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# Religion and Terrorism: Christian Fundamentalism and Extremism

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*The history and identity of fundamentalism is complex. Religious fundamentalism names an ideological perspective found in most, if not all, major religions and is currently associated with variant forms of extremism and religiously-motivated acts of violence, including terrorism. Following a discussion of religious extremism per se, a typological paradigm of religious fundamentalism that attempts to demonstrate the ideological development from what might be referred to as an “initial” and relatively benign fundamentalism into extremism and thence to terrorism, will be presented. A discussion of a model of fundamentalism as applied to Islam will provide a comparative basis for assessing Christian fundamentalism and extremism, so setting the scene for an applied exploration of religious extremism and terrorism with particular reference to Christian contexts and examples.*

**Keywords** Christian, extremism, fundamentalism, terrorism

## Introduction

Definitions of terrorism are legion.<sup>1</sup> Intimidating the innocent as a modality of action is perhaps one general characteristic, as is the fact that, for the most part, terrorism involves violent behaviours undertaken for political and/or ideological purposes.<sup>2</sup> Terrorism may be regarded as comprising a complex of criminality, psychology, and ideology: there is no single or simple definition or analysis.<sup>3</sup> There are many root causes as well as differing frameworks of self-understanding.<sup>4</sup> Among them is religion, the relative significance of which, as a factor to be considered in its own right, is arguably only recently recognised in any significant way vis-à-vis

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contemporary terrorism. Religion and terrorism are a powerful mix: as James Veitch has remarked, “When religion empowers political terrorism then the terrorism apparently has no limits and acknowledges no boundaries.”<sup>5</sup> And terrorism expert Alex Schmid, who has explored the definition and context of terrorism in terms of “five conceptual lenses” that provide a multi-perspectival framework of crime, politics, warfare, communication, and religious fundamentalism, cautions that a religious framework can only provide a partial perspective on the nature of terrorism.<sup>6</sup>

Terrorism is a multi-faceted phenomenon and Schmid clearly advocates setting any consideration of terrorism within a wide framework. Nevertheless, I would not be alone in advocating the taking of the religious dimension even more seriously by, in effect, giving it pride of place especially where there are obvious links between the terrorist and a religion or religious ideology.<sup>7</sup> My work on religion and terrorism which informs this paper is of a theoretical and philosophical nature. The aim is to strive for greater conceptual clarity and depth of nuanced understanding of what it is that empirical social scientists report and so provide, hopefully, a fruitful interpretive perspective that might aid the further development of critical analytical thinking about terrorism and its associated violent activities. For, without doubt, religion is increasingly in the frame as a critical component of contemporary terrorism and political violence.<sup>8</sup> But it is not religion *per se* that is the issue to be addressed, rather it is the phenomenon of religious extremism. So what is this extremism?

### Religious Extremism

A first step in exploring the relationship of religion to terrorism is by way of a consideration of extremism *per se*, for it is extreme forms or expressions of religion and religious ideology which, under the guise of fundamentalism, is arguably the point of connectivity between religion and terrorism. The ordinarily religious person or community does not engage in violence as a matter of course: religions as a rule espouse values of peace and harmony, even in contexts of challenge and contestation. So the first step in considering religious extremism is to ask an obvious question: what is the meaning of “extremism” as such?

#### *What Does “Extremism” Mean?*

The term evokes a sense of being at the margins, of existing on the boundaries or of functioning at the edges; in other words, extremism suggests—naturally enough—“extremities.” And any organisation or group that is in this sense extreme will tend to manifest a tenuous link to whatever is the appropriate “centre,” or else give evidence of a loose connection to the relevant normative tradition. Here, extremism expresses heterodoxy against orthodoxy. But extremism can refer to something else altogether; even, indeed, the opposite of being “at the margins,” and that is being at—or claiming to be—the centre. Here the term connotes degrees of intensity or sharpness of focus: extremism suggests fanaticism. In this case an extremist ideology or group will claim the relevant central position exclusively and, in so doing, will proclaim its normative tradition intensely. Extremism in this sense takes its own wider group identity—its religion or tradition—to an extreme; not by a move away from the centre, but rather by intensifying its self-understanding and self-proclamation as representing, or being, the centre. Thus, in this mode extremism expresses an ultra-orthodox outlook in contrast to orthodoxy *per se*. However it is

important to note, I suggest, that either way religious extremism belongs to a “tradition” for such extremism, by definition, has to do with the extremity or centring of an existing tradition—that is, of a religion—with which the extremist is concerned. A religious extremist requires specific religious identity as the primary reference for self-legitimization.

By contrast, religious cults and other radical alternatives do not belong to a tradition; rather, by definition, they are “other-than” any normative tradition or religion.<sup>9</sup> Cults, sects, and new religious movements (NRMs) are to be distinguished from the religious extremism which I am here discussing. This distinction can readily be seen by way of examining the situation pertaining to NRMs. Phenomenologically there are three forms. An *interactive* NRM is the product or outcome of an encounter of—usually—a major world or missionary religion with a local tribal or primal type of religion. An *exoteric* NRM is an outgrowth of—or better, from—a single tradition. By contrast, an *esoteric* NRM comprises an eclectic compounding of multiple traditions or elements from a number of different religious and/or spiritual traditions. Thus we can refer to a cult as an extreme esoteric NRM and a sect as an extreme exoteric NRM. In this regard cult and sectarian extremists are not to be equated with religious extremists in the strict sense in which I wish to use that term. For *religious* extremists are the extremists *of a religion*; they ought not be construed as representing a cult, sect, or other form of NRM with the effect, thereby, of being regarded as “not belonging,” and so no longer the putative responsibility (whether in terms of formation or countering) of the religious community whom they claim to represent or with which they are allied. This has been a particular problem in regard to a widespread disavowal from within the Muslim community that identifiably Islamic terrorists are not genuinely Muslim, therefore their espoused Islamism is not to be addressed—it lies outside the purview of the normative tradition and represents something that is quite beyond the pale so far as the wider community is concerned. But, arguably, this is a position of naïve rejection that illustrates a variant of the denial of belonging by construing the extremist as not part of, and so thereby only problematically representing, the tradition.

For the most part the extremists, including especially terrorist expressions of a religion are regarded as fundamentalist; but the reverse is not necessarily the case: a religious fundamentalist is not necessarily an extremist, or at least not of the sort likely to engage in terrorism. But some are. So what is the ideology of religious fundamentalism and what might be its link to terrorism as such?

### Religious Fundamentalism

For nearly a century the term “fundamentalism” has referred to a set of specific Christian beliefs and an allied ultra-conservative attitude. However, use of the term has broadened: the term “fundamentalism” more or less names a religio-political perspective found in many if not all major religions in the contemporary world.<sup>10</sup> Most disturbingly, it is associated with variant forms of religious extremism and thus religiously-oriented terrorism, in particular—though by no means exclusively—that of an Islamic ilk.<sup>11</sup> Movements of a fundamentalist type are evident in Islam, certainly, but they may be found also in Christianity, in Hinduism, in Judaism, and in other religious communities. Contemporary fundamentalism is not the sole province of any one religion. And the upsurge in the totalising claims of fundamentalist ideologues, of whatever religion, together with the utilisation of globalized

communication, transportation, and related modern technologies, means that the issue of religious fundamentalism itself requires careful attention.<sup>12</sup>

In some respects “fundamentalism” may be understood in terms of whatever it is “against.” The word is often used as “a pejorative description for anyone who is regarded as having a closed mind with regard to a particular issue.”<sup>13</sup> However, Peter Lineham observes that the history and identity of fundamentalism as a Christian phenomenon is, indeed, quite complex.

It is sometimes said that moral panic explains the appeal of Fundamentalism. Certainly the issues which stimulate political action involve a crisis mood that Christian civilisation is at risk. Fundamentalism is after all a popular movement which flourishes by interpreting current issues in simplified and distorted ways.<sup>14</sup>

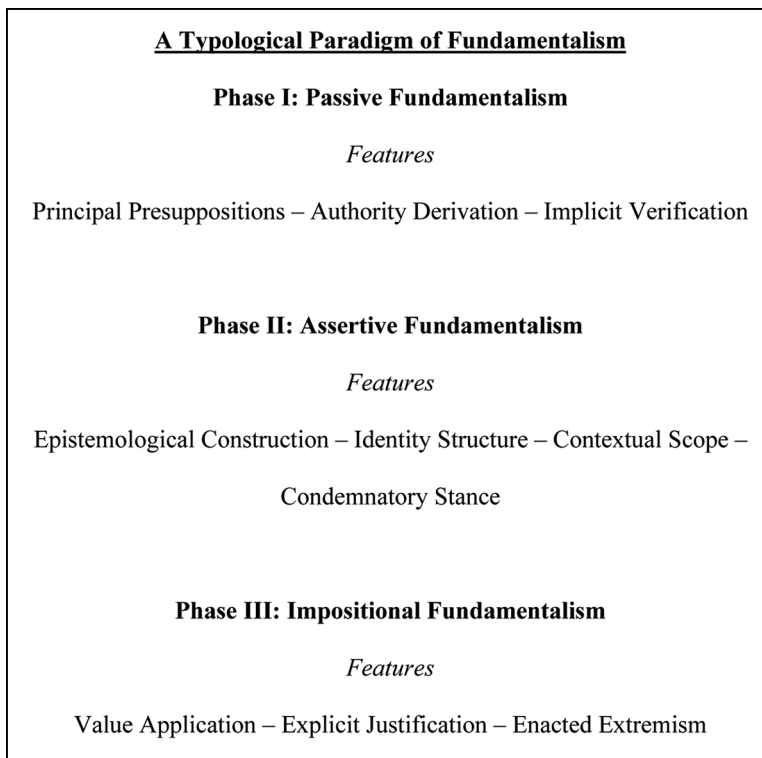
The term “fundamentalism” arose in a uniquely Christian context; it has since migrated into other arenas of discourse. A series of booklets, entitled simply *The Fundamentals*, was published in America early in the twentieth-century and distributed worldwide in order to promote the view that there is a fundamental defining and non-negotiable set of traditional Christian doctrines.<sup>15</sup> As a distinctive religious term, “fundamentalism” arose to refer to this generic idea proposed by the booklets. In an age where theological liberalism had been ascendant, this fresh term enabled a new countering viewpoint to be identified and promoted.<sup>16</sup> There was abroad the sense of needing to do battle royal for the integrity of the Christian faith, and in this context the badge of fundamentalism was proudly worn. However, subsequent and wider application of the term has not been without problems and difficulties. It does not transfer well into religious contexts other than Christian, and it is imprecise enough even within the Christian camp. Nevertheless, it has gained wide coinage and attracted considerable scholarly interest.<sup>17</sup>

As a subject of critical academic scrutiny, fundamentalism, in its Christian context, has been the focus of a number of notable studies which include both religious and political variants of fundamentalism.<sup>18</sup> Marty has observed that “fundamentalisms look backward and set out to ‘freeze’ some moment, some event, some text or texts from the past as the perfect place in time or space from which to measure” life in the present.<sup>19</sup> An imagined “golden-age,” believed to have pertained at the religion’s foundation, is held up as the model and reference point for contemporary reality. In response to the critique that religion—and in particular fundamentalist religion—is but an epiphenomenon riding on what are really political ideas and actions, or that fundamentalism is really just a passing fad, such studies have only served to highlight what subsequent history and recent events underscore: religious fundamentalism is a deeply rooted phenomenon that can, and does, give rise to political acts. Religious fundamentalism can imply a narrow, strict, and limited metaphysics and set of doctrines, which to a greater or lesser degree hardly impinge on the wider life of a society; it can also mean a worldview perspective that engenders, if not demands, the advocacy of a socio-political ordering and action to achieve an intended outcome.

As noted above, terrorism, as a descriptor for extreme and violent behaviours, is not solely the province of religious fundamentalism. But it can be—and sometimes is—the end-result of a fundamentalist ideological trajectory. This is the issue that faces us today, in both localised and globalized manifestations. An absolutist perspective—arguably at the base of every religion, and certainly the heart of any fundamentalist

expression of religion—does not necessarily result in terrorist behaviour. Not all fundamentalists are terrorists. Yet it is arguably the case that religious fundamentalism may—as indeed we know that it does—in certain circumstances produce a terrorist. At the same time, there are many examples of religious fundamentalists who are pacifist in outlook and demeanour. Nevertheless, the point is that fundamentalism may lead to terrorism, and in some cases it does. How might this be explained?

The phenomenon of religious fundamentalism comprises, I suggest, an interconnected sequence of factors which collectively and cumulatively describe the development of an ideology and its accompanying mindset. I have analysed some twenty factors into a progression of ten sets—or “features”—of paired factors. These features are further sub-grouped into three “phases” so as to yield a paradigm typology involving a sequence of passive, assertive, and impositional forms of fundamentalism. In particular, it is the sequential combination of these features and factors which is important, for it is this interconnectivity which makes of a typological description a putative discrete paradigm. There are other scholars who have likewise attempted a deeper understanding of fundamentalism by attempting to identify distinguishing defining features *per se*.<sup>20</sup> By contrast, I seek, and suggest, a more nuanced understanding by way of exploring the dynamics of the sequential development that is arguably inherent to the phenomenon and thus exposes the ideological structure of fundamentalism more precisely. In a tabular form, the structure of the typological paradigm I am suggesting may be represented, in terms of the “phases” and their constituent features, as follows:



**Figure 1.** Typological paradigm of fundamentalism.

In essence, my hypothesis is that all forms and expressions of religious fundamentalism begin with, or at least include, the three features which denote the passive phase. Much conservative religiosity would identify with this phase and would not be overly troubled by that. Indeed, variant forms of reactionary conservatism across both Christianity and Islam, as well as other religions, would easily classify as expressive of passive fundamentalism. However, some religious groups or movements go beyond this such that we may identify them as belonging to the second, hard-line assertive, phase. Most typically sectarian movements, for example Jehovah's Witnesses, the Moonies, the Exclusive Brethren\* (at least until recently; see below) tend to fit within the more overt "assertive" phase.<sup>21</sup> But arguably there are some which, having incorporated all the marks of a hard-line assertive fundamentalism then go further to manifest what, perhaps, can be best described as variant forms of an "impositional" fundamentalism; for example, in the United States, the World Church of the Creator.<sup>22</sup> It is here that we discover the propensity for fundamentalism to yield to terrorism.

Of course, there will be other religious—and non-religious—groups and movements who likewise wish to influence wider society, to advocate policy and values, to effect change in accord with their agendas. But they are nowhere near terrorism or even extremism, for they lie outside the fundamentalist paradigm altogether. The desire for change and active participation in socio-political processes does not of itself equate with fundamentalism, let alone terrorism. It is not activism *per se* which is at issue; rather that fundamentalism which is expressly and intentionally *impositional*. If the Taliban has proved to be a model of the development of an Islamic fundamentalist extremism, recent events involving the Exclusive Brethren sectarian church in Australia and New Zealand as well as elsewhere demonstrate how a former hard-line "assertive" fundamentalist group from within the Christian frame can move, ideologically and behaviourally. This fundamentalist Christian group would now better classify as "impositional," for the behaviours of this category are imposed, or impinge in some way or another (usually negatively), upon the wider society. In this case, a previously assertive fundamentalist group whose sectarian isolation was accompanied by a disavowal of political engagement of any sort recently took covert actions to support and endorse right-wing political parties and so to sway an election outcome in the direction it favoured by way of secret and substantial funding of select electioneering campaigns. The use of a very considerable financial resource was designed to bring about an outcome in the manner of an indirect imposition, but an imposition nonetheless. Hence by its own actions the Exclusive Brethren group demonstrated an ideological shift from assertive to impositional phases of fundamentalism.

A passive fundamentalist group to all intents and purposes "minds its own business" so far as the rest of society is concerned; an assertive group perhaps somewhat less so, but an impositional group does not. An impositional fundamentalism wants to see things change to fit its view of how things should be, and will take steps to make its views known and, if need be, act imposingly to bring about change—by covert or overt interventions, including fomenting revolution or enacting terrorism. Hence the need to construct a paradigm that attempts to show a distinct progression

\*This offshoot of the English Plymouth Brethren is active in Australia and New Zealand, as well as elsewhere. It is a highly sectarian and fiercely exclusive group that exercises tight control over its members.

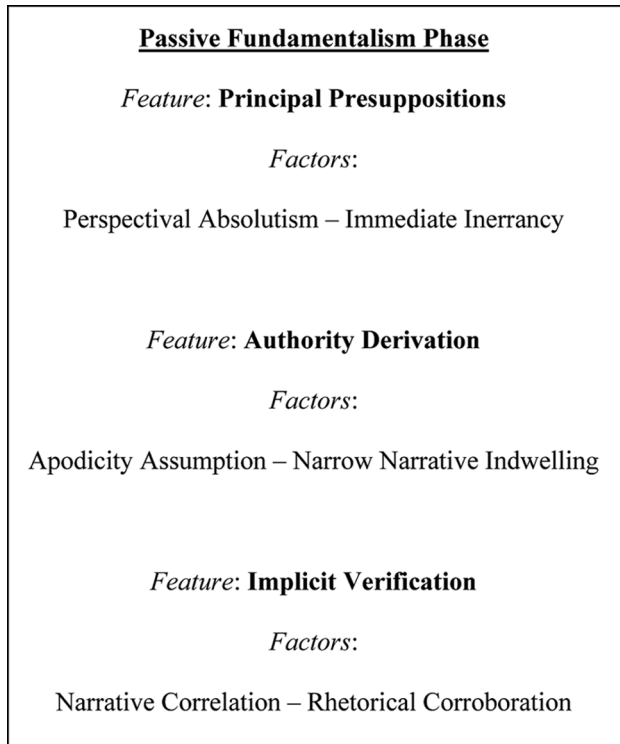
whereby the sequential and correlative links between the ideology of religious fundamentalism and the propensity for extreme, even terrorist, action is made clear. It is the underlying dynamic of an ideological development which the following paradigm attempts to map.

### *Passive Fundamentalism*

As indicated, passive fundamentalism may be regarded as comprising three features. The first, that of “principal presuppositions,” includes two factors: *perspectival absolutism* and *immediate inerrancy*. The fundamentalist presupposes the absolute-ness of his or her position—the very idea that it is but one of a number of possible perspectives is inadmissible—and that the applicable authoritative text or scripture can be read as providing immediate inerrant knowledge. There is no intermediary or mediating lens through which variant interpretations may result; what is presented in terms of absolute text is without error. Knowledge based thereon is sure. These two interconnected factors comprise the foundational or principal presuppositions of religious fundamentalism which, on their own, might simply indicate one among many options for the expression of religious belief. Most often a secularist, an agnostic, or a religious liberal in the West would view these factors to be the essence of fundamentalism: proof positive that religion amounts to no more than fairy-tales; easily ignored, of no consequence or significance in the greater scheme of things. But, I contend, this is not all there is to fundamentalism, even in the passive phase.

The second feature, “authority derivation,” extends the presuppositions by way of an *assumption of apodicticity*—that is, the authoritative text is unambiguous with respect to meaning—together with what I call *narrow narrative indwelling*. Whereas, arguably, all religious people “indwell,” to a greater or lesser degree, their respective religious narrative (it provides for life references, points of meaning, and frameworks of understanding that inform a religious individual’s existence), by contrast a mark of the indwelling of a fundamentalist is that the narrative base is distinctly narrow. The resultant indwelt religious life is correspondingly confined; indeed, this very narrowness often marks a fundamentalist out from the wider religious tradition and community which, by contrast, will have a tendency to admit a wider reading of its narrative and so a capacity to indwell it with a greater measure of interpretive flexibility. The third feature of passive fundamentalism is “implicit verification” which combines the factors of *narrative correlation* and *rhetorical corroboration*. The former denotes a deepening of the correlation between the religious narrative that is espoused and the concrete lived reality, or *sitz-im-leben*, of the religious community concerned. The latter indicates an intensification of corroborating rhetoric that situates, endorses, and justifies the fundamentalist perspective vis-à-vis the judgements and assessments made about the external world in terms of narrative correlation.

I suggest these three features, with their paired sets of factors, denote the essence of religious fundamentalism *per se*. Hence they denote fundamentalism in its “fundamental” or “passive” modality. It is from this starting point of religious intensity that the ideology of fundamentalism can evolve through a hard-line modality and into an assertive, even impositional extremist modality—thus setting the scene for the execution of violent or terrorist acts. In tabular form we may describe Passive Fundamentalism as follows:



**Figure 2.** Typological paradigm of fundamentalism—Passive phase.

### *Assertive Fundamentalism*

This, the second “phase,” deepens and strengthens the ideology of fundamentalism and its application both real (in terms of fundamentalist groups) and potential (in respect to the wider society in which the fundamentalism concerned is situated). It involves four features each, again, comprising a pair of linked factors. The first feature, “epistemological construction,” involves the twin factors of *hard factualism* and *applied necessity*. Fundamentalism hardens, and becomes more self-assertive, as it tightens its own grip on what is understood to be knowable, and how what is knowable is known. In essence the range of what is admitted as genuine knowledge is truncated: arguably, “real” knowledge is reduced to facts that are held to be true—all else belongs to the realm of falsehood. This focus on facts, and so the reading of scripture as a compendium of God-given “facts” to be relied upon implicitly, brings with it a dimension of necessariness to the fundamentalist’s construction of knowledge. The fundamentalist’s own perspective on knowledge is regarded as necessarily the case; an applied necessity of perspective obtains in respect to a focus on hard facts as the essential content of knowledge.

The emergence of a distinct “identity structure” is the second feature of the assertive phase of fundamentalism. It involves the juxtaposition of what might be called *communitarian intent* with *individual constraint*. That is to say, the identity of a fundamentalist individual is bound up necessarily with the identity of the

fundamentalist community: the stronger or more hard-line or assertive the fundamentalism, the tighter this relation. The factor of communitarian intent denotes the way in which fundamentalist movements place value, to a greater or lesser degree, upon membership of the community, and the upholding of its values and norms as essential to the community such that the identity of individuals within the community is thereby proscribed. Thus the factor of individual constraint is the necessary corollary, and the two factors go together to form the structure of fundamentalist identity.

The next feature has to do with an ideological hardening by way of what might be called “contextual scope.” It involves the holding together of an *ideological exclusivism* with an *inclusivist polity*: on the one hand, religious fundamentalism excludes, virtually automatically, anything that relative to it appears “liberal”; that admits of, for example, any limitation, provisionality, otherness, openness, or change. It excludes religious liberalism of any ilk. On the other hand, this same fundamentalism displays a propensity to include, in respect to considerations of the policies and praxis of social organisation, all others that fall within its frame of reference or worldview understanding. Thus, paradoxically it would seem, the excluding of all other ideological variants and perspectives necessarily implies the wholesale inclusion of a society in terms of the outworking of polity considerations. At this juncture a fundamentalist ideology does not wish to see itself as one among many, nor even a dominant yet still one among many; but rather the one to which the many are subsumed and so gathered into the fold, as it were, such that there is no room for alterity of any sort.

The fourth feature of hard-line fundamentalism denotes a move into negative values as opposed to value-neutral descriptors. It is the feature of “condemnatory stance” that has as its factors the holding and articulating of *negative judgemental values* and the exercise of what may be called a *pietistic tyranny*. Assertive fundamentalism is distinguished by strident assertions of a condemnatory or judgemental sort; it is in the expression of judgemental values that such hard-line fundamentalism displays its real stance toward any who would dissent from within, or oppose from without. Inherent in this is often a deprecating attitude towards others, whether in regard to virtually any other (the world at large), or focussed on specific others (particular groups or categories of people such as Jews, Blacks, or gays). Such judgementalism can be found, for example, in the generalised sense of the Exclusive Brethren’s dismissal of all outside its fold as “worldlies.” And it is in the inward application of judgemental values—that is, applying such values for the purpose of control and censure within the fundamentalist’s own community—that the factor of pietistic tyranny may be discerned. This is where assertive fundamentalism shows itself to be truly hard-line. The faith-values it espouses—its “piety”—becomes, in effect, a tool of tyranny: newly-won converts must cut themselves off from their family of origin (as with the Moonies) for example; or members of the community must have no social intercourse with literally anyone who is not in fellowship with them (as with the Exclusive Brethren; a breakaway group, the “Open Brethren,” does allow for such relationships—it remains within the phase of passive fundamentalism). The advocacy by one religious community that its members should have no truck with those of any other, or a different, community may be evidence of pietistic tyranny in action. As constituted by these two factors—judgemental values and pietistic tyranny—the feature of condemnatory stance sets the seal on the hard-line assertive phase and sets the scene for the next phase, that of impositional

fundamentalism. In summary, in tabular form Assertive Fundamentalism may be described as follows:

<p><b><u>Assertive Fundamentalism Phase</u></b></p> <p><i>Feature: Epistemological Construction</i></p> <p><i>Factors:</i></p> <p>Hard Factualism – Applied Necessity</p> <p><i>Feature: Identity Structure</i></p> <p><i>Factors:</i></p> <p>Communitarian Intent – Individual Constraint</p> <p><i>Feature: Contextual Scope</i></p> <p><i>Factors:</i></p> <p>Ideological Exclusivism – Polity Inclusion</p> <p><i>Feature: Condemnatory Stance</i></p> <p><i>Factors:</i></p> <p>Judgemental Values – Pietistic Tyranny</p>
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**Figure 3.** Typological paradigm of fundamentalism—Assertive phase.

### ***Impositional Fundamentalism***

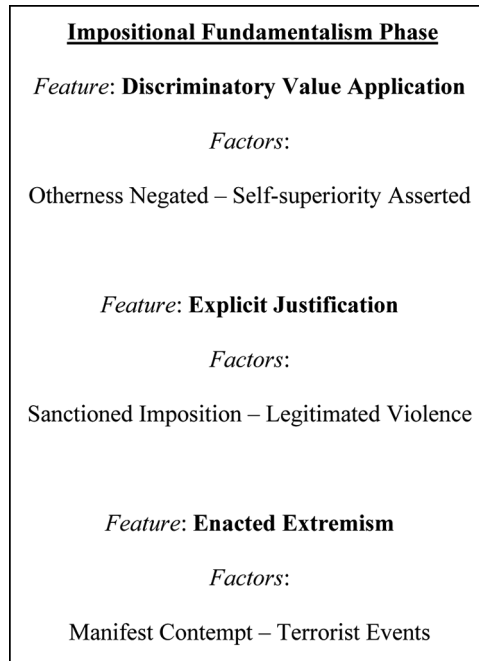
We are brought now into the third and final phase whereby what began, as it were, as “merely” or “benignly” fundamentalist ideology has transformed or evolved into something of a distinctly radicalized and/or impositional nature such that extreme actions, including violent behaviours and even terrorism, may be contemplated, advocated, and eventually engaged. And so we observe an ideological development underway. It is this phase which, including and building especially upon the second two features of the preceding assertive phase (contextual scope and condemnatory stance), denotes an ideological development that is of deep concern to wider society. For it is from here—and as its logical *terminus*—that religiously-motivated terrorism springs: religious fundamentalism here gives rise to ideologies and actions of terror.

The first feature, namely that of “discriminatory value application,” occurs where *alterity*, or “*otherness*” per se, is *negated* and, as a necessary corollary, the *superiority of the self is asserted*. The discriminatory negation of otherness is perhaps critical at this juncture, for the scene set by the feature of contextual scope—the contextualising exclusivism and inclusivism—together with the feature of condemnatory stance, now emerge into a devaluing and dismissal of “otherness” as such, whether in terms of rival community or competing alterities, ideological or otherwise. Indeed, such alterities may be—and in fact often are—demonised. The religiously “other” on this view is often cast as “satanic,” or at least seriously and significantly labelled as a hostile opponent, and so hostilely regarded. However expressed or referenced, it will be clear that the fundamentalist is applying negative valuation to otherness as such, together with a corresponding assertion of self-superiority vis-à-vis any “other.” The scene is now well set for the next feature—the rendering of an explicit justification not just for a viewpoint but also for actions premised on that viewpoint.

The second feature is the claiming of “explicit justification” for both the ideology espoused and any actions it implies. Once the preceding sets of factors are in operation it is but a short step to the penultimate pair that signals the expression of fundamentalism in some form of direct political action: *sanctioned imposition* and *legitimated violence*. The former sees the very imposition of the fundamentalist’s views and polity as, in fact, sanctioned by a higher or greater authority, however that is conceived. This point of reference transcends the local, particular, ordinary taken-for-granted freedoms of everyday life; it embraces and promotes the requirement to be, live, and do in accord with the fundamentalist’s ideological dictates.

The sanctioning of the fundamentalist’s programme of imposition leads naturally to the next factor: extremist violence is legitimated; a platform of justification is established, at least in the mind of the impositional fundamentalist. In other words, once there is in place a sense of transcendent sanction for any set of particular programmatic actions, the way to the legitimising violent behaviours to achieve the outcomes driving the programme is eased. Sanctioned imposition and legitimated violence are the two sides of the chief coin of justification in the currency of extremism.

So we are brought to the final feature of the sequential paradigm of fundamentalism, “enacted violent extremism,” with the penultimate factor of *manifest contempt* and the end-result factor: the *terrorist event*. On the one hand, manifestations of contempt, as an expression of negative judgements and the negation of the “other,” are often instantiated in various contemptible behaviours—intimidation, coercion, violent and destructive actions directed at non-human symbolic targets (works of art, places of worship), and so on. Such behaviours may be *ad hoc*, simply manifesting an underlying contempt in a comparatively spontaneous fashion. If an aim as such could be adduced, it would be to assert superiority, impose an ideology, or enforce subjugating submission; but not necessarily inculcate terror as such, even if the behaviours are in themselves terrorising. On the other hand, there is certainly the phenomenon of intentionally organised terrorism where extremism knows no bounds: the terrorising of a targeted populace that is itself both means and end. It is only so that the extremist ensures that a duly sanctioned imposition can be brought about. In tabular form the impositional phase of fundamentalism may be depicted as follows:



**Figure 4.** Typological paradigm of fundamentalism—Impositional phase.

In summary, I have endeavoured to describe a typological paradigm structure that demonstrates a sequential and cumulative ideological development which in turn highlights the nature of the link between religious fundamentalism and terrorism. As earlier noted, the two are not necessarily related. But they can be; and in certain cases they are. The trick is to discern the difference: where is fundamentalism likely to result in terrorism? This is perhaps more readily undertaken by attending to the category of religious extremism, for it is fundamentalist religion of a more “extreme” type that reveals a propensity for violent behaviour and terrorist modalities.

To be sure, there are examples of non-religious movements of protest, such as anti-vivisectionists or Greenpeace, who will give evidence of all three phases—albeit in some modified form—of the fundamentalist paradigm. There will certainly be expressions of a relatively passive sort (people who hold sympathetic views); dimensions of a hard-line assertive approach (people who publicly advocate the movement’s views and policies); and from time to time instances of a clear impositional polity at work wherein disruptive, even violent, actions will take place (by people who are the “extremists” of the movement). But the key difference between such secular groups oriented to a cause, and contemporary forms of religious fundamentalism that are inclined to an impositional activism and so extremism, is that the former are highly specialised and focussed—it is relatively clear as to who are the protagonists; who the target—and the latter rather more wide-ranging in terms of scope and likely arena of application.

### **A Comparative Analysis of Extremism**

One useful means of assessing religious extremism is to utilise a model designed to explicate extremism in one religion with the phenomenon as recorded in another.<sup>23</sup>

The Islamic scholar, John Esposito, articulates the Muslim extremist ideology of Islamism in terms of six elements.<sup>24</sup> First, Islam is a total and comprehensive way of life. Second, the failure of Muslim societies is due to their departure from the “straight path of Islam” and their following a Western secular path. Third, the renewal of society requires a return to Islam and the advancement of an Islamic religio-political and social reformation or revolution. Fourth, Western-inspired civil codes must be replaced by *Shari’a*, which is the only acceptable socio-legal blueprint for Muslim society. Fifth, although Westernisation of society is condemned, modernisation as such is not; that is to say, science and technology are accepted, but they are to be subordinated to Islamic belief and values; and finally, the process of Islamisation requires organisations or associations of dedicated and trained Muslims.

Arguably this structure, or paradigm, can be applied to other contexts—in this case, that of Christian fundamentalist extremism. In general terms it could be said that Esposito’s paradigm of religious extremism states that (a) the extremist’s ideology is comprehensive and totalitarian; (b) it is cast in a context of the perceived failure of the wider society of which it (the extremist group) is representative, having failed in its divinely ordained destiny and so suffering the consequences; (c) the renewal of society requires an intentional and successful “overthrow” or “re-ordering” by way of direct intervention; (d) society’s godless laws and legal system require to be replaced with that which has been ordained of God; (e) the tools and artefacts of the modern age are not eschewed—there is no atavistic retreat, no Luddite-like dismissal of modern technology—rather such tools are to be subordinated to, and utilised in the service of, the higher calling of the religious extremist; and (f) in order for the programmatic goals to be achieved there needs to be a growing cadre of dedicated, trained, and committed participants. How might we see this worked out in terms of Christian extremism more directly? I suggest by way of the following:

- (a) In respect to the comprehensive and totalitarian motif, Christian fundamentalist extremism certainly demands total commitment: it is all encompassing, affecting all aspects of the believers’ lives.
- (b) With regard to the context of social failure, it is certainly *de rigueur* for Christian fundamentalists to bewail the apparent rise of homosexuality, promiscuity, divorce, and abortion for example and to take these as evidence of the moral and theological “lost” status of society.
- (c) By comparison, the renewal of society requires assertive, even aggressive, interventions whether by way of savvy and hard-hitting communication to get the religious and moral message across, and so attract requisite attention, or by advocating and enacting more direct forms of socio-political action.
- (d) There are varying expressions of the extent to which the legal codes and laws that apply to Western societies within which Christian extremists operate are regarded as genuinely reflecting the divine Will, or else representing an imperilled Christian predominance. Certainly Christian fundamentalist extremists, for the most part, oppose any perceived dilution—whether by dint of secularisation, or admission of religious and cultural plurality—of what otherwise might be taken as God-sanctioned law. And if law has been amended in the direction of moving away from what is presumed to be “God’s law,” this will likely provoke representation and/or agitation for its reversal.

- (e) The Christian fundamentalist camp has been at the forefront in the use of modern technology to spread its message and gain—and hold—wider attention. Technology in service of the higher cause is no issue; technology applied to life more directly (medical interventions; the promotion of human individual autonomy in respect to life-choices, and so the granting of freedoms seen to detract from so-called “traditional” values) may well provoke the ire of Christian extremists.
- (f) Christian fundamentalism is adept at organisation and the fostering of highly intentional discipleship. The Christian Right in the United States, for example, has long been an enemy of public education since the creation-evolution debate started, and rejecting on religious grounds the teaching of scientific theory that does not correspond to its own interpretation of how things are and how they came to be. Education and training programmes, separated out as much as possible from that of the secular world, are at the forefront of the task of inculcating a growing cadre of dedicated and committed Christians formed in the mould of fundamentalism and set on the path of activist engagement that, in the extreme, may result in violent outcomes.

This attempt to re-work Esposito’s Islamism paradigm yields a possibility for investigating and understanding Christian extremism that sits alongside the more general typological paradigm of fundamentalism that I have adumbrated. In both cases correlations between the paradigmatic structure and the examples noted above can be drawn. Arguably this line of comparison can be readily extended. However, I suggest an advantage of the fundamentalist three-phase paradigm is that it highlights the possibility—and reality—of ideological shifts that can, and do, take place. Indeed from the second half of the fundamentalism paradigm there can be drawn a five-point profile of religious extremism, the application of which I explore below.

### **Religious Extremism: Applying a Five-Point Profile**

Eugene Gallagher notes that a group “that defines its mission as ‘religious’ is claiming a very powerful form of legitimacy” as this claim, and its outworking in behaviours, “can become particularly problematic and threatening to the social order when a group also espouses a strongly anti-government ideology,” for example.<sup>25</sup> Thus, if “such a group acts or threatens to act on its principles, the need to evaluate its claims to religious legitimacy becomes urgent.” Gallagher is clear that religious sensibilities lie at the core of many radical, or extremist, right-wing ideologies; in effect, they represent forms of religious—indeed Christian—extremism. Our concern is with religion when it provides primary sanction for an extreme, even violent, resistance to the status quo. With some minor modifications, the second half of the overall sequential paradigm of fundamentalism as outlined above may provide a five-point profile of religious extremism. In so doing it offers an ideological template that may be useful in assessing the relative propensities of otherwise “fundamentalist” oriented religious groups to yield to extremist ideologies and perhaps then to terrorist engagement.

1. Religious fundamentalism, as an identifiable ideological trajectory, begins to turn toward the extreme end of the paradigm, I suggest, at the point where there can be discerned evidence of an “Inclusive Contextual Scope” where ideological exclusivism conjoins with an inclusivist polity. We can see this, for example, with respect to the ideology of the British Israelite movement that was itself an ideological forerunner of the Christian Identity and the American Aryan Nations

movements in the United States.<sup>26</sup> British Israelite ideology was born, in part, out of the phenomenon of British Imperialism and the propensity for many Englishmen to see their world spanning empire in theological terms—the British were obviously God’s chosen people, just like the Israelites. Here we have a clue to Christian extremism as such; the juxtaposition of an encompassing theological perspective with a self-perception of superiority and biblical-like chosen status such that the contextual scope of the ideology is quite exclusively inclusive—empires are all-embracing; rivals are necessarily shut out.

2. There next comes evidence of a “Condemnatory Stance” which is given clear and vociferous articulation. This not just a matter of voicing an opinion: the weight on the word “stance” indicates an ideological intention: it is in the expression of judgemental values that assertive fundamentalism displays its real position toward any who would dissent from within, or oppose from without. Denigration, deprecation, and ultimately denial of rights, whether in regard to virtually any other (the world at large), or focussed on specific others, flesh out this element of the profile. It is the depth and intensity of expressed condemnation that marks an extremist ideology. This is reflected, for example, in the example of Destiny Church New Zealand, a relatively recent fundamentalist group, very much modelled upon the Christian right in the United States.<sup>27</sup> In recent years the leadership publicly declared its opposition to the elected government of the day as anti-Christian, even inherently evil. The church declared itself to be ready to wage war on secular humanism, liberalism, relativism, on “a Government Gone evil,” and on the “radical homosexual agenda.” Destiny Church has been active in campaigning for a return to what it considers to be Christian moral values in New Zealand society. In August 2004 members of the Church undertook a protest rally against proposed Civil Union legislation. Under the banner “Enough is Enough” the rally drew some 5,000 protesters dressed in menacing black uniforms to the steps of the Parliament Building. The media quickly drew a parallel with the “Black Shirts” of Nazi Germany and opined on the rise of religious fascism and extremism within the New Zealand context.
3. Thirdly, we find as the next logical point of development toward outright extremism the direct application of negative values as expressed in the condemnatory stance where alterity, or “otherness,” is often given specific identity and thence negated by virtue of being often cast as “satanic,” or at least seriously and significantly labelled in some negative and deprecatory fashion. In this context, the superiority of the fundamentalist’s self-identity is asserted. This gives rise to a combination of hostile regard with both accompanying rhetoric and either direct or indirect—often symbolic—action. Once again, we may see this, for example, in the North American Christian Identity movement which is a form of highly racist, right wing, and socially conservative Protestant Christianity. It is not a single church or institution, but rather an “umbrella concept” ideology shared among a number of different groups on the far right of Protestant Christianity in regard to which a wide variety of specific theologies, or theological emphases, may be found.<sup>28</sup> In essence it preaches the gospel of an Aryan Israel, that is, the “gospel” of a non-Jewish Aryan (or white) Christ. One of the major theological platforms of this movement’s beliefs is the “Two Seed theology” which holds that whilst Cain and Abel both had Eve as their mother, only Abel had Adam as his father. Cain was fathered by the serpent that seduced Eve in the Garden of Eden. Thus from Cain is descended all the “unclean” races, particularly the Jews who are

understood to be literally the sons of Satan. So, for example, Jews are not only genetically conditioned to oppose the sons of Abel (i.e., the Anglo Saxon races); they are equally beyond all redemption, thus they may be subject to direct negative action, whether symbolic or literal.

4. Not only is the particular fundamentalist ideology that corresponds to this typological template undeniably extreme, it is poised to take the final steps to outright terrorism. For at this juncture the fundamentalist has come to the point where explicit actions are given unequivocal justification: impositions in respect of the negatively valued and so condemned “other” are sanctioned, and both the advocacy and the potential action of violence toward that other is legitimated by recourse to a “higher ideal” or “greater authority.” So a platform of justification is established, at least in the mind of the fundamentalist extremist. This may be seen in the example of the Phineas Priesthood that has arisen within the United States and which draws heavily on the ideology of the Christian Identity movement. But, ideologically and in practice, it is even more prone to violence. The name comes from an account in the Hebrew Bible—or “Old Testament”—where it is recorded (Numbers 25) that an Israelite priest Phineas, grandson of Aaron, killed an Israelite man and a Midianite woman while they were having intercourse in the precincts of the Tabernacle, by running them through with a spear. In the Bible, Phineas is commended for having prevented Israel’s fall to idolatrous practices and putting a halt to the desecration of God’s sanctuary. Today, members of the Phineas Priesthood use this biblically-attested and sanctioned deed as justification for using violent means against whatever they consider as profoundly immoral. The movement is not so much an identifiable group as an ideological “focus” that has attracted sundry individuals to espouse it. The movement clearly stands opposed to interracial intercourse, the mixing of races, homosexuality, and abortion. It is also marked by its antisemitism, anti-multiculturalism, and opposition to taxation. Individuals who identify with the Priesthood are often considered terrorists by American authorities for, among other things, the planning and/or execution of the bombing of FBI buildings, abortion clinic attacks, and undertaking bank robberies.
5. The religious fundamentalist, having moved deeper into extremism, is now likely to be a terrorist, for the manifestations of contempt, as expressions of negative judgements and the negation of the “other,” will at this juncture be instantiated in various overt contemptible behaviours—intimidation, coercion, violent and destructive actions directed at non-human symbolic targets—or else manifest in respect to forms of organised intentional terrorism directed at human subjects: the terrorising of a targeted population. As previously noted, violence, both real and symbolic, is the outcome of the ideological trajectory of religious extremism. This can be seen in actions undertaken by the Branch Davidian sect outside of Waco, Texas in 1993 and of the bombing of the Federal Building in Oklahoma City in 1995. Indeed, for those extremists who consciously model themselves as militias, “religion unequivocally provides the ground and the motivation for all of their actions.”<sup>29</sup> One good example is the *Field Manual of the Free Militia* which “is systematically organized to accomplish its pedagogical goals, functioning virtually as a catechism for the instruction of initiates.”<sup>30</sup> In pseudo-Gnostic style it guides the reader toward “a simple theory of interpretation that should be applied to any text... the *Field Manual’s* exegesis is distinctive in depicting Jesus of Nazareth as a role model for the militias.”<sup>31</sup> Indeed, it concludes that “a close look at the Bible will show that Jesus Christ was not a pacifist and that he

approved of the justified use of deadly force.”<sup>32</sup> For the *Field Manual*, the “sacred history” of the United States teaches the same lesson as the Bible: deadly force in godly and principled opposition to tyranny is not only acceptable but necessary. Thus the “volatile mix of religion and politics is more the rule than the exception on the contemporary radical right.”<sup>33</sup>

## Conclusion

Not all fundamentalist groups necessarily become impositional, and if they do they may not necessarily resort to violence and terrorism in the attempt to achieve their aims. The potential scope of Christian extremism is quite wide.<sup>34</sup> The Exclusive Brethren, as one example of a fundamentalist Christian group, has certainly demonstrated a recent transition from a hard-line assertive to an active impositional phase, inclusive of the features of value application and explicit justification of whatever actions they take; but other factors of their orientation and religious ideology would not support an expectation that this will issue in outright terrorism and its associated violence.

Religious fundamentalism issues in multifarious forms of extremism.<sup>35</sup> Islamic extremists may have caught attention and headlines; Christian extremism has somewhat less so. But extremism, as with fundamentalism, is found within all religions. The ideological interlinking has been explored above, with emphasis given to Christian expressions of extremism. Historically, Christianity has known extremism in a number of guises.<sup>36</sup> Often these have involved the application of violence for political and spiritual ends or the engagement in violent clashes in respect to competitive theologies and so on; this is a matter of historical record. Both marginalised and fanatical variants of the faith have arisen and have themselves been the subject of repressive and extreme measures. In the contemporary world there is evidence of an upsurge in fundamentalist mentality and groupings within Christianity sufficient to suggest that fundamentalist extremism is not just the province of Islam but that Christianity is able to produce similar extreme ideology and related actions. Christianity knows its own extremities and its fanatics; fundamentalism can and does yield extremism; extremism can and has yielded terroristic violence.

Although the focus here has been on Christian-oriented extremism that has yielded acts of violence—such as the murder of an abortion doctor in the United States or the desecration of Jewish gravestones in New Zealand or, again in America, the bombing of a public building—there are other religions contributing to the contemporary phenomenon of religiously-based acts of political violence, not the least of which is Islam. Whether it be an al-Qaeda trained and indoctrinated Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab transiting Europe with the intention to destroy an airliner over the United States on the eve of Christmas, or the angst-ridden actions of a lone Muslim major in the U.S. Army bursting forth in a moment of massacre madness, the issue of religiously-inspired and motivated terrorism is one requiring to be actively combated as much as being academically comprehended. And if there is to be any advance in the task of pre-empting religiously-motivated violence then translating the theoretical proposition discussed above into a workable analytical tool is perhaps as urgent as it is necessary.

## Notes

1. Alex P. Schmid, “Frameworks for Conceptualizing Terrorism,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 16, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 197–221.

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4. Cf. Walter Reich, ed., *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind* (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Centre Press, 1998).
5. James Veitch, "Terrorism and Religion," *Stimulus* 10, no. 1 (February 2002): 30.
6. Schmid (see note 1 above).
7. Cf. Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).
8. Cf. Tanja Ellingsen, "Toward a Revival of Religion and Religious Clashes?" *Terrorism and Political Violence* 14, no. 37 (Spring/Summer 2005): 305–332; Susanna Pearce, "Religious Rage: A Quantitative Analysis of the Intensity of Religious Conflicts," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 14, no. 37 (Spring/Summer 2005): 333–352.
9. See David Bromley and J. Gordon Melton, eds., *Cults, Religion and Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
10. Cf. Gabriel A. Almond, R. Scott Appleby, and Emmanuel Sivan, *Strong Religion: The Rise of Fundamentalisms around the World* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003).
11. See Douglas Pratt, "Terrorism and Religious Fundamentalism: Prospects for a Predictive Paradigm," *Marburg Journal of Religion* 11, no. 1 (June 2006). NB: e-Journal only at <http://web.uni-marburg.de/religionswissenschaft/journal/mjr/>
12. Douglas Pratt, "Religious Fundamentalism: A Paradigm for Terrorism?" *Australian Religion Studies Review* 20, no. 2 (2007): 195–215.
13. Bryan Gilling, ed., *"Be Ye Separate": Fundamentalism and the New Zealand Experience* (Red Beach: Colcom Press, 1992): xi.
14. Peter Lineham, "The fundamentalist agenda and its chances," *Stimulus* 14, no. 3 (August 2006): 8.
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17. Lionel Caplan, *Studies in Religious Fundamentalism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987); Gilles Kepel, *The Revenge of God: The Resurgence of Islam, Christianity and Judaism in the Modern World* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994); Bruce B. Lawrence, *Defenders of God: The Fundamentalist Revolt Against the Modern Age* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989); Santosh C. Saha, ed., *Religious Fundamentalism in the Contemporary World: Critical Social and Political Issues* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004); David Westerlund, *Questioning the Secular State: The Worldwide Resurgence of Religion in Politics* (London: Hurst, 1996).
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20. See, for example, Barr 1977, Caplan 1987, Marsden 1991, Juergensmeyer 2000, Saha 2004; see also Malise Ruthven, *Fundamentalism: The Search for Meaning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
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23. I am grateful to Daniel Maguire, formerly a graduate student in Religious Studies at the University of Waikato, for the initial idea and analysis that gave rise to this section.

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26. See, for example, Michael Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right: The Origins of the Christian Identity Movement* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

27. For information on Destiny Church, see their website, [www.DestinyChurch.nz.org](http://www.DestinyChurch.nz.org).

28. Mattais Gardell, *Gods of the Blood: The Pagan Revival and White Separatism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003): 118.

29. Gallagher (see note 25 above): 65.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid., 66.

33. Ibid., 67.

34. See, for example, Chester L. Quarles, *The Ku Klux Klan and Related American Racialist and Antisemitic Organisations: A History and Analysis* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1999).

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