

The Young Fundamentalists' Survey: Summary and Analysis

***A Fundamentalism File Research Report
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This report is intended to be a resource to help Fundamentalist Christians in studying and evaluating religious leaders and movements. It draws primarily upon materials housed in the Fundamentalism File in the J. S. Mack Library on the campus of Bob Jones University.

Although every effort has been made to provide an impartial study of the topic, this work will naturally reflect the interpretations and viewpoint of its author. ***This report should not be taken as representing an official statement of the position of Bob Jones University.*** The University's theological position is well expressed by its creed.

The staff of the Fundamentalism File would welcome any questions or comments concerning the content of this report.

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Young Fundamentalists

“Young fundamentalists” are hardly a blip on the American cultural radar screen—despite all the attention given by national media to the second half of their moniker. However, within English-speaking Protestant fundamentalism itself these young people have risen to new prominence. This prominence could stem from the fact that a new generation is entering the formal ranks of fundamentalist leadership, with new, youthful presidents and deans at places like Northland Baptist Bible College, Clearwater Christian College, and Bob Jones University.¹ But the Internet, which both brings groups closer together (however artificially) and levels the playing field so that age, gender, education, and position matter much less,² is perhaps the primary reason for this phenomenon. Simply, older fundamentalists are having to listen to younger ones because the Net has given the latter more opportunity to talk.

Jason Janz, a young fundamentalist himself, has surfed the crest of this Internet wave with a survey trying to map the views of the new generation.³ Between January 21 and February 14, 2005, over 1,100⁴ self-avowed “young fundamentalists” completed a 105-question online survey written by Janz and produced by Jerry Thacker’s Right Ideas, Inc. Respondents for the “Young Fundamentalists’ Beliefs and Personal Life Survey” (hereafter the YFS) were to be

¹ Dick Stratton was born in 1958, and Stephen Jones was born in 1969.

² In fact, young people may even hold the most advantageous portions of the field because they tend to be more adept at using the Internet.

³ Like most generations other than the Baby Boomers, the outer limits of this one are somewhat amorphous. The oldest were generally young enough, however, to have had their lives significantly affected by computers and the Internet.

⁴ 1,121, to be exact.

Christian college students and graduates 35 or under.

Taking the results with a grain of salt

But here lies the first grain of salt with which the survey needs to be taken: There were no controls over who completed it. An 18-year-old freshman art major who had never heard of fundamentalism before coming to college a few months previously could complete the survey as could a 32-year-old senior pastor with ten years’ experience in formal Bible training and several years in the pastorate. Most respondents (59%) had not finished their education, and 37% had not finished their undergraduate education. And only half were in or had finished a major related to biblical studies. Some young fundamentalists are indeed 18, and their views do matter, but a survey casting such a broad net including unformed—and uninformed—young people must be expected to turn up some odd results.

That is just what occurred. Some clearly heterodox views appear to have garnered multiple (18-year-old?) adherents because they had to represent complex issues in few words. For example, 12% of respondents (as many as 139⁵) chose a neo-orthodox statement among three options which followed a question about bibliology. Approximately 50 respondents selected a position similar to that of Fuller Seminary, that the Bible is “not always to be taken literally in its statements concerning matters of science, historical reporting, etc.” Those who did not really know what to choose seem less likely to have picked the Fuller option—the words “not to be taken literally” would have alerted anyone who has spent any time in a Fundamentalist church. But it seems that the 12%

⁵ The results make it impossible to say, because it is apparent that not every respondent answered each question. Some left certain questions unanswered.

who chose the neo-orthodox position may not have understood the wording. When they read, “The Bible becomes the Word of God when someone reads it by faith!” some may have thought, “Yes! 1 Cor 2:14—only saved people really get the Bible.” It seems unlikely that 12% of young people graduating from and studying at fundamentalist schools are truly neo-orthodox.

In addition, some pre-written replies were ambiguous, such as “Study of Greek and Hebrew is not necessary to understand the true meaning of the text.” What is the “true meaning” of a text? Is it the most precise answer or merely a correct one? One option to another question read, “Abstinence [from alcohol] cannot be proven from the Bible, but I feel it is still unwise for a believer to engage in it.” To engage in what? Abstinence? Consider also a reply provided by the survey for one query, “I have made a large sacrifice for Christ.” That could be understood as, “I have given up something of real value to me for the sake of Christ,” to which many would respond with strong disagreement because they don’t view anything they have to give up for Christ as truly valuable. On the other side, some would see this as saying “I have given up everything for Christ.” The numbers on some questions seem to reflect the different ways people understood what they were being asked.

Another reason readers need to think through the survey’s results carefully before making pronouncements based upon them is that whole sectors of Fundamentalism are unrepresented. The YFS asked respondents which school they had come from, and the great majority had gone to a school in the Bob Jones University/Fundamental Baptist Fellowship orbit. David Cloud, whose spaceship spends most of its time in a neighboring orbit (and many of whose forays into the BJU/FBF orbit come in the form of 1611 phaser blasts), has pointed out that multiple schools were not represented, including Fairhaven Baptist College, Crown College,

Ambassador Baptist College, Hyles-Anderson Baptist College, and West Coast Baptist College.⁶

The survey’s organizers did not purposefully leave out students from other schools, but because the survey was advertised by word of mouth and faculty recommendation, and because word of mouth takes time to jump orbits, none of these young fundamentalists took part in the YFS. The three schools which graduated the largest number of respondents are Bob Jones University (29% of all respondents who had completed an undergraduate degree did so at BJU), Northland Baptist Bible College (21%), and Maranatha Baptist Bible College (22%).⁷

Add to the fray 350 feminine voices, whose views are no less valuable than those of their male counterparts but whose influence is likely to be felt differently than that of future pastors. Their training, too, is somewhat less likely to be focused primarily on theology.

One last reason that the results of the YFS need to be examined closely before they are relied upon is that, as with any poll, some respondents did not appear to be giving much thought to their replies. Here are a few extended examples:

⁶ Cloud also noted that the focus of the study seemed to be upon those who have gone to school somewhere. What about those young fundamentalists who aren’t in Christian colleges—or in any college? An answer to Cloud’s question seems simple: Those people will be of much lesser consequence in the direction of fundamentalism than those who have gone to school, both because educated people rise to leadership positions and because very few fundamentalist churches are willing to have totally uneducated pastors.

⁷ Other schools that were represented in the survey with as many as 5% or more of respondents as students or graduates were Faith Baptist Bible college & Theological Seminary, Piedmont Baptist College, Pensacola Christian College (whose students, along with those of Piedmont, appear to have been transferring to other schools to finish their undergraduate degrees, according to survey results), Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, Puerto Rico Baptist College, International Baptist College, and Clearwater Christian College.

- 837 respondents plan in ten years to be in the process of raising a godly family, yet only 765 respondents plan to be active in a “good, Bible-teaching church.” Some respondents must have failed to note or understand the question’s instruction to “check all that apply.” Should we conclude from such a disparity that a statistically significant percentage (a bit under 7%) of young fundamentalists hope to raise a godly family without going to church?⁸
- On the question of fundamentalist identity (No. 34), how many of the nearly 100 people who said that one who holds to Baptist doctrine “cannot be a fundamentalist” meant that? And if they believed that, why did only half that number say that one cannot be a fundamentalist if he calls himself a “Baptist”? How about the approximately 65 people who said that ecumenical evangelism a la Billy Graham is a requirement if one is to be called a fundamentalist?
- Just a little over half of respondents indicated that they have concerns about the direction of liberal evangelicalism. And only a few less have concerns about the direction of mainstream evangelicalism—when its own leaders are calling conferences trumpeting their concern! Nearly as many, but still only half of respondents, have concerns about the direction of the Southern Baptist Convention. And over 400 of the 1100+ respondents have concerns about the Sword of the Lord, just 168 fewer than had concerns about liberal evangelicalism! It seems that these young people were bewildered by the choices and picked only the things they were familiar with.

These are all indications that the questions in this survey should be thought through carefully before any of the answers are taken with less than several grains of salt.

⁸ Other interesting results show that respondents weren’t thinking: 200 respondents failed to check that they would allow a piano in their church services.

Of course, no large, subjective survey can perfectly assess its intended audience. The mere fact that someone has been asked to think about something by a survey may change what his answer would have been had he not been asked. Perhaps one thing the YFS organizers could have done to avert misreadings of the results would be to provide on each question the number of respondents who made no reply to that particular question.

Current thoughts and trends

What overall trends does the YFS reveal after the pie charts and graphs have been sprinkled with the salt above?

Some of the results were predictable:

- Most (73%) were schooled in a Christian environment (Christian school or homeschool).
- A comfortable majority (84%) believe in the perseverance of the saints.
- Over 800 of the respondents were willing to identify themselves as cessationists when it comes to tongues speaking. Charismatic views were definitely in the minority.
- Nearly 900 respondents elected six-day creationism as their preferred view on earth’s origins.
- 79% of respondents are premillennialists and 83% are pretribulationists.

Some responses were shocking, however:

- 11% of fundamentalists believe in annihilation rather than eternal, conscious punishment of the wicked.
- 16% of fundamentalists believe that those who have never heard Jesus’ name can still be saved.
- Over 100 respondents, nearly one in ten Fundamentalists, were willing to say that “the biblical account of the origin of the world is intended to be symbolic and not literal”—

even when given the option of six literal days?

- 42 respondents do not plan to be attending church in ten years.
- Almost three quarters, 72.4%, believe the Lord will return during their lifetimes.

It is difficult to imagine how survey-takers could have misunderstood the questions above, most of which offered pre-written responses.

Evaluation of these shocking replies will come in due course; first let's turn to individual issues.

Bible translations

Responses reveal a great amount of confusion over the version issue—perhaps even among those who wrote the survey. A question regarding which Greek text respondents prefer listed SEVEN different response options, but three were essentially the same thing (the eclectic, Westcott-Hort, and UBS). Confusion over the issue is evident in the full 1/3 of respondents who simply did not know which text they preferred as well as in the number who picked anything other than the TR and the eclectic. Surely few of the 150 people who picked the Majority Text really know what the Majority Text is.⁹ In addition, the 37 people who chose Westcott-Hort were very likely either joking or unknowledgeable regarding biblical textual criticism. And the split between the eclectic text and the UBS makes no sense: the UBS is an (and practically the) eclectic text.

More confusion shows up in the question about the KJV issue. It is sad but understandable considering the current spate of misinformation that about a fifth of respondents consider the KJV the best translation available. It is unfortunate that

⁹ And which Majority Text did the respondents mean? How many of them actually know that there are more than one? Maurice Robinson has made a reasoned case for the Majority Text (scholars have tended to agree that Hodges and Farstad's case is not quite so well reasoned), but I doubt many of the respondents were thinking of Robinson when they chose the Majority Text.

only half of respondents were willing to affirm the simple truisms “the KJV has mistakes in the translation” and “the original manuscripts are the only manuscripts that were without error; all translations have some errors in them.”

Regarding new translations, the ESV has apparently struck a chord among young fundamentalists. When asked which versions they would use if they started a church, respondents showed that the ESV approaches the currency of the much older NKJV, and could one day bid fair to overtake the more popular NASB. Of course, 43%, the largest group by far, would use the KJV. The question could not assess whether these men really believe the KJV is the best option or broader pressures are pushing them to use a translation they do not believe is best.

Music

Somewhere between 300 and 600 respondents sometimes listen to “secular rock music (rock, pop, country, etc.).” The question makes it hard to tell how many listen, though only 401 said they never listen to those types of music. Only 284 said they never listen to contemporary Christian music.

Gender roles

133 respondents said women should have no leadership over men even in society (forgetting, perhaps, about Deborah), only 666 think women may speak publicly in a church business meeting, and just 12 would allow a woman to be a senior pastor. Yet 111 respondents said that women can have all the same roles as men. Perhaps at this question (no. 48), too, there was some confusion over what it meant to “check all that apply,” because some answers are contradictory.

Christian education

Students do have an appreciation for their Christian school teachers. 75% of them are above average in their teaching! However, a full quarter of respondents who went to Christian school say they would not do it again if they had the chance. And, perhaps worse for the movement, only half of respondents would recommend their Christian

school enough to put their own kids in it. Almost a third of respondents were unsure quite where they would put their kids.

Evangelists

The YFS reveals a negative view of evangelists among respondents. A substantial number of respondents see problems in the preaching of fundamentalist evangelists, and nearly half are unwilling to say that the preaching of most fundamentalist evangelists “is healthy for believers” (No. 49). A significant number, about a third of respondents, are not even sure they would have an evangelist into their churches—or are sure they would not.

Cultural co-belligerence

Co-belligerence with Catholics on issues such as abortion is a difficult topic for young fundamentalists, with respondents nearly evenly split into the five possible categories of strongly agreeing, somewhat agreeing, neutral, mildly disagreeing, and strongly disagreeing.

Moral decline in America

Young fundamentalists, in a fill-in-the-blank question, picked apathy and worldliness as the top problems among the Christians of their generation. They followed those up with lack of conviction, absence of personal holiness, lack of evangelistic effort and fervor, legalism, overreaction to problems in fundamentalism, and technology.

As for America’s moral decline as a whole, respondents were asked to finger a culprit, either the Church, Hollywood, Public Education, the Family, or Media. At first glance it looks as though the common fundamentalist belief in depravity, man’s basic badness, causes respondents to lay the blame for America’s moral decline squarely at the feet the family. However, if the “Hollywood” and “Media” choices are put together—as they should be for a question like this—it becomes apparent that young fundamentalists view popular entertainment as the most damaging influence upon American culture.

Fundamentalist effectiveness at addressing issues
Young fundamentalists have a dim view of fundamentalism’s ability to address current issues. They see their leaders as good at saying why homosexuality is wrong and at pointing out religious apostasy, but as for being stewards of the environment or getting involved in the political process, most young fundamentalists think their leaders are doing an average job or worse.

Alcohol

Young fundamentalists have not been convinced by their leaders that they should totally abstain from alcoholic beverages. At least 830 respondents believe abstinence either to be commanded by the Bible or to be the best course even if it is not explicitly biblical (unless some of them inadvertently picked both of these mutually exclusive answers).

Fundamentalism and separation

Perhaps at the heart of the discussion about and among young fundamentalists is the doctrine which tends to be fundamentalism’s real distinctive, separation. The YFS asked several questions about separation, and some of the answers are surprising for people who have studied at fundamentalist institutions.

About 150 respondents don’t think separation from disobedient brethren is a necessary part of what it means to be a fundamentalist, and nearly 100 each don’t think the five fundamentals¹⁰ of the faith or the inerrancy of Scripture and willingness to battle for it are worth separating over. Respondents were evenly divided over secondary separation from evangelicals. It seems that young fundamentalists want to make a statement that they have not been persuaded as to the necessity of separation.

A solid majority, however, especially among those who desire to be senior pastors, believe that they can give a biblical apologetic on their view of separation. If discussion in Internet chat rooms

¹⁰ These are left undefined.

and at seminary lunch tables belies this, it is still young fundamentalists' self-perception.

The responses to one question leap out at any older, convinced fundamentalist: Only a little over half of the respondents to the YFS plan to stay in fundamentalism.

From pie charts to praxis

What can those convinced fundamentalists do to keep their movement from faltering in the next generation? The YFS provides some answers through written responses and statistical analysis:

- Christian schools need to improve academics and pay for teachers, emphasizing spiritual growth more heavily as opposed to external standards of conduct.
- Christian colleges must keep teaching basic doctrine so young fundamentalists don't pick neo-orthodox answers in surveys! Even if they've never read a neo-orthodox theologian, heretical views are leaching into them from other sources.
- Spiritual leaders and parents must continue to face the immorality which sadly, but not unexpectedly, fills the lives of some and tempts many others. Many respondents struggle against sexual sins.
- Evangelists appear to face an uphill battle for legitimacy. Perhaps all evangelists should consider carefully the objections respondents raised to their ministries.
- Preachers are generally well-regarded when it comes to their weekly task of sermonizing. Most respondents have a positive view of their pastors' preaching. But many have criticisms as well. These predominated:
 - Get your preaching points and truths from the text you're preaching, make sure your hermeneutics are accurate.
 - Do not preach your own opinions. Do not go too long.

Of course, every individual in fundamentalism has something different to learn from such an expansive survey. Approached thoughtfully, the

information contained in the YFS's sharp-looking charts and graphs—available for free in PDF format—can help readers of all stripes.

It is the nature of a survey like this to show the weaknesses in fundamentalism. Fundamentalist leaders who read the YFS results should not be irrepressibly discouraged, however. There are signs of life, even the life of the Spirit.