

ONLINE JOURNAL™

www.onlinejournal.com

Theocracy Alert

The religious right: Pushing a deadly addiction

By Carolyn Baker

Online Journal Contributing Writer

May 19, 2005—In a recent article, I promised readers that I would address the mindset of the religious right as an addiction. In order to do so with accuracy and clarity, it is first necessary to define *addiction* and clarify the terms, *Christian fundamentalism* and *Dominionism*.

According to www.dictionary.com, an addiction is “being abnormally tolerant to and dependent on something that is psychologically or physically habit-forming (especially alcohol or narcotic drugs) [syn: [dependence](#), [dependency](#), [habituation](#)] 2: an abnormally strong craving 3: (Roman law) under Roman law addiction was the justification for slavery”

For over 70 years, Twelve-Step programs have addressed issues of addiction not only to substances such as alcohol, drugs, and food, but to behaviors such as compulsive gambling, shopping, and even working. After a number of responses to my last article from former fundamentalist Christians, I began investigating Twelve-Step groups which address issues of religious compulsion and spiritual abuse. One group I discovered was [Fundamentalists Anonymous](#) (F.A.) and its Twelve Steps.

However, before I examine those steps, I would like to further define the terrorist and tyrannical aspects of Christian fundamentalism.

As many readers called to my attention, in response to my last article, Christian fundamentalism and Dominionism are not necessarily synonymous. According to Merriam-Webster, Christian fundamentalism is: “a movement in 20th century Protestantism emphasizing the literally interpreted Bible as [fundamental](#) to Christian life and teaching **b**: the beliefs of this movement **c**: adherence to such beliefs **2**: a movement or attitude stressing strict and literal adherence to a set of basic principles.”

[Katherine Yurica](#) defines Dominionism as “the conversion of America to a theocracy by taking over the American Judiciary.” I would add that the conquest might begin with the judiciary, but the Dominionist agenda has targeted all aspects of government and society for the establishment of a theocracy.

For my purposes, the distinction between fundamentalist Christianity and Dominionism is incidental because what is most important to understand is that any religion, philosophy, or belief system can be addictive, fear-based, and terrorizing, and if it is used to justify changing the Constitution of the United States and creating a society in which the laws of that system are also fear-based and terrorizing, then regardless of the label, fundamentalist or Dominionist, that system is both terrorist and tyrannical. Whether one wishes to debate the differences between fundamentalist Christianity and Dominionism or not, *both* systems are about domination, power, control, right/wrong; win/lose. Moreover, as in my last article, I am reiterating that *terrorism* and *tyranny*, like the word *addiction*, have much broader definitions than crashing planes into buildings, establishing a superior race, or forcing women to cover their faces.

My focus here is on fundamentalist Christianity and Dominionism as religious systems which complement and support tyrannical political systems, specifically, fascism. I am well aware that not all fundamentalist Christians, and certainly not all folks who call themselves evangelicals, are of the Dominionist variety. Many are hard-working individuals who pay their bills and follow the rules and attempt to live the

teachings of Jesus. I respect those individuals and consider them a mitigating force amid the onslaughts of the religious right.

For an in-depth analysis of religious right corruption and tyranny, I highly recommend the recent article "[The Christian Mafia](#)" by investigative journalist, Wayne Madsen.

Additionally, my intention in this article is to explore the addictive features of these systems which ultimately result not in spiritual well being but spiritual abuse.

Spiritual abuse is the manipulation, exploitation, and mistreatment—mentally, emotionally, or physically of another individual or masses of individuals, in the name of promoting spiritual principles or values. As we have seen from the rampant sexual abuse of children in the Roman Catholic Church, spiritual abuse can open the door to every other kind of abuse. And just as a plethora of Catholic priests for two thousand years have used their position of authority and piety to abuse children, countless children in fundamentalist Christian homes have been beaten, raped, molested, shamed, and emotionally devastated in the name of "children obey your parents in the Lord for this is right." I suspect that in the not-too-distant future, we may see revelations of child abuse in fundamentalist Christian homes and churches break into the light of day that could pale by comparison the abuse scandal of the Roman Catholic Church. For the fundamentalist Christian, children too, born into "original sin", are to be dominated and made into subservient born-again believers as soon as possible.

Also, before turning to the Twelve Steps of Fundamentalists Anonymous, I want to emphasize that religious intoxication is an ancient theme in human history. In fact, Carl Jung would have called it an archetype—a universal theme imbedded in the human psyche that is found in all eras and cultures. According to Jung, such an archetype is not necessarily toxic or pathological but points to an inherent human craving for meaningful spiritual experiences. Whether found in the spell for the revival of Osiris, the orgiastic rites of the cult of Dionysius in Ancient Greece, or the Native American sun dance, the need for sacred ritual and celebration of the divine is as old as human history. However, need and desire are not the same as physical, emotional, or mental dependence.

What makes a belief system, a ritual, or one's relationship with other adherents addictive is the dependence one has on them. Is one able to think for oneself? Is one able to function without incessant participation in the rituals, and without obsessive contact with and validation from fellow devotees? Is one able to trust one's intellect and emotions and not subordinate them to those who claim to have more spiritual authority, deeper spiritual understanding, or more extensive training in interpreting the Bible or other sacred writings?

In exploring this topic, a caveat is in order for all who are atheist, agnostic, or offended by the mention of "God" in the Twelve Steps. After many years of working with the Steps and atheists and agnostics who utilize them, I have discovered that there are many ways to interpret and apply the concept of a Higher Power, so I would ask the atheist or agnostic reader to consider this and continue reading.

Why do I think that Christian fundamentalism and/or Dominionism is an addiction? My answer to that question comes first of all from my own experience, as well as my observation of these individuals over the years. I recall my own dependency on what "the Bible says"—my own inability to trust my thoughts and feelings. I remember the need for the "fix" of the church service, the revival meeting, the prayer meeting, the Bible study, or listening to a fiery sermon on tape. I knew how to think on my own, but I was afraid to do so. Who knew what I might discover? But no "fix" was more deliciously validating than "winning souls for Christ"—that dramatic moment when I had manipulated someone else into a born-again experience. For this, the fundamentalist Christian addict lives and breathes. And this is precisely why the religious right is intractably hell-bent on converting the entire society and system of government in America to its fundamentalist theocracy. What could produce a greater "high"? And if this project should get interrupted by the Rapture, the resulting euphoria would be so well-earned—doing God's work and getting the planet ready for Jesus' return. The adrenaline-drenched grandiosity in such a scenario is palpably tantalizing. More addictive than heroin perhaps?

It is axiomatic in Christian fundamentalism that without the born-again experience, one cannot think clearly. Being born into the human condition, and therefore, being inherently sinful, one's mind is deluded, clouded, and always potential putty in the hands of Satan. Once one has been born again, the mind is magically transformed, and one is now guided by the Holy Spirit who Jesus said would lead his followers into all truth. The more the born-again believer reads and studies the Bible, the more clearly and correctly he/she thinks. Therefore, the new convert to fundamentalist Christianity *must* depend on his/her minister, Bible teacher, evangelist, or other spiritual leader to interpret the Bible and guide him/her in living the Christian life. Eventually, with years of seasoning in the faith, one needs less guidance, but one always requires regular contact with the church, prayer group, or Bible study circle because even after decades of devotion, there is always the possibility that one could be deceived by the devil. Therefore, thinking for oneself is out of the question, and as a result, profound dependence on others is created for producing the "answers" one cannot discern by thinking for oneself.

In one of the responses to my last article, one actively fundamentalist reader, whom I am paraphrasing, stated that he does look to the Bible for answers and asked to whom or what else he should look— Darwin, Camus, or other great minds? I found the question itself very telling because inherent in it is the assumption that one cannot or should not trust oneself. This assumption constitutes the major underpinning of the addiction to Christian fundamentalism, hence Step One of Fundamentalists Anonymous:

1. I realize that I had turned control of my mind over to another person or group, who had assumed power over my thinking.

The convert to fundamentalist Christianity must be convinced that his/her thinking is irreparably in error. The underlying message is: "You don't believe the Bible is the inerrant Word of God because your mind has been occupied by Satan. This has happened principally because you are a human being, but also because you have made the enormous mistake of trying to think for yourself. Of course you think there are contradictions in the Bible because Satan controls your mind. If you surrender your mind to Jesus (actually to me/us/the enlightened flock of believers), you will understand that there are no contradictions in the Bible and that your life should be guided only by the Bible and nothing else. What you cannot now understand, you must take on faith, and more will be revealed to you later. It may not be revealed on this earth, but by accepting Christ as your personal savior and having faith, you will be guaranteed eternity in heaven where everything you never understood will be completely revealed to you."

Curiously, as stated in the above definition of addiction, under ancient Roman law, addiction was grounds for slavery. I found this detail particularly significant because obviously, addicted people are "enslaved" people

Any thinking person reading the Bible will discover dozens, if not hundreds, of contradictions. Moreover, any Bible student who also studies history will discover massive discrepancies regarding which books were chosen to be in the Bible and why. Studying that history reveals that the decision to incorporate certain books and exclude others was primarily a fourth century political decision intended to strengthen the appeal of Christianity and prevent its demise in the face of Rome's attempts to extinguish the religion.

An excellent analysis of this controversy has been done by religious historian Elaine Pagels in her book, *Beyond Belief*. She explores the discoveries of the Nag Hammadi Library in Upper Egypt in 1945, which unearthed the existence of numerous gospels eliminated from the final canon of the New Testament. Both Pagels and another Biblical scholar, Marvin Meyer, have analyzed the Nag Hammadi writings and hypothesized the reasons for their exclusion. I particularly enjoyed reading Pagels' *Beyond Belief*, because not only does she analyze the controversy surrounding the exclusion of these Gnostic Gospels, but she openly shares her own intellectual process of discovering the significance of their exclusion and its impact on her own spirituality. Very UN-fundamentalist indeed.

Reading the research of Pagels and others makes clear the reality that the Bible is not and cannot be the inerrant, impeccably-written, divinely dictated Word of God that fundamentalist Christians claim it to be. Thus Step Two of Fundamentalists Anonymous states:

2. That person or group persuaded me of the inerrancy of the Bible, in spite of its many internal contradictions.

One of the most significant aspects of my abandonment of Christian fundamentalism was the awareness that born-again Christians worship the Bible and not God. They argue that the only way to know God is through the Bible. They are forced to believe this because if they concede that God might speak through an inner voice, through a tree, or through a particular life experience, their entire belief system is toast. When I realized that contrary to their much-touted Ten Commandments, Bible worship is nothing less than “having other gods before me,” I finally realized the depth of the hypocrisy of their system. Part of my, and anyone’s recovery from fundamentalism is a commitment to develop a relationship with a Higher Power—whatever that may be—and not with a book. Step Three therefore states:

3. I became addicted to the Bible as the supreme focus of my faith, in spite of the commandment that God should come first.

Like the spiritual inventory of Alcoholics Anonymous and other Twelve-Step programs, Step Four asks the recovering fundamentalist to look at the damage one has done to oneself as a result of turning control of one’s mind over to another person or group. Not a pretty picture in most cases, but certainly a huge relief when the whole truth is finally faced and spoken.

4. I admit to God, to myself and to another person the shortcomings of my belief in the unbelievable.

Fundamentalist Christianity is filled with false claims about the Bible. It has to be in order to keep its system intact and use the Bible to manipulate, control, and above all, gain converts. So as part of recovering from addiction to fundamentalism, one must examine the various false claims one has made about the Bible. Step Five states:

5. I have made an inventory of my false claims about the Bible.

Ouch! This could be very painful—and it could go on for years as one recalls all the times one may have used “the Bible says” to beat up oneself or someone else. But again, there can be profound liberation with truth-telling.

Could it get more painful than Steps Four and Five? Yes. How many minds have I whacked beside my own? Who have I manipulated, controlled, cajoled, or conned by using false claims—things I could never absolutely know or prove about the Bible?

6. I have made a list of those whom I led into confusion about the Bible.

All Twelve Step programs require “searching and fearless” inventories of oneself and one’s actions while practicing one’s addiction. Moreover, they demand accountability to one’s Higher Power, oneself, and the persons harmed.

This could be excruciating! Admitting to someone that I may have led them astray with the Bible? As experienced Twelve-Steppers know, it may not be possible to make the amends in person or even by letter. Someone may be so hurt, so angry, so alienated that making contact with him/her is not feasible. Most important, however, is the admission to oneself. Hence Step Seven:

7. I am willing to make amends to all those whom I may have led astray.

And now comes the payoff: sanity. Sanity is not a mental health term but rather a state of acceptance and release often attended by a sense of relief. After one has admitted turning one’s mind over to another person or group and has faced the devastation the addiction has caused, and if possible, made amends to those harmed, it becomes possible to experience sanity.

Step Eight, in offering the hope of sanity refers to searching Scripture for the truth. Notice the Step says “search Scripture.” It doesn’t say, “search *the* Scripture.” One now has the freedom to search for one’s own truth—wherever, whenever, however. Step Eight:

8. I realize that I have the inner power to restore sanity to my life and to search Scripture for the truth.

Having completed the first eight Steps, the recovering fundamentalist can begin authentic relationships with others regarding spirituality. No longer does one need to “be right,” convert, admonish, exhort, or teach. The first eight Steps make it possible to share on a truly level playing field without right/wrong, either/or dichotomies. Step Nine:

9. I will reach out to friends who can help me clarify my thinking about the Bible, God and Jesus.

Reaching out to friends is not the same as dependence. It means information gathering, exploring, dialoging, but most importantly, *thinking for oneself*.

Then brilliantly, Step Ten hastens to add that I do not need to figure it out all on my own; I can ask for help from a Higher Power. It humbly implies that I don’t have all the answers. I have help, but it is with my own mind that I grasp the truth, not with someone else’s.

10. I confess that only with God's help can my mind grasp the truth.

How do I get help from a Higher Power? I practice Step Eleven which deals with conscious contact with that power. This may have nothing to do with reading the Bible or going to church. It may have nothing to do with meditating in a lotus posture or praying in the traditional sense. It may mean journaling, spending time in nature, painting, composing music or poetry.

11. I will seek through prayer and meditation to improve my conscious contact with God, praying for knowledge of God's will for me and the power to carry that out.

One of the most profound aspects of recovering from any addiction is the compassion one experiences for others who are still ensnared in the addiction. One naturally wants to share the liberation, peace, and sense of well being that one has found with others who are suffering. What might be particularly challenging for the recovering fundamentalist, however, is to share the Twelve Steps of Fundamentalists Anonymous without falling back into one’s addiction to proselytize and “being right.” So Step Twelve must be practiced sensitively and compassionately.

12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these twelve steps, I will offer these steps to other former biblical fundamentalists.

Some may argue that I am being judgmental and lacking compassion in this article and my former article on Christian fundamentalism. However, I do not apologize for being uncompromising in my analysis. As with all addictions, compassion for the addict does not mean condoning addictive behavior. It means speaking the truth about the addiction to the addict him/herself, to the family and loved ones involved with the addict, or anyone else affected by his/her behavior. This is referred to in recovery circles as an intervention. Is it not appropriate for critically thinking individuals who desire to live in a diverse and open society to conduct “interventions” when those drunk on Dominionism and fundamentalist Christianity flagrantly attempt to construct a theocracy which requires everyone to be a born-again Christian in order to thrive in that society? Do we not have a moral obligation to confront destructive religious intoxication that tears apart families, communities, and nations? Hopefully, this article is an example of such an intervention.

The mainstream media does not seem to comprehend the inherent danger of the religious right let alone report it accurately. All of us need to challenge the addictive tyranny of Christian fundamentalism at every turn—for the sake of our sanity and for the sake of our civil liberties. We don't allow street junkies into the halls of Congress, the Supreme Court, or the pulpits of America to admonish us how we should live and why we should demolish our Constitution. In fact, we confront the insanity and criminality of such individuals. Similarly, it's time to confront the domination drug for what it is—a grave and perverse spiritual and moral illness.

Carolyn Baker is recovering fundamentalist Christian and an adjunct professor of history living in Southern New Mexico. She can be contacted at: cbaker@nmsu.edu.

Copyright © 1998–2005 Online Journal™. All rights reserved.