
ON THE FUNDAMENTALISM OF THE QUIVERFULL MOVEMENT

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Abstract

In this paper I intend to assess whether the Quiverfull movement within Evangelical Protestantism is fundamentalist or not. To that end I deploy the conceptual apparatus provided by Peter Herriot, who provides a concise list of necessary and sufficient criteria that have to be satisfied by a movement for us to call it fundamentalist. Having taken into account the relevant literature on the movement, as well as statements provided by former believers, I conclude that the Quiverfull movement is fundamentalist. A secondary and meta-theoretical conclusion that I draw is that we are yet to overcome some theoretical limitations in dealing with fundamentalist movements. Peter Herriot's account could, to a certain extent, mitigate such limitations, since he provides us with a unified framework that can help us determine whether we are justified in calling a movement fundamentalist or not. Furthermore, an increased number of case studies to which this account of fundamentalism is applied can only mean that its own defects are overcome, though I do not engage here in a criticism of Herriot's work.

Keywords: culture, fundamentalism, identity, sect, modernity

1. Introduction - the understanding of time in learning

In this paper I will analyze the Quiverfull movement, trying to determine whether it can be considered a fundamentalist offshoot of Protestantism. Although some have claimed that it cannot be fully encompassed within fundamentalist movements [1, p. 192], I will employ Peter Herriot's conceptual framework [2] in order to prove the opposite. To my knowledge, no similar exercise has been done in regard to the Quiverfull movement, though my approach will sometimes come close to Herriot's own analyses of some Protestant churches, such as Neil Frisby's movement, the Spirited Church, the Truth Church or the Philadelphia Church of Christ [2, p. 116-119, 121-123]. I will proceed as follows. I will first present Peter Herriot's necessary and sufficient conditions for a movement to be labelled as fundamentalist, showing, where it is the case, some further connections with other relevant literature on fundamentalism. This part is meant to endorse Herriot's account. I will further

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briefly explain what the Quiverfull movement is. The latter part of the paper will be dedicated to falsifying my claim that it is a *sui generis* Fundamentalist movement by comparing its characteristics with those mentioned by Herriot. A brief discussion on the significance of better understanding this modern phenomenon follows. The spread of fundamentalist movements can have far-reaching consequences, and understanding their origins and particularities can help us better respond to the challenges they pose.

One further *caveat* before I continue with the main arguments. It has been argued (by one of the former members of the movement) that Quiverfull cannot be said to represent an actual denomination, but instead its members can be found within other fundamentalist denominations [<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/nolongerquivering/what-is-quiverfull/>]. However, insofar as members of those religious bodies have abandoned the practices, values and beliefs cherished within those denominations, they can be classified as sectarian, if we resort to Johnson's taxonomy, further developed by Bainbridge and Stark [3, 4]. As it has been stated, individuals who embrace Quiverfull values only take a little further the „mainstream conservative Christian's movement ideals" [http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx_factor/2014/09/22/vyckie_garrison_on_escapin_g_quiverfull.html] – this clearly shows that the Quiverfull movement is not a cult, at least if we adopt Bainbridge and Stark's taxonomy. According to Johnson, whereas Churches are characterized by institutionalization and resort to „liturgical means of justification" (*i.e.* to ceremonies performed by functionaries), sects represent „associations of ethical virtuosos who attempt to realize in their own conduct the principles in terms of which they are united" [5]. This is commonplace within branches of American Protestantism, where it is expected from a believer of such a sect to profess in his daily life the values upheld in his congregation. A clearer distinction between sects and Churches is this: Churches inhabit a certain social environment within which they try to integrate, whilst sects reject the social environment that surrounds them [4]. Sects originate in some members' attempt to restore some purportedly lost moral order. According to Stark and Bainbridge, what characterizes this opposition to the social environment is a „subcultural deviance", reflecting „difference, antagonism and separation" [4, p. 124]. As I will later show, this is something characteristic to fundamentalist movements in Herriot's view. For the moment, however, suffice it to note that the Quiverfull movement can be considered a sect of its own, since its members try to depart from several denominations' ways. Furthermore, we cannot speak of an identity relation between fundamentalisms and cults – the difference consists of fundamentalisms' loyalty to textual scripturalism [6].

2. Herriot's account of fundamentalism

According to Peter Herriot, a movement can be considered fundamentalist if it satisfies five sufficient and necessary criteria [2, p. 2]. By definition, all of them have to be satisfied, but Herriot notes that the first one (*i.e.* the hostility to

certain aspects of modernity) is in lexicographical order to the others [2, p. 3]. First, it has to be *reactive*, in that fundamentalists believe in the existence of an imminent threat posed to them by the modern world. We can almost talk of a pathological perception of peril, since fundamentalists ‘have to have an enemy’. Further, fundamentalists are Manicheists. They simplify the social reality that surrounds them by conceiving the world in binary terms, a characteristic that Herriot calls *dualism*. The *Holy Book*, whichever it is, is the ruling authority in settling matters, whether or not they are connected to the religious domain or not. This is most obvious in the thought of Ali Khomeini, according to which shari’ah is not only the only legitimate source of authority but also the most efficient: „a case that a shari’ah judge in earlier times settled in one or two days cannot be settled now in twenty years” [7]. (I also acknowledge the fact that this example may fall short of theoretical rigor since shari’ah encompasses, along the Quran, „the normative practice and authoritative pronouncements of the Prophet”, along with a number of secondary sources [7, p.12n172]). Fourth, fundamentalism entails a *selective reading of the holy book*. Taking advantage of the ambiguity of the texts of the holy books, fundamentalists (be those the *ulama*, Protestant new ‘prophets’ and so on) draw attention to some aspects which bolster their viewpoints where ignoring altogether other aspects [8]. A very good example of such a selective reading of a Holy text, in this case the Bible, is provided by Neal Frisby’s scrolls [<http://nealfrisby.com/pages.php?pageid=10>]. They manifest little concern for tampering with the plethora of meanings contained in the holy books, dismissing any form of pluralism, which deeply contravenes to their ethos. The last characteristic which a fundamentalist movement has to fulfil in order to be labelled as such is its *millennialist view of history* – Christian fundamentalists wait for God to restore order on Earth, as it is promised in the Gospels, for instance.

The characteristics emphasized by Herriot can be found in the literature on a regular basis, though his merit is that he systematically analyzed fundamentalist movements in light of those criteria. According to Ruthven, a ‘literalist interpretation’ of the sacred texts is one of the key features of fundamentalism. This is backed by regarding any textual anomaly as caused by humans’ cognitive limits, thus „shifting the burden of proof from God to humanity”, in their „hermeneutics of inerrancy” [6, p. 59, 66]. The reactivity to modernity is found in Kaplan’s now classical definition of fundamentalism: „a world view that highlights specific essential truths of traditional faiths and applies them with earnestness and fervour to 20th century realities” [9]. Marty has highlighted the perception of threat that motivates fundamentalists to act reactively. To this, one should also take into account that one fundamentalists also oppose modernity lest they fear a world. This leads to their being Manichaeic, a heuristic which embodies their resistance to ambiguity and ambivalence [10]. The case of fundamentalist offshoots of Protestantism is peremptory. Starting with Milton and Lyman Stewart’s movement that led to the elaboration of *The Fundamentals*, those that came to embrace the two brothers’ ideals did all they could in order to stop the withering away of their world,

upholding a *Weltanschauung* characterized by „the inerrancy of the Bible, the direct creation of the world and humanity *ex nihilo* by God, the authenticity of miracles, His imminent return to judge and rule over the world” [6, p. 10-11]. This ‘search for meaning’ is emblematic not only for Protestants but also for other fundamentalists. Fundamentalists retain their trust in grand narratives, each fundamentalism representing such a grand narrative, which is invariably opposed to other perceived narratives such as humanism or religious pluralism. The question that ought to be put forward nonetheless is this: „how do fundamentalist movements succeed in attracting, retaining and motivating people who live in modern societies on the prospectus of a pre-modern world-view?” [2, p. 3-4]. Herriot’s answer is indeed complex, and I have neither the space nor the occasion to discuss it in detail.

One part of the answer to the question above is that fundamentalism has social origins, which can be traced back to the social context in which it has originated [2, p. 5]. The cultural aspect is thus extremely important, though it is only part of a wider picture [2, p. 42]. According to Herriot, we can regard fundamentalisms as sub-cultures, „set within national and religious cultures”. They require certain conditions in order to flourish, namely an underlying layer of a historically conception of a holy and distant god [2, p. 58]. Herriot highlights culture and identity as key concepts in understanding fundamentalism. Whereas at first identity is considered to be the *explanans* and culture the *explanandum*, he later returns to this and proves that they are mutually reinforcing. The behaviour of fundamentalists, peculiar as it might seem to the outside world, fulfils two functions: it effects change in fundamentalist world-views and it „reinforces them as they are” [2, p. 6, 253].

The success of fundamentalist movements can be explained by looking at the conditions that facilitated their emergence. Modernity has brought globalization, or at least has ensured that globalization’s reach is indeed global (since interdependence has always existed to a certain degree). Globalization, in turn, has led to anxiety, generated by coming across the existence of a plethora of ways of living and believing „other than those deemed to have been decreed by one’s own group’s version of the deity” [6, p. 34]. This rejection of modernity, nonetheless, has been selective. There are many aspects of modernity that fundamentalists have benefited from and even embraced – mass media being the most obvious example [2, p. 10, 25]. What is disdained by fundamentalists are cultural pluralism and moral relativity (Herriot calls these „anathema” for fundamentalists) [2, p. 25]. Psychologically, we can talk of a real „fear of freedom” [11], whose origins lie in modernisation’s false promises: „anomie, anxiety, dissatisfaction with consumerism, low self-esteem are for many people the outcomes of modernisation. By means of its grand narratives, fundamentalism can help to meet some of these needs.” [2, p. 28]

A few more aspects of Herriot’s complex analysis of fundamentalism have to be put forward in order to facilitate discussions regarding the Quiverfull movement. First of all, no fundamentalism is like another. The distinction between them can be traced back to what answers they give to three questions:

who is their favourite enemy? (*the identity of the Other*), how do they engage with the world? (*the mode of operation*), what are the key beliefs, values, norms that motivate and legitimate their actions? (*the ideology*). The most interesting would be to note their mode of operation. Following Almond, Herriot considers that there are 4 reactive responses: „world conqueror, world transformer, world creator and world renouncer” [2, p. 44-45]. The boundaries between these do not have to be, of course, mutually exclusive and at times a fundamentalism movement can switch from one *modus operandi* to another. Further, I have mentioned above the importance of identity and culture that is emphasized by Herriot. This is a consequence of the fact that cultural features become internalised as social identities. People „internalise as part of their selves the rituals, the myths, the peculiar language” [2, p. 109]. Herriot defines fundamentalists as “passionate oppositional ideologists with a dualistic world-view based on a selective reading of a holy text, and working for a millennial Kingdom of God”. To understand them, he resorts to analysing the organisations they take part in as culturally embedded, taking into account the „stories, myths, rituals, routines, language forms and images”, *i.e.* what he calls „cultural artefacts”. The organisational culture can provide meaning and purpose to members’ lives [2, p. 112-113]. The following excerpt is definitory for Herriot’s understanding of the fundamentalist opposition to the *Otherness*: „there has been a history of shadowy scapegoats in protestant fundamentalism...such out-group performs several functions. Its existence permits the fundamentalist in-group to reinforce its core belief that the secular world is out to destroy it. It enables the in-group to create stereotypes against a category of persons and feel prejudice against it. This in turn allows the in-group to re-emphasize its distinctiveness.” [2, p. 262]

3. The fundamentalism of the Quiverfull movement

With these considerations in mind, I can now proceed to explaining what the Quiverfull movement is and to applying the aforementioned criteria on it in order to ascertain whether it can be labelled a fundamentalist movement or not.

The Quiverfull ideology is not particularly complex, though it has a couple of characteristics that set it apart from other fundamentalist movements. First of all, it lacks an effective organization – there is no church where its believers convene, most of the activity happening online, with the members subsequently implementing their beliefs in their lives [1]. Its believers oppose any form of contraception and equal birth control with murder. It is deeply patriarchal, relying on what Herriot has identified as a specific cosmology of the Christian right in America, „consisting of a set of concentric circles, at the centre being the individual and his family, then the local church congregation and his local community, then the state, then the world” [2, p. 126]. Similarly, the Quiverfull movement is a retaliation to the modern ‘demons’ that affect the traditional family, *i.e.* ‘gays, lesbians, feminists, abortionists’, which endanger the sacred institution of the family. A further resemblance is in regard to their

purpose, that of outnumbering the sinners [2, p. 126]. The father occupies the key place in the patriarchal perspective on the family upheld by Quiverfulls: "by God's perfect design, it is the father who is the head of the home – in his leadership capacity, the father serves as protector, provider and shepherd for his wife and children" [<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/nolongerquivering/what-is-quiverfull/>]. If one remembers the earlier definition of the cult, provided *via* Johnson and Stark and Bainbridge, the similarity with the specificities of Quiverfull families is significant: socialization and the internalization of a certain cultural identity (as Herriot would put it) have the effect of turning a family into a patriarchal cult „completely at odds with the general population. In fact, the more peculiar the family becomes, the more they consider themselves true believers." [<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/nolongerquivering/what-is-quiverfull/>]

The Quiverfull believers not only trust the inerrancy of the Bible, but the movements' origins are deeply tied to the Bible's Psalm 127, verses 3-5: „Lo children are an heritage from the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man who hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies at the gate." [1]

The movement is reactive towards certain features of modernity, especially towards the woman empowerment movement. Some consider it to have originated exactly in the reaction against the second feminist wave: „The gains made in women's equality since the second wave of feminism are anathema to the Quiverfull way of life" [1, p. 196]. What should instead be believed by woman is not that they are equal to men, but that their role is to have a family and to provide babies, as God intended for her [12]. The Quiverfull movement perceives a constant threat from feminists and from all those who oppose this traditional, and, in their view, correct, interpretation of the Bible: „the fear of white Christian culture being outpaced is right there in the scripture, in the specter of enemies at the gate" [12, p. 38]. Herriot has identified several ways that have been employed by fundamentalists in order to react to those aspects of modernity that they perceive as threatening. His case study relates to education, which is an important aspect of the Quiverfull movement and thus the following is doubly instructive. One of the strategies has been the retreat from the public system of education, the exit being correlated with parents sending their children to explicitly Christian private schools or with teaching them at home. The second strategy, more active, has been to infiltrate in local school boards in attempts to change curricula and to exert some influence on the way education is conducted [2, p. 127]. Likewise, members of the Quiverfull movement have infiltrated the Department of Health and Human Services, which is a prize in that it provides them with a degree of „control over abstinence-only education funds" [12, p. 39].

As mentioned, the Quiverfull movement resorts to a selective reading of the Holy text, though the implications it draws from such a reading have little to do with the spirit of the text. The Quiverfull women are considered to be

soldiers, in a battle against secular humanism, emphasizing the anomie instilled by feminist movements and decrying the „forty years of destruction wrought by women’s liberation: contraception, women’s careers, abortion, divorce, homosexuality and child abuse” [13]. Other excerpts from the Holy book which are precious and vital to the Quiverfull interpretation are the Genesis, where the command „to be fruitful and multiply” is present, and the story of Onan [13]. Their mission is also emphasized as being in line with a Biblical event, that of the triumph of the sons of Israel: „But the sons of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly, and multiplied, and became exceedingly might, so that the land was filled with them” (Exodus 1.7) [13, p. 15]. Furthermore, there have been views according to which all principles endorsed by the Quiverfull movement are ‘Bible-based’. Even in a more sceptical view on the fundamentalism of Quiverfulls, one cannot deny that this „is a decidedly fundamentalism conviction”, to consider the holy text applicable irrespective of the context [1, p. 198; 14].

Herriot has shown that not all aspects of modernity are repudiated by fundamentalists. The Quiverfull movement too has made extensive use of the Internet, since it lacks conventional gatherings. One of the points of contention regarding Quiverfull fundamentalism is that its believers employ „a forward-looking focus”, which stands at the heart of their struggle to change the world [1, p. 199]. This purportedly separates them from evangelical fundamentalists. However, this can be considered as an aspect that justifies one to associate Quiverfulls with a world-transformer and ultimately world-conqueror *Weltanschauung*: „Quiverfull believers engage intensely with the modern society, in attempt to transform the world to obey God’s word”. That the end-goal is to transform the society is easily to comprehend by looking at the political strategy of the Quiverfull believers. They aim at creating an electoral base which should ensure that they get a comfortable majority which will subsequently allow them to implement their preferred policies and to impose patriarchy. The fact that the Quiverfull believers do not represent a secluded community, like the Amish, is not a counter-argument to the assertion that they are fundamentalists. Van Geuns does not take into account the fact that fundamentalists are not only world-renouncers, but also world transformers and world conquerors, whose purpose is explicitly to change the environment in line with their interpretation of God’s will [1, p. 201].

The Quiverfull women are actively involved in the proselytism, lauding their experience and encouraging via blog posts, online articles, other wives to „submit and surrender their bodies and lives to their husbands and God, always insisting that this is a matter of choice: choosing to live life the biblical way” [1, p. 204]. This shows that Fundamentalist is, as Herriot put it, dependent to a certain degree on the cultural and social environment in which it appears. In order to cajole other members, Quiverfull believers have to appeal to them by using familiar arguments. Further, the active role of women is not a counterargument to the assertion that the movement is fundamentalist. In the fundamentalist Philadelphia Church of Christ, albeit women were not given

positions of power, they could be counsellors and could communicate with other women, trying to teach them their ways [2, p. 122]. However, the power relations were clearly in favour of men, the same being valid in the case of the Quiverfull movement.

It appears that the movement meets all the criteria mentioned by Herriot, with the exception of the millennialist view of history. However, this is also implicit in their beliefs. Their actions can be easily understood as having this end in mind. Their purpose is to restore order to the world before Christ will return. They promote home-schooling as a means towards reaching the end of harvesting Christian values in the new generations, and by their attempt to outnumber the ‘enemies at the gate’ they show an utter disregard for their lives. This would be irrational, had the belief in millennialism not loomed throughout each action the movement undertakes. This reflects both a high discount factor of the future [15], that is the weight of the future ‘move’ in comparison to the current ‘move’ (in this particular scenario, this entails that fundamentalists manifest disdain for future pleasures, since they expect tremendous payoffs in the afterlife), and a strong sense of altruism. It has already been noted that altruism is a significant factor which influences terrorist attacks, the trademark movement of the world-conqueror fundamentalist Al-Qaeda: „the model views the objective function of the potential bomber as affected by both his current consumption and the expected welfare of his descendants”. The bomber proceeds to act when he perceives the payoffs to the next generation as higher than any payoff he might get for the moment [16]. I argue that the Quiverfull believers are motivated also by similar factors. I hold that this can justify my claim that the Quiverfull movement also satisfies the criterion of the millennialist view of history.

4. Discussion and conclusions

Thus, the Quiverfull movement can be considered as a fundamentalist one, if we take into account Peter Herriot’s criteria. It is reactive to modernity, it bases its beliefs on a selective reading of the Bible, which is also perceived as the supreme authority, its members believe in the parousia, and they conceive of the world in Manichaean terms – us and the others, where the *Others* encompass most of humanity.

Nonetheless, the discussion above shows a significant drawback in dealing theoretically with fundamentalist movements. This is especially important in the context of an increasing emergence of fundamentalist movements, within the Abrahamic religions, though not confined to these. Specifically, the lack of a coherent analytical framework presents difficulties for those who want to study fundamentalism. Peter Herriot’s approach can, to a certain degree, alleviate this issue, though his view cannot be said to be flawless. This is why it is important to develop upon his approach – fundamentalism is certain to be a significant phenomenon of the 21st century and we need a better understanding of its origins, of its persuasion methods, of its resilience.

Understanding why fundamentalist movements are able to cajole so many people to join them can not only contribute to improving our theoretical knowledge, it can also help us pinpoint those problems that affect humankind nowadays. The fear of freedom continues to be a significant problem, and it can definitely be said that fundamentalism is a new escape mechanism, one that has the potential, in the case of world-transformer and world-conqueror movements, to be as pernicious as the escape mechanisms of the last century. After all, Lutheranism can be said to have represented such an escape mechanism, promising redemption in exchange of utter obedience [11, p. 76]. That its perilous propensities have been mitigated throughout the centuries is an aspect that is harder to be satisfied when it comes to fundamentalist movements (except for apparently innocuous ones such as the Amish – I say apparently because obedience can never be said to be innocuous).

It is unclear for the moment whether the Quiverfull movement is here to stay. It benefits from decentralization and from not depending on the personality of a charismatic leader – like it was the case with Neal Frisby's movement, which was centred on him and on the symbolism of the Capstone Cathedral. The latter, bearing the 'harbingers' of Armageddon, played a key role in Frisby's performances and allowed him to pose into a 'prophet' for his congregation [2, p. 118]. The Quiverfull movement can be more resilient, since it is not dependent on such transient factors. It depends on the disappointment with the modern world, with the fear of freedom and with the hatred of secular humanism.

Charles Taylor mentioned at one point that we can talk in the United States of a „very large consensus” which has achieved to integrate different religions, on the basis of acknowledging that what is important is spirituality, irrespective of the church of choice: „go to the church of your choice, but go” [17]. Such fundamentalist movements, of which the Quiverfull is only one example, are outside this consensus, and this is what can make them perilous – they can mobilize believers who are unsatisfied with the institutionalization of their religions. Seeing how your congregation embraces the values of modernity that you despise can make you more susceptible to adhere to the principles of a fundamentalist movement, and this, as we have seen, does not have to be an irrational behaviour. Perhaps this is the most significant threat: that fundamentalism has managed to take the form of a rational response to the drawbacks of modernity. If we want to mitigate the nefarious influence of fundamentalist movements, we have to look at their believers' discontents and try in turn to alleviate those aspects of modernity that partially motivate their actions. This does not mean to succumb to their requests or to abandon our values- instead, it means that we have to widen the consensus mentioned by Taylor, so as to integrate not only further cults and further religions, but to integrate individuals. They have to be persuaded that modernity, with its secular humanism, with its respect for diversity, for tolerance, for human dignity, are the things that ought to be pursued in life. To this end, we have at first to better understand fundamentalism. I hope that my case study has contributed to some

degree to this Sisyphean task. Fortunately for the academia, but potentially dangerously for the stability of the modern world, there are a plethora of such case studies that could be conducted. No fundamentalist movement is like the other, and I encourage researchers to deploy Herriot's methodology towards the end of getting a better picture of fundamentalism. Simultaneously, falsifying his assumptions can only lead to progress, as it has long been known by those who have been inspired by Popper [18].

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