

# Being the Chosen

Exploring a Christian Fundamentalist Worldview

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# Chapter 1

## ‘Furiously Religious’: Contextualising Fundamentalism

### **Religious Fundamentalism ... the Exception to the Theory**

Religious fundamentalism has been a subject for research since the 1920s (Barr, 1977, Marsden, 1980). Initially research focused on fundamentalism among American Protestants, for reasons that will be discussed in Chapter 3 of this book. This early research focused initially on theological issues, such as, fundamentalists’ reaction to the rise in Biblical criticism, secularism, theological liberalism, and the teaching of evolutionary theory in schools (Ammerman, 1993, Marsden, 1980). As well as exploring the interconnections between fundamentalists, evangelicals and other charismatic and traditional Protestant churches.

Sociologists of religion became interested in American Protestant fundamentalists, as they did not ‘fit’ neatly into sociology’s central dogma: the secularisation thesis (Ammerman, 1993). This group of inter-related theories have dominated sociological accounts of religion’s (particularly Christianity’s) position in relation to modernity. It contends, to put it simply, that as society modernises religion ‘loses its social significance’ (Wilson, 1966) and becomes a matter for private choice or conscience. Religion as a socio-political or economic institution with a key structural role within society (as was the case in pre-modern European societies) is dismantled, eroded and eventually ceases (Bruce, 2002). Mainstream religion is then left to become a provider of life-cycle (for example, naming, marriage, and funeral rituals) and calendrical rituals (for example, harvest festivals, Christmas, and Easter), which become increasingly secularised (Bruce, 2002). It may serve as an historical ‘memory’ resource (Hervieu-Leger, 2000) that communities can draw upon to reinforce a sense of shared identity based on perceived past patterns of beliefs. Religion can become an identity provider for marginalised communities, such as migrant communities (Herberg, 1956, Bruce, 2002). Finally, religion operates as a meaning ‘safety net’ to be used when mainstream meaning systems, such as science or medicine appear to ‘fail’ to resolve individual or communal existential ‘worries’ (Davie, 1994, Berger, 1967). Religion shifts from a communal activity, at the heart of social life, with a key role in reinforcing social norms and consensus to a matter of individual ‘choice’ (Bruce, 2002, Heelas, 1997). Thus, religion becomes ‘privatised’ and a matter of consumer ‘choice’, which is demonstrated, in western societies, by the popularity of New Age beliefs with their focus on self-sacralisation and an ‘if it works for you, it works’ ethos (Heelas, 1997). It can also be seen in the phenomenon of

'believing without belonging' where people still appear to believe or have some sense of attachment to the idea of believing but choose not to attend regularly an actual place of worship (Davie, 1994). The gap between statistics which show low church attendance rates but relatively high (65 to 75 per cent) rates for belief in god/spirit (Davie, 1994, Bruce, 2002) also suggest 'privatisation' and individualised spirituality at work.

In many respects, mainstream religion (specifically Christianity) in the western context is following the wider social trend for a structural division between 'public' and 'private' domains. This divide is not present in pre-modern societies: moral issues, family life, personal conduct, work, and so forth are conducted in 'public' and open to scrutiny and communal monitoring; hence the high levels of cohesion and control in such societies (Foucault, 1979). Modernisation brings with it structural changes that create a divide between the 'public' spheres of work, social participation, social institutions, etc. and the 'private' sphere of family, sexuality, individual conduct, etc. An example of this is how the state retracts from moralising, monitoring, and interfering in private matters such as family life and sexuality: only becoming involved in matters of child protection and public decency (Sennett, 1996).

Fundamentalism among American Protestants challenged the secularisation thesis' account of religion and modernity in the western context (Ammerman, 1993). Fundamentalists do not recognise a division between the 'public' and 'private'; God is everywhere and thus everything is under scrutiny, nothing is 'private'. Similarly, faith is not for them a matter of individual, consumer 'choice' but rather a 'gift' bestowed on them by God. Most important of all is that God and faith should be at the heart of society and embedded within all society's structures and institutions (Ammerman, 1991, Bruce, 2008). Therefore, while the majority of western European societies appeared to follow the secularisation model in respect to Christianity; Christianity in America and particularly in relation to the phenomenon of fundamentalism posed a theoretical quandary. Initially theorists explained the emergence of American Protestant fundamentalism as a 'knee jerk' reaction to modernisation: a retreatist position taken by communities who could not 'cope' with the modern and more importantly secular world (Ammerman, 1993). This was a 'neat' theoretical account in that it explained away the fact that fundamentalism had emerged in the most modern of modern societies: the USA. It also reinforced the stereotype that is implied subtly within secularisation theories that religious people are somehow 'backward', 'irrational' and 'anti-modern'. This theoretical account of fundamentalism remained dominant until the 1980s; it was reinforced by the seeming lack of fundamentalism elsewhere in the world. In other words, this seemed like a peculiarity of American Protestantism. Additionally, American Protestant fundamentalism did not seem to be anything other than a regressive theological movement. However, this perception started to change in the late 1970s with two events that caused researchers to think again about religious fundamentalism (Ammerman, 1993, Bruce, 2008).

In 1976, President Jimmy Carter, who claimed to be a 'born-again' Christian, was elected, in part, by the mobilisation of evangelical and fundamentalist Protestant voters. Yet, Carter's politics and actions while president did not demonstrate any specific allegiance to this bloc grouping; nor did he enact legislation to change the relationship between church and state. Religion and religious-moral issues were not central preoccupations of his administration, despite his professed personal beliefs. However, his election did bring this brand of conservative Protestantism into public consciousness at a national and global level. In 1979, evangelical and fundamentalist churches, groups and communities mobilised against Carter and campaigned for future President Ronald Reagan, who was elected in 1980. Reagan, unlike Carter, openly courted this bloc of voters (and raised important campaign funds in the process) and campaigned on some issues, such as abortion, which were central to evangelical and fundamentalist campaigns. The rise in political influence, both as fundraisers and agenda setters, of evangelical and fundamentalist Protestants caught Americans 'by surprise' (Ammerman 1993: 1). The extent to which Reagan, when in power, actually placed evangelical and fundamentalist concerns at the heart of his administration, is open to debate (Bruce, 1990). The importance rather is that by the 1980s this bloc of Protestants had become a political and culturally influential group who could not be ignored. The reasons behind the emergence and rise of American Protestants, as well as the differences between evangelicals and fundamentalists will be explored in Chapters 2 and 3 of this book.

In 1979 another event happened that raised awareness of and changed how we think about so-called 'fundamentalists': the Iranian revolution. The Iranian leader Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi was overthrown in February 1979, by the religio-political movement led by the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Khomeini had become a focus for Iranians' disaffection with the socio-economic consequences of the Shah's 'White Revolution' of the 1960s, which had at its heart an agenda of modernisation (including industrialisation and urbanisation) and ideological westernisation (including encouraging a consumer society, asserting secular values, eradicating gender divides, encouraging western style dress and 'tastes'). The 'Shah's Revolution' had created a prosperous urban middle class, but the majority of working class Iranians remained poor and excluded from the benefits of the consumer society built on Iran's oil economy. The Shah's increasingly repressive regime also facilitated dissent among Iran's urban poor. The mosques soon became the focus of dissent. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini became the figurehead of the revolutionary movement, despite being in exile in France (Salehi, 1998, Daniel, 2001).

Khomeini reasserted the need for an Islamic government, what he called 'God's Government', essentially a theocracy ruled by ultra-conservative Islamic clerics, who stressed a literal interpretation of Islam and the dismantling of all things secular, western and 'unIslamic' that the Shah had established (Salehi, 1998, Daniel, 2001). The Iranian revolution had been fermenting for many years but the new regime again proved surprising for political commentators and researchers of religion alike. Again, the secularisation thesis proves inadequate in

accounting for modernisation's impact on religion, in this instance Islam. It was presumed that the European model of modernisation, which has secularisation as a key consequence, would be applicable elsewhere in the world, irrespective of the religion in question. More importantly, the Iranian Revolution popularised the word 'fundamentalism'.

Although, as will be discussed in Chapter 2, the word 'fundamentalism' has its roots in early twentieth century American Protestantism; it was not used beyond theological or sociological circles. Following the events in Tehran in 1979, the word entered mainstream usage as the media adopted it to describe the new Islamic republic's version of Islam, in an attempt to offer a simplistic description of it for a western audience with little or no knowledge of any variety of Islam. From this point onwards, the term 'fundamentalism' would be used to refer to extremism and politicisation in all varieties of religion (Scott Jones, 2009). It became a word, which slowly drifted from its theological origins within American Protestantism (Scott Jones, 2009). Increasingly, 'fundamentalism' has become a pejorative label, often used synonymously with 'terrorism', which is one reason that many theorists avoid using the term at all (Munson, 1995). This issue will be explored in greater depth in Chapter 2. Iran remains, since the fall of the Taliban who ruled Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001, the world's only example of a long-standing fundamentalist state.

By the 1980s 'fundamentalism' has entered a wider public consciousness where it would remain through the long standing 'culture wars' in the USA in the 1980s and 1990s; and in the powerful political movements that would support successive Bush administrations and rally support against the Clinton and more recently Obama administrations. The rise of Islamic fundamentalism, beyond the continuing existence of the Iranian version, and its ties to radicalisation and in some instances terrorism, further illustrates the power of religious fundamentalism. Within the social sciences, particularly sociology, fundamentalism has proven to be a key element in critiques of the secularisation thesis, proving as Peter Berger puts it that the modern world is 'as furiously religious as ever' (1999, 2). Challenges to the secularisation model have now rightly seen it revised as a model almost exclusive to Europe and her satellites (Bruce, 2002). Fundamentalism also remains the best example of what happens when religious communities become politicised and the role that religious beliefs can play in political activity. Religion can be a powerful revolutionary force, as exemplified by the Iranian example.

### **The Extent of Religious Fundamentalism**

Fundamentalism occurs in all the world's major religions, including Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism. Marty and Appleby's five volume 'Fundamentalism Project' (1991–1995) illustrates the diversity and spread of religious fundamentalism across the world's religions and regions. As fundamentalism is a theological term this should be expected; it should exist in

all religions in the same way that 'liberalism', 'conservatism' and so forth, also exist. However, as will be discussed in the next chapter, 'fundamentalism' is also a sociological label that implies a specific worldview and an element of politicisation, usually leading to socio-political action in the world. Although fundamentalism can be found in all the major religions of the world, it predominates in the monotheistic, religions of 'the book', i.e. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (Marty and Appleby, 1991, Bruce, 2008). This is not surprising given fundamentalism's focus on scriptural literalism and claims to a unifying and single 'true' reality. Fundamentalism is less likely to prosper in religions with less focus on one single authoritative account of 'reality', i.e. a central sacred scripture, and a unitary view of god. Therefore it is no surprise that fundamentalism predominates in Christianity (particularly Protestant varieties) and Islam.

Although fundamentalism can be located throughout the world's faiths and across the globe it is difficult to accurately chart the size of fundamentalist populations. One reason for this is definitional (Ammerman, 1993, Scott Jones, 2009): the term 'fundamentalist' is not often used by so-called 'fundamentalists', they prefer to adopt names that stress their mission or uniqueness, such as 'God's soldiers' or 'God's Way'. The over-use of the term in a pejorative sense also lumps non-fundamentalists together with 'actual' fundamentalists; too often traditionalists, the orthodox, and conservatives are lumped together and mislabelled as 'fundamentalists'. The latter is particularly a problem when looking at Islam, which stresses orthodoxy (the right way to believe) and orthopraxy (the right way to act or behave), as core tenets; often leading to traditional or conservative Muslims being categorised as fundamentalists (Scott Jones, 2009). Generally, it could be said that fundamentalism is widespread across the Islamic world, particularly, where modernisation (and westernisation) have created socio-economic inequalities and marginalised communities; for example, in Egypt, Iraq, Turkey, Indonesia and Malaysia. Jewish fundamentalism is an active agent in stalling and fuelling the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Within Christianity, Protestant fundamentalism is growing in influence in South America, some parts of Europe and remains a significant force in the USA (Scott Jones, 2009). The final chapter of this book will explore the extent of religious fundamentalism on a global scale and explores some of the reasons for fundamentalism's continued growth.

## **A Way of Viewing the World**

This book is about Protestant fundamentalism in the USA, although it will look at the wider global context of fundamentalism in the final chapter, Chapter 9. The book explores Protestant fundamentalism through looking specifically at the fundamentalist worldview. As was noted previously, fundamentalism is a theological label for a particular approach to religion, but it is also a socio-political term that stresses agency and political activity in the secular world. Fundamentalists were once stereotyped as 'retreatist' and 'anti-modern' but

rather than retreat back into literal, 'blind faith', these are individuals and more importantly communities that seek to act in the world; to effect change. They do not retreat from the modern world but rather offer an alternative version of modernity, which places religion at its heart. In doing so, they also posit a powerful critique of modernity. Fundamentalists may have an end goal that is otherworldly (for example, to enter heaven or survive the end of the world), but in the interim, they seek to effect socio-political change in the present. They willingly utilise the 'modern' against itself, for example, making extensive use of modern media technology, such as the Internet and satellite television, to disseminate their beliefs and mobilise communities (Marty and Appleby, 1991). However, action and a blueprint for social change and political action can only be understood through locating such action within an individual or community's worldview.

A worldview is, simplistically, how individuals see, understand and interpret the world around them (Gerth and Mills, 1991). Everyone in that sense has a worldview; we all see the world in a subjective way that is unique to us. However, as Berger and Luckmann (1966) note, it is more complex than that. Our worldview is an all encompassing, 'comprehensive meaning system' that establishes what is 'social reality'; why 'social reality' is how it is; and it also accounts for why 'social reality' may change (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). In that sense worldviews are normative and explanatory (Berger, 1967, Berger and Luckmann, 1966); they establish 'the norm' and account for it. To illustrate, we agree the sky is blue and not green, and we can offer an explanation for it. To suggest the sky is not blue is to then go against a shared consensus, which is presented as 'commonsense'. Worldviews are built on and maintained by meaning systems, that is, forms of knowledge by which 'reality' is established. Meaning systems are typically built on one default form of knowledge; for example, in most modern societies scientific, empirical knowledge is the default (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). To illustrate, one would not go to the exorcist if one fell ill; one would seek out medical assistance and remedies, based on empirically tested knowledge that we can 'prove' works, for example, taking antibiotics to cure an infection. Meaning systems (and therefore worldviews) change and thus so do the knowledge forms on which they are built (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Consider the reaction of an individual in the Middle Ages when confronted with what we today would label as 'epilepsy': it would have been explained as demonic possession and the expected, i.e. 'normal' thing to do would have been to call for an exorcist. Such action today would be seen as 'irrational' and 'odd'. Although most meaning systems are built on a default knowledge position, individuals and communities' worldviews may shift and draw on alternative knowledge providers in the face of the failure of the dominant meaning system (and knowledge) to account for reality. For example, if an individual remained seriously ill, despite the best efforts of modern, western medicine, she may be drawn towards a religious knowledge base instead. 'Moral panics' (Cohen, 1972) are a good example of how communities can shift their meaning-knowledge position in the face of seeming disruption to their 'social reality'. Although we have individual worldviews that are subjective; society requires some semblance of consensus on what is 'really real'. If we fail to



have consensus on what is 'real' then existential chaos threatens and we begin to appreciate that what is 'real' is a mere social construction; at that stage 'anomie' becomes a reality and society may become chaotic. Thus, socialisation operates to socialise individuals with regard to what the group agrees is 'reality' (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). The accepted version of 'reality' is hegemonic, and maintained and reinforced by society's key social structures and through forms of control. Psychology (for example, the Asch conformity experiments of the 1950s) has long demonstrated the innate human tendency to conform to the group consensus, even if the individual believes the group's interpretation to be wrong. Thus, worldviews may have a subjective aspect: we have agency to act in the world and interpret to what extent we adhere to the hegemonic version of reality (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Nevertheless, worldviews are built upon shared understandings of what is 'reality'.

Religious based meaning systems are particularly powerful providers of 'social reality', partly because they solve the issue of 'meaning crisis' far better than alternative knowledge forms. Weber (1991) labelled humanity's self-consciousness a 'curse' because it meant that we search for meaning to our existence. The majority of us are not content to accept that we live in an arbitrary and random universe, where to put it colloquially, 'shit happens'. We want, again to put it colloquially, 'shit to happen for a reason'. Most of modern, western life is secure and the sorts of events that forced individuals and communities in the past to confront the discrepancy between how reality should look and how it actually is no longer trouble us; for example, famine, natural disasters, plague etc. However although our lives are safer and more sanitised we still have what Weber (1991) called the 'meaning problem'. That is there remain the big existential questions of existence; they may not trouble us on an everyday basis but at different stages of the life course they challenge us for an answer. The 'why are we here', 'where are we going', 'what happens when I die', 'why get up in the morning to do the same thing I did yesterday and the day before', and so forth, are questions that need an answer. Our default empirical-scientific meaning system is not very effective in offering an answer that emphasises human significance. Consider, 'you are here because of billions of years of evolution' makes humans appear (and rightly so) rather insignificant in the wider scheme of things. As does the notion that 'when you die you become worm food'. Religious meaning systems offer answers that place humanity at their centre and make people (and their actions) seem significant and that they have a greater destiny beyond the often mundane everydayness of life; for example, 'you are a gift from God' and 'when you die, you might go to heaven'. Additionally, religious meaning systems are more effective in times of individual and communal 'meaning crises'. Geertz (1966) identifies three key categories of events that have the potential to create 'meaning crisis': the problem of evil (i.e. why do bad things happen to good people; why do bad people prosper), suffering (i.e. if there is a God why is there disease, pain, tragedy, etc) and bafflement (i.e. when events occur or phenomena are viewed that cannot be placed in the accepted interpretative framework). Scientific or secular meaning

systems may explain 'evil' through psycho-pathology or neurology, for example, that an individual's brain chemistry or inadequate parenting while young, makes them a dangerous psychopath. Suffering can be accounted for through medicine or psychology, for example, you have a gene for cancer or your child died because they have caught a particular virus. Baffling events can be explained away as hallucinations, inventions and superstitions. Again these fail to offer a 'why me' account of why am I a victim of evil or suffering or have experienced bafflement. Religious meaning systems use characters such as 'the Devil' to account for evil or beliefs such as 'possession'. Suffering can be explained away through concepts such as 'sin', 'karma' or by 'god's will'. Bafflement can be accounted for through belief in magical or spiritual beings, such as Jinns or ghosts, or through the view that 'God works in mysterious ways'. 'Meaning crisis' develops when a gap emerges between how 'social reality' is perceived through lived experience and how people believe it should actually be. As Weber (1991) and Berger and Luckman (1966) all note, the majority of us cannot live in a state of meaninglessness. If we did, we would see 'reality' for what it is; a human construction, open to change. To confront this issue would cause 'meaning crisis', or what Durkheim (1989) called 'anomie'. Societies cannot function effectively when 'anomic'; they need to have a shared view of reality. Simplistically, imagine if we all had a different view of the colour of the sky; consensus is fundamental for societies to function.

Religious worldviews are so powerful because they draw on knowledge that appears to offer the 'whole story' and their power is supported by three key mechanisms: legitimations (Berger, 1967), such as sacred scriptures, that explain the how and why of reality. For example, the Bible offers an account of why we are here; how we should conduct ourselves while here; and what happens when we die and when/how the world will end. Legitimations can offer powerful explanations as to reality and are hard to criticise and challenge as to do so would be to literally 'take on' God. For example, the European feudal system or the Indian caste system were predicated on a view that this was a 'god given' social hierarchy and that one's place was decreed by God himself. Such legitimations are used to socialise the next generation of believers into the shared view of reality. The effectiveness of socialisation, particularly primary socialisation, has been well documented (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Few of us stray from the belief systems with which we were socialised as children. This is also one of the reasons why religions focus so much on issues of family and education. They appreciate that socialising the next generation is crucial for their long-term survival. Finally, mystificatory devices (Berger, 1967), such as rituals, are used to 'mystify' beliefs by removing the 'hand of man' and thus supporting the view of 'reality' as God given. Mystification also focuses people's attentions on instrumental activities such as rituals and away from questioning 'reality'. Other meaning systems lack such a repertoire, which is partly one of the reasons why even in modern societies religion has not died out, as was once predicted and anticipated. Therefore, an exploration of how believers view and build reality is the key to understanding other aspects of their lives, beliefs, and activities.

This book's central focus is on outlining and exploring some key components of the worldview of Protestant fundamentalists and indeed religious fundamentalists in general. It does this by drawing predominantly from one specific case study of American Protestant fundamentalism: 'God's Way'<sup>1</sup> community.

## **Introducing 'God's Way' Community**

I conducted long-term, participant observation, ethnographic research in God's Way community (Scott, 1996). I lived as a member of the group for just under a year. God's Way community consist of thirty-seven individuals who believe that they are uniquely 'chosen' by God as 'his people' to do 'his bidding'. The community was originally founded by their charismatic leader, 'Abraham Zion'<sup>2</sup> in 1927 in Arizona. However, following a series of natural disasters that the community interpreted as a series of punishments and 'tests' from God, the community migrated to southern Missouri where the present day community was established in April 1935. Abraham had been 'called' by God, via a series of dreams, to found the community and gather followers. In 1939, he experienced a series of powerful visions where God 'spoke' to him and dictated a new 'version' of the Bible. These scriptures were written-up and are called the 'Books of Abraham'. They play a central role in communal worship and complement their study of the Bible. They view the Bible as the product of centuries of 'editing' and 'rewriting' by the 'enemies of God', specifically, Catholics. Therefore, they use the Bible as a secondary source in relation to their own communal scripture. Both texts are taken literally as guides for living and a source of advice on all matters of faith.

The community established their current day ranch and built up a prosperous farm. During the post-war years they experienced a period of growth and the community's population peaked. Although initially isolationist, as they prospered they became more open to 'outsiders' and worked alongside local church groups who shared some of their beliefs. However some members became disaffected with this networking on common interests, as well as the increasing problem with the community's youth becoming influenced by the 1960s 'youth culture'. By the late 1960s, Abraham's health had deteriorated to such an extent that the issue of succession needed to be resolved. This issue became a focal point for increasing communal tensions around the future direction and aims of the community, particularly around external engagement and action. Isaac and Joshua are the two eldest sons of Abraham and by 1973, the community had split into two factions, each led by one of the sons. This conflict came to a head with a schism and Joshua led one half of the community away to found a rival group, which stressed a more literal, 'basic' way of life, without any use of modern technology or comforts. On departure, this group deliberately set fire to the community's buildings, destroying

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1 A pseudonym.

2 All community members' names are pseudonyms.

most of the community's infrastructure and killing several members. Isaac assumed leadership of what remained of God's Way; a role that was formalised following the death of his father. Rebuilding following the fire is still ongoing and the community exists on a subsistence level on their ranch; they rely on work as contract labourers for local farmers to supplement their income. The community try to balance self-sufficiency and isolation with the need to participate in the 'outside' world for economic reasons. Isaac interpreted the fire and his father's death as divine 'punishment' for opening up the community to 'outside' influences and so the group attempt to maintain an isolationist stance. How successful this is will be discussed in later chapters.

The community's isolation has meant that few new members have been recruited, bar one family and they face a growing demographic issue, whereby nearly all the members are related either through birth or marriage and therefore the younger generation will struggle to find spouses within the group. This may force the community to recruit more actively. The current recruitment 'policy' is that God 'will bring' new members; so far this approach has brought five new members in the past twenty years. My initial overtures to the community and my eventual arrival were interpreted as a 'sign' from God.

I came across God's Way by accident; I had been writing to the leaders of a variety of religious and ethical communities in the USA, some 'closed', some open to 'outsiders', during the initial stages of my doctoral research. In these letters, I introduced myself as a student researcher interested in their community and belief systems. My research was 'overt' at this stage, but I included a note of ambiguity into my introduction by also presenting myself as a 'seeker' of alternative ways of living. Thus, I presented a dual identity; this was not a lie as such, as at that time I was interested in seeking out alternative ways of living. I received a number of replies and invitations to visit. However, I was most interested in my letter from Isaac the leader of God's Way community. In that initial letter he outlined their belief system and some of their history. We struck up a short correspondence during which I stressed an interest in visiting as a researcher, but also emphasised my 'seeker' role. Isaac then passed my correspondence on to his niece, Rachel, and she became my new correspondent from the community. We wrote to each other for the next six months during which it became clear that the group was interpreting my interest as a 'sign' from God and that I was a new member to be 'brought from overseas'. I went along with this deception, as it was clear from Isaac's initial letters that only potential members, as opposed to researchers, could visit the community. On arrival, following almost a year of correspondence, I assumed the role of 'new' member and later initiate to the community; one who had been sent by God, from overseas. I judged my successful 'role performance' through the fact that I was quickly accepted as a provisional member and assigned to the social category of 'adolescent', which included all community members (irrespective of age), who were not married with children. Marriage and children brought status and authority in the community, without them, you occupied a lowly place in the social hierarchy. This status suited me as it gave me greater licence to make

mistakes without damaging my 'role performance'. I lived on the community for just under a year. I maintained contact with Rachel my key informant for several years following my fieldwork until our correspondence ended abruptly.

The community is a ranch, which is isolated from neighbouring farms through local topography, which is hilly. The heart of the community is the chapel and the communal dining room, where everyone eats together at every mealtime. A number of small houses circle the centre and these are home to the various family groupings. Single members are attached to a family group, thus I was housed with Isaac's family. The internal design of all the buildings is open plan, with no doors in the door frames. Curtains can be drawn in door frames to maintain privacy when using the bathroom or sleeping. All bedrooms are shared and curtains are never drawn unless the room is in use at night. This design works to maximise a communal ethos and minimise feelings of individuality and privacy. It also allows community members to monitor each other and thus enforce norms of behaviour and belief. The only time one is truly alone is in the bathroom and even then, the noise from conversations can be heard coming from surrounding rooms. The only 'quiet' space was the chapel, but this was rarely used for private study or worship and for members to have sat alone in the chapel would have generated disapproval. The ranch has several acres of land for growing crops and they keep chickens and horses.

The community view themselves as God's 'chosen' people and that only they will survive the end of the world, which they believe to be quickly approaching. Their belief system, which will be explored in later chapters, is steeped in American Protestantism and is fundamentalist in orientation. God's Way will be used as a central case study to explore the fundamentalist worldview. However, other examples will also be used to demonstrate the diversity of Protestant fundamentalism, its commonalities and differences.

## **The Structure of the Book**

To understand the appeal of religious fundamentalism in even the most modern of societies it is important to explore a number of related questions:

- What is religious fundamentalism?
- What is the specific nature of American Protestant fundamentalism?
- What are the characteristics of a fundamentalist worldview?
- What is the appeal of this particular set of beliefs and worldview?
- Why does religious fundamentalism emerge and thrive in modern and late modern societies?

This book aims to answer these questions and explore these themes. The book's central contention is that to fully understand this phenomenon, one must get to its heart, which is its worldview. One cannot understand fundamentalist beliefs

or actions in the world without appreciating their source of agency, which lies in their worldview.

This book is structured in such a way that it will take the reader through the different key characteristics of the Protestant fundamentalist worldview. Chapters 2 and 3 set the scene for the subsequent chapters by further contextualising Protestant fundamentalism, historically and theoretically. Chapter 2 reviews the issue of definitions: what is a fundamentalist and are all fundamentalisms (regardless of their specific religious provenance) the same? Is a unitary definition possible and desirable? The long running academic debate on this topic will be discussed. The contrasts and connections between Christian fundamentalists and other Christian groupings, such as evangelicals, charismatics and conservatives, that are often mistakenly labelled as 'fundamentalist' will be examined. Building on this discussion of definitions and characteristics the chapter will end by outlining the five key characteristics of the typical fundamentalist worldview: chosenness; orthodoxy and orthopraxy; separation and opposition; apocalypticism; and (re)action in the world. The following chapters will focus on one of these characteristics, which will run as a theme in that chapter. Thus readers will literally be taken through a fundamentalist worldview and see how its different elements work together to inform action.

Chapter 3 discusses the historical roots of American Protestant fundamentalism and the socio-political forces that caused its emergence and growth. When and why did this variety of fundamentalism emerge in the world's most 'modern' nation? American-style Protestant fundamentalism is uniquely related to the socio-political structure of the USA, which needs to be contextualised, for example, in foundation views of national destiny and 'chosen nation' status; in an identification of White Protestants as 'true' Americans; and in the constitutional separation of state and religion. There will be an outline of the emergence of Protestant fundamentalism in the USA, with its roots in the modernisation of the late nineteenth century, where factors such as mass immigration, Biblical Criticism, urbanisation and industrialisation prompted the emergence of groups, who sought to critique modernity and stress the 'fundamentals' of faith. The politicisation of what were initially theological issues and the failure of early political campaigns will be discussed. The chapter will end by exploring the growth of fundamentalist communities in the post-war era and the increasingly influential political action of these groups will be examined.

Chapters 4–8 all focus on a different aspect of worldview. Chapter 4 primarily focuses on the core belief in being 'chosen' and how this is the foundation of the entire fundamentalist worldview. A sense of being 'chosen' is both a shared communal identity and a personal identity. However, claims of being 'chosen' or communal uniqueness are not uncommon through history or across different religions – so how do such groups maintain this view of their own uniqueness and how does it withstand competing claims to special status? Chapter 5 focuses on how fundamentalists live out their sense of being 'chosen' through their everyday lives, where orthodoxy and orthopraxy are paramount. If one is 'chosen' then all activities

become sites for expression of religious devotion and commitment. Therefore, behaviour is strictly monitored and controlled, especially around morality, gender and sexuality. The role of commitment mechanisms (rituals, beliefs, activities) that are used to reinforce and maintain faith over time will be discussed, particularly the use of Biblical literalism. Chapter 6 explores the apocalypticism that is part of the fundamentalist worldview. Fundamentalists are profoundly apocalyptic and a belief in the end of the world adds agency and urgency to their beliefs and activities. Apocalypticism is an important form of reinforcement for their belief in being 'chosen'. This chapter will also look at the importance of 'signs'. It will also look at what happens when the end of the world does not happen as predicted. Chapter 7 discusses fundamentalists' relationship with the 'outside' world; fundamentalists have a strong oppositional worldview which reinforces their sense of being 'chosen' and creates real and symbolic 'enemies' to fight back against. The nature of this oppositional worldview and its impact on activities and beliefs will be explored; especially around political action. The exploration of worldview ends in Chapter 8 with a discussion of fundamentalist political action and radicalism. What impact have they had and what impact might they have? Their preoccupation with education, moral and family issues is discussed. Differing political positions will be reviewed particularly in relation to the extent to which such groups wish to change the secular world and to what extent they wish to abandon it.

Chapter 9, the final chapter, places American Protestant fundamentalism (and its worldview) back into the broader spectrum of global fundamentalism. It returns to some of the issues explored in Chapter 2 around definitions, such as, are fundamentalists more alike than different. It explores the reasons behind the global growth in religious fundamentalism. It will discuss some of the consequences of this growth and whether it poses a serious socio-political threat in the world or whether it is transitional phase.