

## FUNDAMENTALISM

Fear of fundamentalism has cooled lay enthusiasm for Bible studies in recent years. Fundamentalism is a word that strikes a nerve in Catholic pastors and people. Some go so far as to discourage Bible reading unless carefully guided by experts. Are such fears justified? We think not. Just what is fundamentalism anyway? Fundamentalism is a new phenomena in the history of God's people. It was unheard of in previous Christianity. It is a way of looking at the Bible that's not in good standing with most Catholic scholars. It's not all bad, but we should be aware of it's weaknesses and of better ways to come to our Bible. In the Catholic tradition, we read the Bible specifically as members of the people of God. Most Protestants tend to relate to the Bible more as unattached individuals. Catholics come to the Bible in the light of the apostolic faith handed down in church tradition. Protestants tend to see the Bible as independent of the Church and of any handed down faith. To them, faith has it's origins in the Bible only. Fundamentalists go a step farther.

1. To a fundamentalist, the Bible is the answer book to all life's questions. As Catholics we recognize there are questions left unanswered in the Bible. We see Scripture and Apostolic Teaching handed down through the Church as our unified source of basic truth. We also see the Bible as a measuring rod by which we check and double check what the Lord teaches us through the experience of His people gathered.
2. Fundamentalists view the Bible as coming word for word from Heaven. To them the human writers were simply secretaries taking dictation from God. Consider the difference between this view and the idea of Holy People who are inspired by the Holy Spirit to write of their experiences with God. Note that this does not mean that parts of the Bible couldn't have been written by use of Charisms like direct prophecy or Word of Knowledge.
3. Fundamentalists see the Bible as the only source of Christianity. They tend to think that every Church practice should be spelled out in Scripture. If it's not in the Bible, they say, it's not Christian. As Catholics we know some of our practices pre-date the writing and cannon of the New Testament. No where does the Bible say it is the only source of God's revelation. That's a Protestant tradition. The cannon of the New Testament, however, is an ancient Church Tradition we share with Protestants. There is no inspired table of contents in the Bible.
4. Fundamentalists are also literalists. They believe every word of the Bible is historically and scientifically true as stated. It should be noted that until the 1940's it was normal for Catholic scholars to be literalists concerning the Bible. Don't confuse all literalism with fundamentalism.
5. Fundamentalists sometimes take short passages of scripture as absolute law without seeing them in the context of the entire word of God. Some fundamentalists like to use the Bible to prove their arguments. Do you think that we might find isolated verses to prove another view too?
6. Fundamentalists tend to see everything as black or white, good or bad, unchanging, clear and final. Some Catholic groups have a fundamentalist attitude in this sense?
7. Fundamentalists are usually evangelicals. They have a strong focus on the message of personal salvation. Not all evangelicals, however, are fundamentalist. They are also conservatives, but not all conservatives are fundamentalists. Does fundamentalism make everything they believe wrong? No.
8. Some Fundamentalists are militantly anti-Catholic. They try to discredit the Church and make every effort to, "rescue," us from, "Romanism." They may deny that anyone can be both Catholic and Christian at the same time.
9. Not everything applies to every fundamentalist. This term is used indifferent ways by different people. Sometimes fundamentalism is simply a name that some professional religion teachers use against any common Bible reader who's Scripture study challenges their world view or academic pride. In all this, let's remember that fundamentalists are our brothers and sisters in Christ. They are often very close to God and may live in beautiful fellowship. We can learn from them. Praised be Jesus Christ.