consciousness the way genuine eros always does-as that which shatters all else with the demand to affirm and live out all that it puts one in touch with within oneself.

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