Religion and the Family:
The Case of Christian Fundamentalism

RICHARD A. HANSON*

Christian fundamentalism has emerged on the American scene with a powerful ideological message as well as with considerable political clout. In this paper, after a section defining Christian fundamentalism, the place of family within the fundamentalist consciousness is examined. As a pre-eminent symbol of social stability, protecting and enhancing the American family is a major goal of Christian fundamentalists. Factors delegitimizing the family are discussed along with gender roles, parent-child relations, the methodology of Christian fundamentalism, and social programs for families. The Christian fundamentalist agenda for the family is discussed along with the implications of fundamentalism for family science.

Religion has had a formative influence on our understandings of the concepts of family and childhood (Aries, 1962; Boswell, 1988; DeMause, 1974; Sommerville, 1982; Zelizer, 1985). While religion is primordial in development of western concepts of childhood and family, the specific expressions of religion that should be included in any comparative analysis remain under scrutiny. Analyses of the influence of religion on families must include established religions, i.e. mainline Protestants, Roman Catholics and Jewish denominations, but should also consider other less formalized (nonetheless quite important) religious expressions. One such expression of a more populist, traditional though less structured religious phenomenon is Christian fundamentalism. Among the major religious transpositions of the 1980s, one of the more spectacular was the expansion and aggressiveness of Protestant evangelicalism. This more conservative and nationalistic expression of American civil or public religion matched Catholicism and mainline Protestantism in size and outdid them in scope by 1985 (Marty, 1985).

The term "fundamentalism" came into common usage in America around the turn of the twentieth century through the publication of a series of eleven monographs collectively called The Fundamentals. The intent of the writers of these monographs was to unite Anglo-American Protestants around the issue of basic Christian truths. More than three million copies were sent free of charge to church leaders and lay religious leaders after 1910. While ineffective in uniting all Anglo-American Protestants, The Fundamentals laid the groundwork for modern Christian fundamentalism.

*Richard A. Hanson, Department of Family Science, North Dakota State University, Fargo, ND 58105

More than anything, the expression of Christian fundamentalism visible today takes the form of a Bible-believing worldview that supports the literal affirmations and attitudes of the Bible and denounces all non-biblical affirmations and attitudes (Dollar, 1973; Hill, 1986). This version of Christian fundamentalism is a body of religious beliefs incubated in an environment of social change and cultural dynamism in America; a period that included the Scopes evolution trial, a tremendous growth in ethnic and racial diversity, the counter-culture revolution of the 1960s, and the major family-related Supreme court rulings of the 1960s and 1970s.

Christian fundamentalists emphasize biblical literalism while teaching a legalistic rather than situational ethic, insisting that a literal understanding of the Bible be applied to contemporary life. In religious life, fundamentalists stress experience and conversion over sacraments and institutions and their manner of biblical exegesis makes ecumenical discussions difficult (Ahlstrom, 1975; Gritsch, 1982; Marsden, 1987). Nevertheless, the popularity of fundamentalism is increasing. In fact there has been a surge in popularity since the mid-70s until the present time. Since 1965, conservative evangelical Protestant groups have increased in membership; they have increased their per capita annual church donations every five years since 1945. Private evangelical primary and secondary schools have increased in number (representing some 2.5 million students in 1985), and conservative Protestant publishing has grown enormously. The movement is far from pale and lifeless. Its hale and hearty complexion relative to its counterpart on other continents is nothing shy of remarkable" (Hunter, 1987, p. 7).

The attractiveness of fundamentalism is due to its seriousness and to its participatory nature. Seriousness is attained through acceptance of the massive presupposition that the Bible was written according to the literary forms guiding a modern writer. The Biblical texts directly address the modern reader. Its coherence is attained through a view of scripture as the word of God; people are able to participate directly in the subject matter of scripture (Branick, 1984). "In the Fundamentalist's hands, the Bible becomes a treasure of lucid delight; not the tangle of murky contingencies it seems to be in the hands of the historical critic" (Branick, 1984, p. 24).

FAMILY IN THE FUNDAMENTALIST CONSCIOUSNESS

There were earlier organizations, religiously based and politically active, that held strong concerns about the family, e.g. the National League for the Protection of the Family (1896) and the White Cross Society (1883). Today, however, the voice of Christian fundamentalism is clearer and louder than most of these early groups at local, state and national levels. Among all of these contemporary voices, there is a heightened sense of crisis about the family that produces a strong desire to preserve the traditional family.

Importance of Family

Within the fundamentalist consciousness, the family is the pre-eminent symbol of social stability and traditional moral values; it is a vital part of America that must be protected. The most visible signs of the defense of the traditional family by Christian fundamentalism include the proliferation of pro-family and family-preservation films from various groups (including James Dobson's series, Bill Gothard's Institute in Basic Youth Conflict, and many others), the large number of books relating to the family (Hunter and Stehlin estimated 10% of all mass market and trade books published by the evangelical publishing houses deals with some aspect of the family), and many political

As a popular spokesman for the fundamentalist movement, Reverend Jerry Falwell has written and spoken at great lengths about the pro-family stance of conservative Christians. Falwell wrote that Christian fundamentalists are pro-traditional family in that the only acceptable family form begins with a legal marriage of a man and woman (homosexual marriages and common-law marriages should not be accepted as traditional families). Moreover, fundamentalists oppose legislation that supports diverse family forms; these proposed laws penalize the traditional family (Falwell, 1981). The apocalyptic emphasis within Christian fundamentalism is demonstrated by the primal belief that when the Christian family falters, society falters. The family is damaged when Americans honor divorce, when we raise children permissively, and when we undermine parental authority.

Obviously to the fundamentalists, the family is more than a simple institution or a "family next door". The family is an ideal, an icon that has become endangered and is in crisis. With this sort of emphasis attached, the symbolic value of the family as an institution is probably greater than its face value, perceptually more power-laden than probably occurs in reality. Christian fundamentalism adopted this approach and views the family as a symbol of a lost past (a past that was functional and needs to be revived) and as a symbol of lost meaning within society (Heinz, 1983). The high rates of divorce, marital instability, single parent families, the epidemic of teen-age sexuality and adolescent pregnancy, and the employment of more and more mothers of young children outside the home are all signs of the declining viability of the family. Within Christian fundamentalism, it is important to detect these sources of weakening in the social fabric and work to eradicate the forces delegitimizing the traditional family.

Forces Delegitimizing the Traditional Family

Just as some groups of black citizens claimed Head Start was a way of systematically de-legitimizing the black family, making the government the primary socializer of black children, Christian fundamentalist see some programs and laws designed to help battered wives and abused children, or other attempts by government to intervene into the private lives of families, as similarly constructed renditions of the primary socialization agent in society. Employed mothers and day care centers are signs of the displacement of the family as the primary socializer of children. Rampant, inappropriate teenage sexuality and adolescent pregnancy are caused by the weakening of the family authority patterns generally, and parental authority over children within the family specifically. Secular humanism, movies, television, pornography, and rock music among other things are responsible. Divorce has increased because people have become more self-oriented and are placing too much emphasis on sexuality as the cement holding the marriage together. In seizing upon this chronology of societal cause and effect, Christian fundamentalists desire to restructure the content of American myths. To gain control of these definitions is to gain control of society (Heinz, 1983).

A major point of contention for Christian fundamentalism is the perception that the traditionally strong rights of parents are being challenged and undermined (Whitehead, 1985). More and more rights and powers of parents are either being replaced by other agents of socialization or being taken away through government intervention. Complicating all of this is the movement for the liberation of children and the establishment of children's rights. The "rights of children" movement hurts the family as children become inappropriately parentified and removed from their protected

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position. Whitehead concluded these forces form a menace to legitimate family structures as well as to the "lawful exercise of parental rights" (p. 18).

Another major issue for Christian fundamentalists is the Supreme Court of the United States. In years past, for most of America's history, in fact, the Supreme Court was considered a supporter of traditional family autonomy. This posture in judicial decision making has changed, according to fundamentalist observers, especially since the early 70s. When the Court extended the right to determine the appropriate use of contraceptives to unmarried persons in the Eisenstadt versus Baird case (405, U.S., 438, 1972), it began to actively foster, in the fundamentalist view, the breakdown of the family unit. The logic of Eisenstadt flowed systematically and inexorably into the Roe versus Wade decision (410, U.S., 113, 1973), legalizing first and second trimester abortions. The Court further undermined the traditional patriarchal design of the family in the case Planned Parenthood versus Danforth (428, U.S., 52, 1976) when the Court ruled unconstitutional a Missouri law that required a husband's consent before an abortion.

Secular Humanism and the Schools

Another major issue for the fundamentalist movement relative to the structure and function of the family is secular humanism. Secular humanism contains two basic theses: It rejects any supernatural conception of the universe and it affirms that ethical values are human and have no meaning independent of human experience (Heinz, 1983). As the semi-official ideology of the secular, pluralist state, secular humanism has become a sort of state religion, established against the wishes of the founding fathers and against the intent of the Constitution of the United States (McBride, 1985). The result is that mention of God is left out of schools and government forums, secular curricula are stressed, and government intervention into families is supported. Ultimately, according to Christian fundamentalists, the emphasis on this secular religion leads society away from its strength--the sense of social traditionalism--and toward moral and social decay (Hammond, 1985; Heinz, 1983; Himmelstein, 1983).

One of the rallying points for modern Christian fundamentalism has been the struggle over the influence of secular humanism on the schools in America, the qualifications of teachers, and the content of textbooks. Two of the more well-known textbook reviewers are Texans Mel and Norma Gabler who normally screen school textbooks for anti-family, anti-American and anti-God components. The battles between fundamentalists and humanists in Alabama, Hawkins county, Tennessee, as well as material about parental prerogatives in textbook selection are discussed more thoroughly in the reviews offered by Glenn (1987) and Borden (1987).

The changes occurring in society and to the family are seen by fundamentalists NOT as a cluster of closely related cultural changes, but as a finely turned conspiracy "coordinated by a master blueprint of international scope...it is so perfectly orchestrated that it could not be anything except the handiwork of the Antichrist" (Wacker, 1987, p. 341). Movement leaders (e.g. Tim LaHaye) have directly and indirectly supported this thesis suggesting that the loosening of sexual restraints, no-fault divorce, abortion on demand, civil rights for homosexuals, sexual freedom for teen-agers, feminism, and the Equal Rights Amendment are factors who simultaneous emergence is not likely coincidental (McBride, 1985; Reichley, 1986).

Gender roles in the Family

From the fundamentalist point of view, the family is a hierarchically ordered unit with well-defined roles and structures of authority for all family members. The man is placed as the head of the family and provide needs and direction as he has the power or authority, the woman as compassionate and understanding in discussion.

For example: "It is, I believe, somewhat disturbing to contemplate the age when, within the nuclear family, the mother is responsible for the education of her young. For me and my generation, the roles are placed on the reverse: the father is the chief breadwinner, the mother is the chief childcare provider."

As part of the family, the American Spanking movement is supported by parents and the fundamentalist, against the inappropriateness of the methods.

Debate about the role of the fundamentalist woman and father is limited or limited to the aspects of divorce, abortion, or morals. The inappropriateness of the methods.

Changes in gender roles in the family are not necessarily deleterious to the family structure; however, the fundamentalist view holds that they are. The acceptance of sexual freedom for women will lead to women's and men's equality, 'equality' in the literal sense of the word.

The Motive

America is now in a time of great complexity and change in the social world.

For example, the family is becoming more unfeeling and cold, more self-centred, more isolated from society, and more dependent on the welfare system. For example, the family is becoming more isolated from society, more dependent on the welfare system, more isolated from society, and more dependent on the welfare system.
placed as head of the family and the parents as head of the children. The man is to provide materially and spiritually for the family and as the chief, if not only breadwinner, he has the final say in decision making, although he is admonished not to abuse his power or position. The father’s role with the children is that of disciplinarian, but with compassion and kindness. The origin of this patriarchy is biblical and not up for discussion or debate.

The woman is companion and helper, occupying a power-superior position although somewhat lower than the man. While men and women are equal in terms of absolute worth, they are considered to be endowed with different aptitudes and responsibilities within the family and within the world (Hunter & Stehlin, 1987). The woman’s major responsibilities lie in the home where she makes the home a safe and good place to live. The mother is to actively parent the children, particularly when the children are very young. For the traditional mother, the needs of her children and her husband typically are placed above her own.

As parents, the man and woman are encouraged to be anti-permissive in dealing with the behavior of children concentrating power in the parental sphere (Dobson, 1973). Spanking is a legitimate if not mandatory means of punishing disobedience. However, parents are encouraged to listen to the needs of their children and not be callous or capricious in the handing out of corporal punishment.

Debate over gender role equality creates an important focal point within the fundamentalist tradition. Role equality between the sexes, when present, is a modified or limited equality. In the early part of this century, suffrage for women was called an inappropriate sign of women’s desire for temporal power; it was a violation of God’s will. So it is for many contemporary attempts to change the balance of power between mean and women. Female employment, support services for women who work, and salary equity are concepts that produce anger in discussions with many Christian fundamentalists. These ideas indirectly draw energy and support away from the family. Changes in the traditional female role contribute to the downfall of the family and the destruction of society. To question the “natural hierarchy” is tantamount to questioning the fundamental assumptions of the Christian belief system (Scanzoni & Setta, 1986). The acceptance of male dominance is not seen as a sacrifice for women, but “one of freedom from false and misleading scriptural teachings. Couples are not to be really equal, ‘equality is not really a Christian ideal” (Jorstad, 1981, p. 63).

THE DRIVING FORCES OF FUNDAMENTALISM

The Motivation of Fundamentalists

American society has never been more complex than at the present time. The complexity is due, at least in part, to the expanding variety of social interaction and social form and has precipitated several “danger signals” relative to families and children. For example, many observers have written that America is developing into a cold, unfeeling anti-child culture. America has been collectively unable to come to a moral, societal, and practical understanding of the increasing number of women, especially mothers, moving into the labor-force. America is being overwhelmed by an increase in family disruption, family violence, and poverty. A healthy and strong family is part of the vision for both Christian fundamentalism and family science. While the goal, a better understanding of the relationship between society and the family, might be the same, there are significant differences between fundamentalism and much of family science on why the family should occupy such a primordial position, how the family
should be structured, and how it should operate. This section is intended to examine the forces that explain the zealous commitment of fundamentalism to its version of the family.

Graham Spanier wrote recently that the family will not continue and persist into the future by the "sheer good fortune of history or the fondness for nostalgia" (Spanier, 1989, p. 10). Even so, fundamentalists labor exhaustively to retain (or re-establish) a view of the family that sounds more like a "family of nostalgia" than the family that actually exists. Jerry Falwell wrote:

We believe that the only acceptable family form begins with a legal marriage of a man and a woman. We feel that homosexual marriages and common-law marriages should not be accepted as traditional families. We oppose legislation that favors these kinds of diverse family form, thereby penalizing the traditional family. We do not oppose civil rights for homosexuals. We oppose special rights for homosexuals who have chosen a perverted lifestyle rather than a traditional lifestyle (Falwell, 1981, p. 109).

Why do fundamentalists argue for a traditional family, husband employed outside the home with the wife at home caring for the children, when fewer and fewer families can live according to such proscriptions? Why are fundamentalists so insistent on arresting the forces of modernism? What makes this group of people so committed to a particular, relatively narrow worldview?

One of the reasons for the publication of The Fundamentals in the early part of this century was an intense fear over the potential loss of the Protestant hegemony in America. At that time, the immigration of non-Protestants (particularly Catholics) and the introduction of higher forms of Biblical criticism produced the motivation to rally around the values that formed the basis of their understanding of society. So it is today. The Falwellian agenda for society and for the family included stopping ill conceived gender liberating amendments like the Equal Rights Amendment, resisting the rising sentiment toward enhancing the legal rights of homosexuals, opposing abortion on demand, and ending the encroachment of government into the family (Falwell, 1981). The opposition of fundamentalists to the Equal Rights Amendment was about the fear of undermining the family through the adoption of principles that were inconsistent with their fundamental beliefs, as was opposition to homosexual rights, abortion rights, and many government based intervention programs for families. Individual civil rights were of lower magnitude than some of these overriding moral and religious positions. Part of the strength of fundamentalism, then, is a fear of losing an ideological plurality which, if lost, would hasten the ruination of the family and of the American society.

The strength of fundamentalism also can be explained in terms of some of the individual and personal aspects of the belief system. For example, fundamentalism appeals to people because it is personal and reachable. Rather than alienating or confusing people, fundamentalism provides a sense of psychological meaning and cognitive sureness. As a result, people feel empowered individually and collectively within their families and communities of belief. Christian fundamentalism is at once both soothing and confirming in that it addresses systematically the human need for confirmation; it makes people feel good. Falwell wrote that "the ultimate product of theological liberalism is a vague kind of religious humanism that is devoid of any true gospel content" (Falwell, 1981, p. 187). In other words, liberalism is vague. Finally, the belief system is made workable and alive through an understandable set of beliefs and practices. For the fundamentalist, there is a tremendous amount of personal clarity available in an all too confusing world.
An important consideration is the negotiation of the relationship between men and women in society. There is a distinct sexist orientation to fundamentalist theology (Schmidt, 1984). A large battery of biblical verses is employed by Christian fundamentalists to reinforce a closed sex-role orientation within the family and within society. The Biblical exegesis employed, however, consistently has failed to recognize that the Bible not only sheds light on life, but also gives us knowledge of that ancient culture. It is common to use the fifth chapter of Ephesians to teach that the husband is the authoritative head of the wife. What usually is not mentioned is that the specific reason for the instructions contained in that chapter had to do with the state of most women at time of marriage: 13 to 14 years of age, no economic potential, no job skills, and no formal education. These things coupled with a high pregnancy rate after marriage meant women were indeed the weaker vessel (1 Peter 3:7): economically disadvantaged, placed at great health risk from pregnancy, uneducated, and highly dependent upon their husbands; women were simply at greater risk. It is difficulty today to suggest that women, in any way, are the weaker vessel in comparison to men, as the standards for comparison have changed radically.

Legislatively, fundamentalists seek to transform their vision of the traditional patriarchal formula into law. While influential spokespersons for the Christian fundamentalist movement, like Falwell, might argue that such a "favored" position for women in the social and legal codes of America is a reflection of how respectful society is of women and motherhood, other writers are not convinced that this is the case. Radl (1983) suggested the fundamentalist vision of women and the family perpetuates and reinforces a capitalistic orientation about the economy and perpetuates the inequality of women. The "special right" that all women have is to be dominated by their husbands. The family is merely a device to hold "divinely ordained capitalism together...It is part of the package that...is designed to keep women in their lowly places" (Radl, 1983, p. 67).

Social Programs for Families

The intent and degree of intervention into families by government agencies offers another point of analysis. Do fundamentalist oppose social programs for children and families? Generally, the answer is yes. With great sincerity, fundamentalists believe anti-poverty and entitlement programs only deepen the dependency of families leading to more intervention and bureaucracy. The social traditionalism and economic libertarianism of fundamentalism creates the perception that programs for families, e.g. AFDC, perpetuate dependence of families and actually do more harm than good (Himmelstein, 1983). The solidarity of individual families is paramount, and when families have difficulty, community and church support should be in place, not government programs or intrusive agencies. Reasonable people might agree that agency intrusion into families should be closely monitored, but most also would warn of the dangers of fanatical adherence to a "no family programs" attitude.

It is not particularly unusual to reach the conclusion that the social agenda of conservative Christian evangelicals is limited and relatively narrow. There is often a lack of a systematic social agenda within the doctrines of fundamentalism, and while it is important for fundamentalists to work hard for a closer connection between the preaching of the Gospel and social concerns (Wirt, 1968), there is research evidence that fundamentalists do not consistently reason at a principled level of moral reasoning (Clouse, 1985). Christian fundamentalism may be suffering from a limited moral imagination. Consider these facts: (a) less is spent on social welfare in the U.S. than...
in any industrialized western nation; (b) since 1967, the richest 20% of American families have increased their share of the nation's income (from 40 to 44%) while the share of the poorest 20% declined; (c) American stands alone among western industrialized nations in its refusal to provide a national health insurance program (Freiden, 1987; Heidenheimer, Heclo & Adams, 1983; Kaus, 1988). Given these inequities and given the fundamentalist argument for even fewer services to desperate, needy families, the methodology of the movement seems inadequate to the task. "Confronting people with the facts will not get you very far. Moral eugens extends even into human relations...you can show people pictures of starving children or homeless people...and many will say 'that's too bad; life is hard'" (Caplan, 1988, p. 45). By opposing large-scale modification (expansion) of social-family policy and increased governmental intervention but at the same time speaking of a stronger commitment to families in America, Christian fundamentalism appears to offer a methodological contradiction.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Born amidst struggles to resist modernism at the turn of the century, Christian fundamentalism achieved an unexpected political maturity in the last 15 years. The Bible-believing worldview held by fundamentalists has been the basis for dynamic growth and expansion, surprising lay and religious leaders alike. As can be seen, fundamentalists have a specific agenda relative to the American family. This final section will address the implications of Christian fundamentalism for the study of the family.

The Family Agenda of Fundamentalism for the Future

The extreme rationalism of America's post-industrial order (interpreted as secular humanism) has motivated Christian fundamentalists to attempt to re-focus the energies of society on the family. From reviewing the many issues involved in this situation, the family agenda of fundamentalism appears to contain seven specific items: (a) getting government intervention (perceived as inefficient and threatening) out of the family; (b) re-establishing the Biblically-ordained patriarchal structure within the family; (c) re-establishing the primacy of women as child caregivers within the family, particularly during the early years of childhood; (d) broadening the operational and motivational comprehensiveness of marriage, emphasizing marriage as something more than a sexual relationship; (e) clarifying the power and position of parents relative to their children (emphasizing traditional power-assertive techniques of behavior management); (f) realigning educational institutions so that curriculum and teaching styles are more consistent with traditional family values (eliminating many controversial aspects of modern curricula, e.g. sex education); and (g) battling the pernicious effects of secular humanism, not only in the schools, but also in the media, in politics, and in all other areas of society.

Of the goals set forth by the Christian fundamentalism movement, some will be accomplished while others will be forgotten. Since 1980, many American families have not fared well. Levitan, Galio, and Belous (1988) reported that while the median family income has gone up since 1980, so have births out of wedlock (up 4%), children living in poor families (up 2%), children living with a single parent (up 4%), cohabiting couples (up 44%), married mothers in the work force (up 10%), and mothers with children under age three in the labor force (up 13%). Without help in establishing quality child care programs, intervention programs for teen-age sexuality and pregnancy, and other successes, people will continue to be left behind.

The political success of Christian fundamentalism, as well as its future, may be viewed sterilely as anachronistic and complex. One wonders whether, given the fundamentalist agenda and the trends in the American family, such an effort might be the only effective way to help families improve their lives. It will take a great deal of tact to help families become aware of the pernicious trends threatening them. Moral eugenics, the movement on behalf of the family, does not seem to be offering a methodologically sound approach to the issues facing the American family today. It is clear that a family movement is essential if reforms that improve the family's well-being are to be accomplished. It remains to be seen whether Christian fundamentalism can provide the necessary leadership in this area.
and other programs to help economically deprived children and families, we cannot afford another eight years of less government support.

The goal of establishing a Biblically ordained patriarchy within American families as well as re-establishing as strong ‘maternal’ role for women in families are ideas that may be beyond their useful function. Much of what now is known about families suggests that these orientations, which speak to homogenizing family experience, are anachronistic. Paul Glick wrote recently: “Studies throw light on the increasing complexities of household and family patterns that have tended to reduce the exercise of social control that is consistent with long-established family norms” (Glick, 1988, p. 871). The fundamentalist dream of patriarchy within families has never been in greater jeopardy, even from fundamentalists themselves, who are favoring androgynous role enactment with greater frequency (Hunter & Stehlin, 1987).

More optimistically, the fundamentalist call to broaden the dyadic comprehensiveness of marriage is a good suggestion, one that stands a chance of occurring given the creation of an acceptable social environment. Expanding people’s consciousness about marriage (care, commitment, compassion, and forgiveness) while avoiding the myth of naturalism about marriage, family formation, and marriage (after Clark Vincent), should go a long way in expanding relational breadth. Expanding this sense of commitment and recognizing the contextual validity of diverse family forms may be the only chance available to lower divorce rates (even though they now appear to have leveled off), to lower the incipient malaise of most single parent families, and to increase public and personal investment in marriage.

Whether adjusting to social trends means surrendering to the forces of secularism and modernism, as conservative fundamentalists might suggest, or whether adjustment is an honest recognition of the need to prepare children and families to live in a highly complex and very demanding environment, as more moderate fundamentalists might suggest, only time will tell. The battle over the intrusion into areas traditionally left to the family is likely to continue. If, however, changes in governmental policy or changes in Supreme Court rulings take away some of the flash points for the fundamentalist movement, or if more conventional religious groups are better able to speak for or incorporate the religious right, “these para-church organizations might wither away, leaving but a small mark on the history of the 1980s” (Guth, 1983, p. 45).

This list of goals for the family is politically, religiously, and culturally ambitious and potentially society-transforming. The likelihood of success depends upon the extent to which Christian fundamentalism in American becomes paradigmatic for the American Christian experience. If fundamentalism becomes the vehicle that melds together America’s existential search for meaning and sureness (i.e. bringing together rational dogma and emotional experience), the stated goals may be possible (Gritsch, 1982). As such, the conservative Christian movement has the power to stir many deeply-felt emotions, especially in terms of children, child management, discipline in the schools, curriculum in the schools, child abuse, and the relative autonomy of families in America. In terms of creating real changes within families and within society for families, the success of Christian fundamentalism rests upon at least two major factors; the solidarity of political coalitions and the maintenance of the sense of being dispossessed.

It may be that Christian fundamentalism has to do more with unanswered and deeply felt concerns about persons, about relationships, and about children than with a movement of political and societal change. If this is true, fundamentalism operates more effectively on the micro or personal-interactional level. The expressions of dogmatism and extremism are then more manifestations of reluctance and reticence rather than a
master plan for all of society. It may be that psychodynamically fundamentalism is willing but not able to assume a prominent role vis-à-vis the family in America because it has not sufficiently gone beyond the individualistic level.

Implications for Family Science

There are three broad implications for the study of the family presented by fundamentalism. First, in the area of education, fundamentalism offers both an opportunity and a danger. Family scientists surely appreciate the attention given to family issues; it is very useful to have the structure and function of the family more open to discussion. Fundamentalism has provided an opportunity for ongoing discussion of critical aspects of the family. On the other hand, there is danger in disallowing or discrediting particular family forms, insisting on adherence to a single ideological point of view. Diversity is one of the richest aspects of healthy families; functional, structural, and ethnic diversity within families is threatened through the imposition of a restrictive model of the family.

Second, fundamentalism presents new challenges for family therapists and family mediators. A therapist unaware of a fundamentalist orientation within a family may encounter severe difficulty in reaching the family, communicating with family members, or even understanding particular positions taken by the family. In some therapeutic settings, it may be necessary to make use of spiritual advisors or consultants who may help bridge the potential gap in communication between family and therapist. In other settings, families seek out Christian counselors and therapists hoping to find a compatible set of assumptions about structure and function of families. In either case, given the strength of Christian fundamentalism and the number of people immersed within the belief system, therapists should be aware of a family's religious orientation and the potential implications of that orientation in helping the family.

Finally, fundamentalism presents political and pragmatic implications for interventions within families. One of the powerful idioms within fundamentalism is resistance to governmental encroachment into the sovereignty of the family. This resistance means less political support for federal programs for families, more support for privatization of delivery services (e.g., health care), and a generally libertarian approach to broad-based programs for families. Fundamentalists are admonished to actively resist the encroaching federal bureaucracy that threatens the traditional family (Falwell, 1981). This admonition is particularly powerful in terms of interventions that appear to minimize the power and authority of parents or that appear to support diverse family structure and function.

For a social movement to be truly transformative, it cannot achieve some of its goals and then leave the societal and political processes pretty much as they were (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, Tipton, 1985). To make a difference in the viability of American families, to have an effect on teen-age pregnancy rates, to humanize husband-wife relations, and make marriage more meaningful, a social movement must engender change in basic, underlying interactional processes. If for no other reason, this fact predicts a limited impact for Christian fundamentalism on the family. There have been no changes in the most important culture-wide operational processes like the economy, and as a result, there will be little change for families. The transformation of society must occur at more than the individual level: "Individuals need the nurture of groups that carry a moral tradition reinforcing their own aspirations...such a social movement would lead to changes in the relationship between our government and our economy" (Bellah et al., 1985, p. 286). This type of elemental change would do more to
preserve the family than any previously attempted effort at the reorganization of priorities, including the biting resistance of Christian fundamentalism.

REFERENCES


In the past, family and community institutions have had a strong influence on the nature and destructive potential of illicit drug use. The 1960s and 1970s saw a significant increase in the use of illicit drugs, with a general decline in religious affiliation and a shift towards a more secular and permissive cultural climate. The influence of religious institutions, particularly those associated with orthodoxy and authoritarianism, was thought to have been reduced since the 1950s (Gloster, 1961).

Another factor to consider is the influence of Aldous Huxley, who in *The Doors of Perception* (1961) established the idea of experience as a means to transcend conventional social norms.

A recent study by Roger Weis, a sociologist at the University of Michigan, suggests that religious institutions continue to have a significant impact on the family and social dynamics.