Divine Order, Divine Myth: Uncovering the Mythical Construction of Gender Ideals in Protestant Fundamentalist Circles

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> Myths are nothing but this ceaseless, untiring solicitation, this insidious and inflexible demand that all men recognize themselves in this image, eternal yet bearing a date, which was built of them one day as if for all time (Barthes 1972, 155).

> Depend upon it, there is nothing so unnatural as the commonplace
> –Sherlock Holmes (Conan Doyle 1892, 68)

Those who have spanned the literature on gender roles and Protestant Fundamentalist groups have been bombarded with theories seeking to account for the thing that many consider most interesting about this movement: its ability to exist peacefully with its own contradictions. Countless scholars have asked why, in such an advanced age, old-fashioned notions of male dominance and female submission continue to thrive; why women can willingly, and even happily, remain a part of a social arrangement designed for their subordination. The attention given to the "why" problem (not to mention the issues surrounding the who, what, when, and where) illustrates the apparent difficulties that arise when such social arrangements remain extant. It appears that knowing *why* something happens does not always sufficiently explain the factors that perpetuate its existence.

Rather than tackle the "why," this essay extends a grasp toward the "how"—specifically, how the gender arrangements of Protestant Fundamentalism have been and continue to be created, and how such relationships co-exist in a world that becomes more unfriendly towards them all the time. As such, this is a discussion of process. I will argue that the formation of gender roles in Protestant Fundamentalist groups is a prime example of Roland Barthes' theories of mythmaking. Barthes' mythmaking model explains the process of ideology construction by examining the ways in which groups create and maintain their power relationships in the face of ever-changing social conditions.

Protestant Fundamentalism is undergirded by the principle that all things are part of a divine plan designed by God, the almighty, creator deity, and the ultimate authority and divine being. Each facet of human life is an exemplar of this plan. This system argues that certain things in life are absolute. In addition to religious truth, this applies to other equally controversial topics such as abortion, homosexuality, and frequently to political affiliation. Observers often remark that Fundamentalism is quintessentially a movement of boundaries (Hawley and Proudfoot 1994, 7). There is no grey area when it comes to issues of truth, nor wavering in a moral conundrum. To believe so is to adulterate what is a perfect arrangement.

I will demonstrate that this movement is rife with mythmaking, and has thrived on the power of certain long-standing mythical constructs. "Myth" in this context is more than its commonplace definition, which usually includes talk of superhuman beings and their deeds.[1] While definitions such as the former are useful in some situations, this common (and popular) use of the term often relegates it to the realm of fairy tales and children's stories, which is unfortunate linguistic baggage. Such connotations make it far too easy to eschew mythmaking as a function of long-dead people and civilisations or humorous tales that immature "primitives" told. In short, a discussion of myth is one that is always in danger of the assumption that our own lives are not evidence of this sort of reality-crafting.

Instead, the category of myth is used here to designate a mode of communication that functions to create and perpetuate a particular perception of reality, one central to an understanding of Fundamental-

ism's theological[2] structure as well as its ties to gender. Barthes' model acknowledges the eminently social component behind reality construction, recognises that certain interests (which are fuelled by power and privilege) play a significant role in shaping myths, and accurately depicts the depth and power of myths as a formative part of our social exchanges. Protestant Fundamentalism's treatment of gender relationships is a process of complex, intricate social myths, and will serve here as a case study for the mechanics of social identity building.

Barthes' *Mythologies*

The Logistics of Mythmaking

Barthes' book *Mythologies* has often been regarded as a formative work in the study of language and symbol. This small but pithy text rests upon the assumption that much of what we consider to be real, true, and even timeless in our respective cultures are really prime examples of the mythmaking process: a continual cycle of authorization, naturalization, and legitimization of certain social conditions, ideas, and images.

Barthes contends that mythmaking is an endeavour that humans use to fashion a particular representation of reality consistent with their own interests. Mythic communication is so masterfully persuasive in as much as myths use subjects that are already vested with some measure of social meaning; a social group is already familiar with or identifies with the subject matter. This occurs with the purposeful switching of certain meaning-laden states (Barthes calls them *nature* and *history*); humans juxtapose the way they think things ought to be (*nature*, to signify the way in which an image is *naturalized*) with the way that things happen to be (*history*). This aspect of mythmaking is especially pivotal as myths superimpose another layer of meaning on top of the one that already exists and, in this manner, portray relationships that have no natural or automatic correlation as just that: natural and automatic. The swapping of the two is designed to communicate a specific message to those that hear or see the mythic exchange (Barthes 1972, 110).

Such exchanges occur in an infinitesimal number of ways. For instance, consider a recent television commercial for *Jif* peanut butter that told its viewers the following: "Big or small, you give your all. Moms like you choose *Jif*." What seems natural or perhaps even unquestionable, that many parents purchase peanut butter for their children, is then linked with another level of meaning: that the calibre of parents ("*Moms like you...*") can be known by the brand of peanut butter that they purchase. This is the stuff from which Barthes' model is made. A common food item has, of course, no innate tie with one's role as a parent, nor his/her parenting ability. But our familiarity with peanut butter as a foodstuff, as well as the fact that people with children frequently purchase it, paves the way for further assumptions to be made about the relationship between the parent, child, and peanut butter. In this situation, advertisers (shall we call them mythmakers?) have not only created naturalness between parents and peanut butter purchases, but also with it attached further messages or meanings (specifically that parental morale is directly linked to a choice of peanut butter) to form the basis of mythic dialogue.

Social mythmakers function more as lay advertisers. Through their own tools of the trade, they attempt to make their audiences perform, via engaging imagery, certain tasks or believe certain ideas. But it would be terribly misleading—in fact, opposite of Barthes' conception of myth—to portray mythmakers as conspiratorial, "ignore the man behind the curtain" agents that consciously promote self-serving agendas. Events are naturalized rather than hidden (Barthes 1972, 131):

> Myth consists in overturning culture into nature or, at least, the social, the cultural, the ideological, the historical into the 'natural'. What is nothing but a product of class division and its moral, cultural, and aesthetic consequences is presented (stated) as being a 'matter of course'; under the effect of mythical inversion, the quite contingent foundations of the utterance become Common Sense, Right Reason, the Norm, General Opinion.... (Barthes, 1971, 165).

Thus what the mythmaker promotes is what he/she finds to be natural, inevitable, or normal. The authority to influence an understanding of

these events is the mythmaker's distinguishing marker, not his/her con-
scious attempt to deceive.

Myth and Authority

Garnering support for a particular myth is not an automatic process.
As earlier noted, there must be some appeal to a topic or issue that
strikes us personally to make us authorize, or believe, the myth, and
thus behave as the mythmakers want (a "want," as I have just noted,
that is portrayed as an inevitable response to certain circumstances or
experiences). This process is contingent upon the right conditions. A
social group must invest some measure of authority in both the speaker
and the message before a myth can become accepted and institutional-
ised. Bruce Lincoln argues that authority is the effect of some pre-
scribed or believed asymmetry between individuals that allows the
more powerful to command the trust of others, or, at least, to make
others behave as if this were so (1994, 4). An imbalance of power,
whether real or perceived, is the key.

Accordingly, authority-building is a process of human social barter-
ing as roles, rights, privilege, and control are all negotiated. Authoriz-
ing an individual's message has as much (if not more) to do with the
circumstances under which the message is heard as it does the qualities
of the person delivering the message (Lincoln 1994, 4). In other
words, authorization of myth is a process of perceiving the mythmaker
as trustworthy, persuasive, and powerful enough to enforce the mes-
sage he/she delivers, but also of perceiving the message as pertinent to
a particular social setting or phenomenon.[3]

Given the addition of this authorization effect to myth's naturaliz-
ing rhetoric, the mythmaking package becomes a superb ideological
tool. Myths "take refuge behind the argument of authority" in much
the same way that parents tell their children that something is true
"because I said so" (Barthes 1972, 153). As a result, myth is not valu-
able for its reflection of truth but because of its usefulness (Barthes
1972, 144). Authority-granting behaviours are symbiotically the
source and by-product of further myth formation, as the myth must be
granted a certain measure of authority to be believed. Authority and
myth are, consequently, self-replicating. The acceptance of the myth

necessarily results in the establishment of an asymmetrical relationship between the myth-hearer and the mythmaker, as myths are designed to protect certain power relationships. Although they employ inventive techniques, myths are, by definition, the opposite of innovation.

Were it not for this natural, irrevocable "costume" that the above process pulls over itself, Barthes contends that myth would cease to exist: "[Myth is] a type of speech defined by its intention much more than by its literal sense; and that in spite of this, its intention is somehow frozen, purified, eternalized, made absent by this literal sense" (1972, 124). Therein lies the essence of myth: it is a system of communication, which, through a process of naturalizing certain images and ideas, manufactures, promotes, and authorises an agenda designed to serve the mythmaker. As long as power and privilege play a formative part in all social exchanges (and is there a social exchange without these as an integral part?) this form of reality-creation will thrive.

The assertion in Protestant Fundamentalism that certain gender ideals are not only natural, but also timeless, speaks to mythmaking of the sort that Barthes describes. This mythmaking works on a number of levels. Not only can we see myth as a presence in religiously backed views of gender difference on a more discrete scale, but also in a more generalized form in the timelessness granted to ideas or beliefs that are otherwise very recent. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger refer to this particular variety of historical tinkering as the "invention of tradition," which is "a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past" (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992, 1, 4). Such practices occur when rapid social change weakens or challenges the cultural fabric, when "old" traditions ("myths" would be an equally suitable term, as these traditions were themselves created to justify a certain situation) no longer sustain the given social structure (1992, 4). To propel a claim into the realm of "religion" provides a certain measure of authorization, as a deity is cited as the source of the claim. To simultaneously establish a continuity with an idealized past (the "good old days"), further bolsters the assertion. Thus mythmaking as Barthes describes can function on a number of levels, using the same medium to commu-

number of levels, using the same medium to communicate different, yet often interrelated, messages.

How, then, are we to apply the basics of mythmaking to Protestant Fundamentalist groups? This is done largely through the recognition that the gendered worldview of Fundamentalists is itself a myth created to maintain a certain reality in response to specific social conditions. By uncovering the naturalization of otherwise artificial phenomena and with it pinpointing an authority-granting mechanism, we can now begin to see an amazing process of reality construction. Human-made tenets couched in specific socio-historical events have become eternalised under the guise of divine law.

I wish to demonstrate this process through two examples from Protestant Fundamentalism. The first is an argument from history, and stems from Betty DeBerg's thesis that Protestant Fundamentalism and gender have been inextricably linked. The second comes from contemporary American culture, with a look at modern Fundamentalism and its portrayal of gender role stereotypes. I believe that these examples depict some of Fundamentalism's most widespread myths. These include the myth of absolute order, the myth of chaos, and the myth of gender dichotomization. It is impossible to speak of them separately; in good mythic style, the web is woven as one myth creates another, but simultaneously depends on its creator. A brief explanation of these myths follows.

Myths of Gender in Protestant Fundamentalism: Past and Present

The Myths of Order, Chaos, and Gender [4]

Before embarking on a discussion of Protestant Fundamentalism's historical record of mythmaking, it is critical to briefly explicate what I believe are three of this movement's most prominent myths. Again, I call them myths because I believe they are naturalizations of an otherwise unnatural state, which function to serve particular social interests.

Fundamentalism's long espoused myth of absolute order argues that God is the master orchestrator of a perfect plan, one that is designed to accurately reflect the true nature of all things within the universe that

God has created. Fundamentalism's historical inception, in fact, was characterized by its absolutist positions, which argued that the virgin birth and atoning death of Jesus were real, divinely significant events; that Jesus himself was a deity; that he was resurrected and would come again; and that the accounts of these things included in the biblical scriptures were divinely inspired and thus inerrant (Hutson 1982, 9-15). To stray from this absolute realm, risks inviting absolute consequences. Modern Fundamentalist rhetoric continues to be filled with allusions to God's "plan" as an overarching order that describes the ideal of all things (although, the argument goes, humans often distort or stray from this divine blueprint). This is not only true in issues of doctrine and theology, but also in issues of identity, gender being foremost among them.

The myth of chaos is an extension of the myth of order, as it is an attempt to describe its absence. Ammerman has asserted that Fundamentalist movements have their "greatest appeal in times and places where values and ways of life are changing" (1987, 192). As such, the argument has often been made that surges of Fundamentalism emerge when specific social, cultural, and historical events are perceived[5] as so chaotic, so challenging to the status quo, that a mechanism of order is necessary to rectify the supposed imbalance by reinstituting an older, superior model of order. The main premise of the myth of chaos is that God's arrangement of absolute order is in continual jeopardy of being undermined. Practices that stray from this divinely mandated order are to be squelched; they are representations of rebellion against human nature as God has designed, and are considered affronts to God himself. All-out destruction is often seen as the consequence of a lifestyle that does not comply with this model.

The final myth, of gender dichotomization, is perhaps more accurately described as an application of the order/chaos model. Specifically, the myth of gender dichotomization argues that the rift between men and women is so substantial that the two groups can only be described as opposites, although complementary opposites, on a long continuum. Despite much evidence to the contrary,[6] Fundamentalists argue that human sex differences are radically different, affecting not only biological difference, but also spilling over into social, emotional,

and psychological tendencies. The argument is thus set forth that one's psychology is predetermined by one's biology. As a result, the appropriate and normative categories for gendered expression occur through a certain set of proscribed male/female roles ordained by God.

Because of this divine design, women have a natural tendency to engage in nurturing, emotionally based behaviours, and are largely defined by their role as mother and wife, and as a source of gentleness and tenderness in their households. They have an ability to provide a sense of comfort and home that no man can match. Their relationship toward their husbands should be one of submission. Men are more apt to conquer, lead, and protect, and find their truest identities as leaders of the household and as warriors in the world of work. They are responsible not only for being the proverbial "breadwinner," but must simultaneously combat the forces that seek to erode the spiritual fortress protecting their families, a fortress they must construct. Those who do not follow their pre-ordained pattern of Christian living are guaranteed, in fine chaos-rhetoric style, that their happiness and the condition of their souls will be jeopardised.

Thus, as earlier mentioned, what I have distinguished for discussion's sake as three distinct myths may be better described as the various layers and applications of the myth of absolute order. It appears that the utility of radical dichotomies lie not so much in their descriptive abilities (as these harsh differences do not commonly exist in real life and are, in fact, distortions of the empirical world) but in their *creative* abilities. I am reminded of Rita Gross' comment that gender roles and stereotypes intensify biological differences between men and women more than their physical constructions necessitate (1996, 20). Such heightening is the heart of mythical thinking.

Fundamentalism's Historical Rise

A good starting point for application of these three can be found in the work of Betty DeBerg and others who have investigated the historical beginnings of Protestant Fundamentalism. DeBerg has pioneered the argument that there is a connection between a perceived gender crisis and the simultaneous rise of Fundamentalism, citing the former as the cause of the latter. Although she does not use the category "myth" in

her book *Ungodly Women,* which addresses this topic, this work is none-theless about social building mechanisms used to sustain a particular perception of reality in response to a perceived socio-historical crisis.

DeBerg argues that the social, economic, and technological shifts characterizing the Industrial Revolution were the catalysts for the for-mation of an especially ordered brand of Protestantism—Fundamentalism—which emerged in the early 1900s. Gender roles un-derwent a rather dynamic transition due to economic and technological shifts at the turn of the century; specifically, a change in the gendered nature of the workforce to include women in jobs they previously had not held occurred. This, by extension, gave women access to an entire sector of society dominated by men. As a result, DeBerg argues, indi-viduals were eager to authorize specific myths regarding gender through the great legitimating tool of religion in exchange for the sta-bility that these myths provided. DeBerg thus contends that it is es-sential to employ gender based models when examining Protestant Fundamentalist groups. The scope of the perceived crisis was large enough that it could only be brought on by the compromise of a major social category (gender). Acceptance of the myths instituted to quell such instability, have since been normalized in the form of "tradi-tional" gender roles.

DeBerg begins her argument with the gender roles of pre-industrialisation, which were rooted in an agrarian lifestyle. These roles tended toward more gender equanimity in social and economic realms as men and women often worked together in the home and on the farm. With the beginning pangs of Industrialisation, however, farming's once prominent stance would became less reliable as a means of sustenance. It was soon overshadowed by big business and factory work. This, combined with the discovery of new forms of energy and the means to manufacture, made an agrarian lifestyle neither a practi-cal nor stable way to support a family (DeBerg 1990, 16). Because the primary means of expressing one's gender ideal had sprung from the social interactions that an agricultural lifestyle fostered, the disintegra-tion of the family farm also meant the erosion of the traditional ideals of "male" and "female" expression. Thus for the middle class, Indus-

trialisation caused a restructuring of both social and economic experience.

It was thus with the advent of Industrialisation and its social challenges that the new Victorian gender norms for the middle class came to be defined *via negativa*: men were not women, and their acceptable daily behaviours would embody this opposition (DeBerg, 1990, 17). Boydston notes that an effort to romanticize the home and traditionally female responsibilities grew as women's involvement in the factory and other industrial settings became more prominent, attempting to sway women back to their "true" realms. For the first time, she argues, the terms "wage earner" and "man" (and with them issues of economic independence) were not synonymous (Boydston 2000, 143).

To balance out what was considered the ruthless, dog-eat-dog environment of the corporate/industrialised world (the new domain of men), women were "elevated as homemakers for the entire nation, responsible for both private and public standards of morality" (Bendroth 1993, 6). The home was portrayed as an oasis of kindness and gentleness, and thus women, who had a natural propensity toward such things, could find their truest calling by remaining at home, providing a shelter for their husbands and family. Conversely, men's role as worker and breadwinner was sustained.

As such, life in antebellum America has often been described in terms of the "separate spheres" model, which advocated that the natural differences between men and women would instinctively point them toward different social and economic roles. Jeanne Boydston quotes Henry Ward Beecher's 1825 advice on women in his *Ladies Museum*, demonstrating the magnitude of the supposed chasm between the "sexes":

> Man is strong—woman is beautiful. Man is daring and confident—woman is diffident and unassuming. Man is great in action—woman i[n] suffering. Man shines abroad—woman at home. Man talks to convince—woman to persuade and please. Man has a rugged heart—woman a soft and tender one. Man prevents misery—woman relieves it. Man has science—woman taste. Man has judgement—woman sensibility. Man is a being of justice—woman of mercy (Boydston 2000, 140).

And again, Boydston quotes Daniel C. Eddy, who, in 1857 remarked:

> Home is woman's throne, where she maintains her royal court, and sways her queenly authority. It is there that man learns to appreciate her worth, and to realize the sweet and tender influences which she casts around her; there she exhibits the excellences of character which God had in view in her creation.

As Industrialisation continued, the late 1800s signalled a shift that would be one of many challenges to Victorian gender ideals and the geographic realms (work/home) that they claimed. Bound in further economic and industrial advancements, this period saw the rise of the professions, professional education, and bureaucratic business establishments (DeBerg 1990, 25). More and more, commercial pursuits outside of the home became the priority of the family. Consequently, it would be merely a few years until the Victorian "cult of domesticity" model faded in popular culture. The early decades of the 1900s saw the flapper become a new possibility in the representation of the modern woman. Occupation and recreation outside the home now knew less gender differentiation. Women began to enter the workforce as never before, many for the blatant desire to have financial gain (Romanowski 1996, 200). Change was evident in all realms: Darwin's evolutionary model alongside liberal biblical criticism made the once unwavering nature of Christianity less secure, and the campaign for women's suffrage was moving full-force as it and other reform-era political groups questioned the status of the business and worker.

It was in the midst of this changing historical scene that Fundamentalism emerged. It voiced a direct challenge to these new social "affronts," advocating that a move backward to the gender paradigms of the Victorian period was consistent with the demands of true religion. Through mythmaking techniques, Fundamentalism was quick to bring into its platform the gender issue as it authorized appeals to religious correctness and appropriate scriptural roles (Bendroth 1993, 34): "By the early twentieth century, the theological rationale for subordinating women—and elevating men—was firmly in place" (Bendroth 1993, 32), a stark division from the popular gender mores of the time.

And hence rather anachronistically, Fundamentalism attempted to turn back the clock. It argued that the social circumstances of earlier years represented an uncorrupted, holy way of living. The gender-saturated religious literature of the time is very telling. Scofield, for instance, argued that the Genesis account of the fall of humans gave an explanation for the naturally hierarchical relationship between men and women. Women would live lives characterized by "multiplied conception, sorrow in motherhood, and the headship of man." These consequences were simply the result of her sinful nature (Hassey 1986, 27). Likewise, John Kendall saw Eve's sin as a confirmation of her innate frailty and the natural propensity of women to submit: "Women never since occupied so responsible a position as that of Eve when Satan assailed and deceived her, and by her failure then she showed that she had not the qualities which fitted her for a leader" (Bendroth 1993, 45). And when women would eventually occupy the church pews in much greater numbers than their male counterparts, a new cry to keep religion from "feminisation" (i.e., emotionalism, tenderness) and return it to male leadership was voiced, as one male activist remarked:

> There is one thing that should be clearly understood: there will not be a trace of emotionalism or sensationalism in this entire campaign. The gospel of Jesus of Nazareth—and its practical application to our practical daily life—is presented calmly, sanely, logically, so it will convince the average man of sane, logical, common sense. Women have no part in this movement, the reason being that the manly gospel of Christ should be presented to men by men. (Bederman 1996, 120)

By contrasting women's "innate" femininity and emotional nature with the logical, and even sane, demeanour of men, a virtual guarantee was set in place that women would remain far away from the realm of men, precluding any challenge. The desire of Fundamentalists to reinstitute a rhetoric of separate spheres was fully functional by the early 1900s.

Modern Parallels: History Remade
The modern surge of popularity surrounding modern Protestant Fundamentalism and the rhetoric of the Christian right resembles its

predecessor in both form and function. In parallel fashion it has a "trigger" of perceived chaos. DeBerg and others argue that Industrialisation's rapidly changing culture generated Fundamentalism's appeal to order, attacking the area that was most dynamic and threatening— gender. Likewise, the resurgence of Fundamentalism over the past few decades has coincided with contemporary culture's equally dynamic change in acceptable gender roles, widespread pockets of acceptance of homosexuality, and abortion legalization. While the rhetoric may sound softer (comments like Scofield's and Kendall's would be somewhat less palatable among modern Fundamentalism's more popular talk), the same messages still exist in an attempt to naturalize identical situations.

One of the most striking Victorian-esque examples from modern Fundamentalism can be found in the 1986 book *His Needs, Her Needs: Building an Affair Proof Marriage* by Willard F. Harley, Jr.[7] Harley argues that marriages fail because men and women do not accurately understand the gender specific needs that each spouse innately has. His first and second chapters maintain that the most primary need for men in marriage is sexual fulfilment, and for women it is affection. Secondary to these concerns, women need (in order of importance) conversation, honesty and openness, financial support, and family commitment. Men need recreational companionship, an attractive spouse, domestic support, and admiration. Although he describes these as universal *tendencies* among men and women, he nevertheless makes it clear that "his needs are not hers" (1986, 10).

Linda Kintz gives the separate spheres model a more modern name by re-couching this ideal as a sort of Fundamentalist natural law, designed to place women well within their "appropriate" roles (1997, 6). She remarks that a polarisation of gender is consistently found throughout Fundamentalist language, and cites a number of authors who claim that contemporary American life is riddled with talk of a cultural disintegration that can be traced directly to the confusion of gender identities, and by extension, a defilement of the design of God. She references well-known conservative Christian writer Beverly LaHaye's perspective on appropriate female roles (and the dangers of

straying from them) in the following passage. Note the appearance of absolute order, dichotomized gender roles, and chaos rhetoric:

> Here feminists, increasingly marginalized as radical and extremist, are described as women who want to exclude all gender difference in order to be just like men; who want to shrug off all authority whatsoever; who want to jettison all family responsibilities in their careerism; who hate men; who are responsible for "rampant individualism"; who insist on abortion on demand; who have misled men into thinking that they should not respect women; who have destroyed all civility and courtesy in public life; who have become so masculine in their appearance that few men are attracted to them; who, because of their selfishness, want only self-advancement; who have caused sexual harassment because they insist on sexual liberation; who confuse the roles of men and women; and whose victory will rob us of "all love, compassion, gentleness, and warmth in all of our relationships." (1997, 19)[8]

The lack of an in-between realm is evident in this ideological stance. True women who abide by God's will do not behave in this fashion—they respect the will of God and its accompanying plan. Those who dare tread on this order not only challenge the ideal individuals that they were meant to be (i.e., one who follows appropriate gender roles and thus recognises her individual ideal), but in doing so risk wreaking havoc on themselves and others, as they are potentially responsible for everything from sexual harassment to the very destruction of civil interaction.

Kintz's observations are very much in line with the thinking of other scholars of modern Protestant Fundamentalism, who place the movement's impetus squarely within its ability to (mythically) order the world during times when order seems to be lacking. The pro-family platform that has been the hallmark of modern Protestant Fundamentalism espouses a return to an arrangement mandated by God, and in turn a move away from the liberal forces of secular humanism. Many facets of this platform deal intimately with gender, family, and reproduction; anti-abortion and anti-homosexuality legislation comprise a large portion of concern. For instance, the Council of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, a Fundamentalist organisation formed in

the 1980's, attributes its existence to the following "crises." I mention here five of the original list of ten:

1. The widespread uncertainty and confusion in our culture regarding the complementary differences between masculinity and femininity;

2. The tragic effects of this confusion in unraveling the fabric of marriage woven by God out of the beautiful and diverse strands of manhood and womanhood;

3. The increasing promotion given to feminist egalitarianism with accompanying distortions or neglect of the glad harmony portrayed in Scripture between the loving, humble leadership of redeemed husbands and the intelligent, willing support of that leadership by redeemed wives;

4. The widespread ambivalence regarding the values of motherhood, vocational homemaking, and the many ministries historically performed by women;

5. The growing claims of legitimacy for sexual relationships which have Biblically and historically been considered illicit or perverse, and the increase in pornographic portrayal of human sexuality...(2002).

The "crisis" perceived by such groups, as I have continually mentioned, is linked to an understanding of gender and reproductive ability as the most primary characteristics of a person's being. This said it is no surprise that many organisations like this one, and including others like Chosen Women (an all-female Fundamentalist organisation), devote considerable print space to past abortions, preventing future ones, and other reproductive or sexually related issues. A testimonial in one publication speaks to this end as it describes the circumstances surrounding one woman's attendance at a Chosen Women conference. Depicted in terms of her "two abortions," this woman was heralded as a messenger from God who, because of her willingness to repent, committed herself to the prevention of abortions by telling her own story (Armbruster 1999). In fact, all-female seminars frequently address top-

ics such as these. The message is one of sympathy, but the underlying sentiment is clear: abortion is sin, and God forgives sinners. Those willing to repent of such sins are to be welcomed into the group as examples of the ideal response to a sinful situation.

Just as abortion allows for a separation in the titles of "mother" and "female," and thus gender and reproductive ability, so homosexuality equally challenges modern Fundamentalist platforms. In many Fundamentalist groups, homosexuality is seen as an inevitable result of modernity. The collapse of traditional gender values is seen to bring with it an equally disastrous crumbling in human sexuality. Exodus International, organised to turn individuals from homosexual behaviour, notes that homosexuality is a result of the "fallen" nature of humans, and as such, distorts God's intent for each individual (Exodus International 2002).

The equally troubling issues of abortion and homosexuality often result in a type of mythological memory of the past as a much more ideal and, indeed, pure representation of moral value. Christian Fundamentalist literature often remarks that America's status as a God-fearing nation has been compromised, and establishes a constant dialogue about times when people "just knew" that such things were morally reprehensible. This is an excellent example of the re-making of history, as the past is hardly as pristine as many of us would imagine it to be. The relatively recent attention given to homosexuality and abortion in Fundamentalist rhetoric would cause one to believe that such things did not exist prior to the 1960s and 1970s. On the topic of homosexuality, one writer remarks, "Thirty five years ago, our country followed the Judeo-Christian ethic. Few people questioned that...homosexual conduct was wrong" (Oliver 1994, 84).

But the concerns of government and large scale organisations can seem far away to Fundamentalists, many of whom focus more on embodying such gender ideals in their personal lives as individual expressions of God's design. The Promise Keepers phenomenon, strongest in the 1990's, urged such a personal commitment, as it implored men to take back the responsibility they had forfeited in their families. Such moves would once again re-establish the power relationships that they were meant to have. To restore the divine order that God intended,

however, women were equally called to recognise their true spiritual nature by relinquishing the power that was not rightly theirs, and in turn to live out the submissive lives they were meant to fulfil. This agenda has been welcomed by many women who see the trade-off of power with a newly responsible, loving spouse as one that is worth making. Part of the success of such movements, beyond their practical benefits of increased male involvement in family and parenting responsibilities, may be attributable to a change in language. Ruether maintains that the tenets of the Promise Keepers and similar groups remain bent on restoring a gendered hierarchy as they always have, but have softened troublesome terms (2000, 176). Instead of referring to their preferred model of family as one involving male headship, men's roles are now discussed in terms of a servant who fulfils the needs of his family. Men are taught that women are to be treated "lovingly and gently" in all endeavours, especially in those that may be difficult for them, like the surrendering of certain roles out of submission to their husbands (Evans 1994, 80).

Yet the move to an ideological acceptance of this platform can be hard to make. One Fundamentalist woman, in another Christian Right publication geared toward women (from an organisation called Suitable Helpers), attempted to reconcile her own mixed feelings over the issue of submission. She remarked that she had begun to realise the proper roles within her family, especially in her relationship with her husband: "I have learned to trust God's leading in Dale's life.... I have learned to be Dale's completer rather than his competitor... Because of this newly learned trust, God was able to move us to Colorado this year with only a 3-month hesitancy on my part" (Parrott 1998, 3). Her hesitancy is not to be misunderstood as a valid expression of personal opinion, but as a rebellion against her husband's and, by connection, God's will. Indeed, the rhetoric is strong as language of divine order and will is often used to convince women that a return to the gender roles of the past embodies a spiritual awakening. Conversely, their refusal or rejection of this role constitutes spiritual damage to their loved ones. The following statement, again from Suitable Helpers, expresses this concern: "Our charge is to be in prayerful support of Godly men.... [God] is reaching out to teach the women how to accept

this work in the lives of their men and to love Him with His uncondi-
tional Agape love. If we are not careful, we can become a hindrance to
God's work by putting out the flame the spirit is igniting in their
hearts—we must learn how to pray for our men continually and pre-
pare our hearts for God's moving in our families" (1999, 1).

A growing camp now advocates that women *do* have some measure
of power in Fundamentalist groups—that women's activities, roles, and
worldviews are not mechanisms of domination, nor the result of elabo-
rate social myths, but are instead a means of female empowerment.
While I deal only briefly with this here, I believe that it nonetheless
deserves mention in the context of mythmaking. Brenda Brasher's
book *Godly Women* is like many others in that it disagrees with the
popular feminist notion that women are of secondary importance in
Fundamentalist groups. Instead, Brasher argues, there are numerous
outlets in Fundamentalism through which women may exert power.

Brasher contends that the relationships that women form with
other women within Fundamentalist groups offer them the opportunity
to become involved in avenues of power that they would not otherwise
be afforded in the larger male/female community. It is an intriguing
paradox that Fundamentalist women could be powerful in a movement
that is "generally conceded to be organized around their disempower-
ment" (Brasher 1998, 3), yet she argues that "the women [she] inter-
viewed bargain with patriarchy to get what they want" (1998, 68).
Brasher acknowledges that these "bargains" must be considered in the
larger context of the Fundamentalist world, and although they are far
from the ideal in egalitarianism, they still represent for these women
significant inroads toward self-empowerment. The rewards they reap
include the formation of important relationships, improvement of their
self-esteem, and a sense of their lives as meaningful and important.

Brasher's work represents a growing group of research arguing that
Fundamentalism is not as disempowering to women as it might appear.
Certainly, this seems to be true if power is seen as a constant negotia-
tion of social roles, rights and privileges, instead of an all or nothing,
black-and-white state. It is necessary to ask, however, about the larger
context in which this "empowerment" takes place. Karen McCarthy-
Brown argues that the idolization of women often only occurs when

their activity and power is both limited and monitored (1994, 181). The less powerful people in a social grouping will often accept a history about their own identities as true, even if degrading, simply because no other explanations for their roles have been allowed to emerge within a particular mythic structure.

Such observations hold an important position in a discussion of mythmaking. Brasher's argument that Fundamentalist women bargain to gain empowerment is an acceptable one within certain limits; I would argue that we must ask if the things that Fundamentalist women "want" are the things made acceptable within the overarching myths of Fundamentalist thought, by the constraints of their social contexts. It seems wise to also question the power of socialization within the all-female networks that Brasher highlights in her book. There is a strong argument that such communities, although they foster feelings of empowerment, are able to do so because they couch positive support and encouragement within gendered ideals, thereby making it impossible to conceive of a worldview outside of the mythically manufactured one. In an ironic twist, women exert power through their own, often grass-roots involvement to endorse a system that will place them in positions of lesser power or authority. Public power is exchanged for private power; private power is downplayed and not acknowledged or perceived as such. Thus women in these groups exert very real but all too localized power, but always to endorse male dominance and leadership. It appears, then, that while certain experiences of power occur, the mythic framework inherent in these groups nevertheless limits the extent and type of power experienced.

Concluding Remarks

The message across history, then, is the same: naturalizing the separate spheres/absolute order/gender dichotomies model within the confines of religion allows some semblance of control to reign in a time when the most significant categories of human interaction (gender and accompanying gender roles) are challenged. In each circumstance the trigger of this move was/is a changing social front, with the authorization factor coming from an appeal to religion, a highly effective means

of authorization. When a deity is said to be the source of a claim, its validity and the simultaneous severity of its rejection are conceived of in ultimate terms.

With this in mind, it becomes much easier to understand that there are significant problems in conceiving of the category "natural" as an unbiased and objective account of reality. It is more advantageous for Fundamentalists to see gender difference as something created by a divine power rather than the product of social forces such as industrialisation or cultural change; the former carries with it much more authority and serves many more interests. Our portrayal of events is always thus an interpretive endeavour; they are always "made largely in retrospect" (Braun 1999, 5). This reinforces Judith Lorber's argument that control over gender role formation and perceptions, is an efficacious way of sustaining, maintaining, and legitimizing the social conditions of a culture (1994, 25).

In light of the power of the mythmaking cycle, which includes as cornerstones the authorization and legitimization of claims, one can understand Kintz's assertion that "reality is the best fantasy of all" (1990, 221). In saying this she references the intricate web of social, economic, and cultural factors that make Protestant Fundamentalist mythmaking possible (1990, 221). Certainly, this movement has risen to meet the challenges of change. Given its longevity, Fundamentalism is an exceptionally successful means of making sense of and ordering a perceived chaos, and of dealing with a world that is "suddenly too big" (McCarthy-Brown 1994, 179). Its success can be linked to a number of levels of myth: first, it argues that the world can be understood in terms of radical dichotomies, that clean lines can be drawn around people and things; second, that a deity has designed the world in such a way, and biblical scriptures, figures, and representatives validate this order; finally, because the system is ordained by God (and, as such, is automatically authorized), it is thus inerrant.

If we were to dissect this in terms of myth-building, we might say that mythic structures are formed when social events threaten those who hold power, and who thus have interest in the maintenance of the status quo. Groups reiterate their *raison d'être* using a number of strategies that most effectively address their own plight at a particular

point in history, and authorize such arrangements through a deified claim. These myths are often built around familiar imagery or an already acceptable scenario, thereby bolstering the mythical claim, and making its acceptance more likely. The fact that a Promise Keeper takes control over the activities of his family is superimposed with the relief felt when he thus commits to support and become involved with this family. The positive benefits of one level of the myth, translates to a classically Fundamentalist, black-and-white support of the entire myth. The departure from the mythical order that Fundamentalism supports becomes a departure from the will of the divine.

Barthes remarks, "Just as the cuttlefish squirts its ink in order to protect itself, it cannot rest until it has obscured the ceaseless making of the world, fixated this world into an object which can be for ever [sic] possessed, catalogued its riches, embalmed it, and injected into reality some purifying essence which will stop its transformation, its flight toward other forms of existence.... For the very end of myths is to immobilise the world..." (1972, 155). In this is the sum and substance of myth: the realisation that our own socially constructed paradigms and worldviews are far more potent than the "religious" paraphernalia that they may produce.

Notes

[1] See, for instance, the *HarperCollins Dictionary of Religion*, 1995, "Myth," for a very commonly used definition. A quick look at many works that deal with the interface between myth and religion as two technical (and separate) terms will define myth in such a manner.

[2] I fear that the use of this term, especially in a discussion of myth, will conjure images of essentialist religious truths that are manipulated, perhaps tainted, by mythmaking, rather than invoking the possibility that these "truths" are large scale mythmaking structures of the grandest kind. Thus I use it with hesitancy, and as a descriptor of a certain category of phenomena.

[3] Myth often creates this appropriate setting (one layer of myth is laid so that another can be as well—myths work off of pre-existing social systems and their myths). Thus myth creation is a self-replicating ordeal, just as authority self-replicates.

[4] I have purposely bypassed a thorough listing of Protestant Fundamentalism's many tenets for the sake of brevity. I would, however, refer the reader to the

work of author Nancy Ammerman (1987) and authors/editors Martin Marty and R. Scott Appleby (*The Fundamentalism Project*, volumes 1-4, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, publication dates vary by volume) for a more factual account of this movement, which I have only attempted to summarise here.

[5] Here is yet another important word, especially in its connection to the myth of chaos. A social group's interpretation (*perception*) of events as chaotic or precarious is what *makes* chaos, an entirely subjective term. Berger, using Durkheim's phraseology, argues that the opposite of the sacred is not necessarily the profane; it is often, instead, the category of chaos. Thus the ability of a group to order a particular social situation within the framework of religious rhetoric sets it up, in my opinion, for an automatically reactionary response when such a framework fails.

[6] I think specifically here of Margaret Mead as one of the first of many who would seek to demonstrate the socially constructed origin of gender roles.

[7] There are, of course, thousands of Fundamentalist publications similar to this one in their espousal of separate spheres thinking and forthright discussion of it.

[8] This passage is Kintz's own paraphrase of a section of Beverly LaHaye's book, *Desires of a Woman's Heart.*

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