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Fundamentalism and the Way

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The question of fundamentalism produced in recent years a vast amount of books. Both popular and academic, these by now represent a huge body of knowledge attacking the subject, as it were, from multiple angles and approaches: social scientific, psychological, historical, and analytical. This is of course a generalization, but what I take away from my readings is number of key principles with which I tend to agree, but which at the same make me ask some new questions about fundamentalism. The first one is: What is the relationship between fundamentalism and religion? The quintessential way in which we identify and classify fundamentalists is by establishing their religiosity. There are many people and movements that advocate all sorts of ideas, but we usually do not call them “fundamentalist” if they are not religious, unless they seem virtually religious in their fervor. *Chicago Fundamentalism*, a book about the so-called Chicago School of economists, frames this group of social scientists – who are by definition secular – as religious. The author begins by citing their disregard of history and of facts, and then states, and I quote: “Economics became a battle zone representing an archetypal struggle between good and evil.”¹ In other words, “fundamentalism” is so intimately attached to religion, so that even in this secular instance invoking the term fundamentalism requires also establishing religiosity.

A second question is the relationship between fundamentalism and violence and intolerance. Almost always, the way in which we identify fundamentalists is that they are violent and intolerant. Violence, writ large, is seen as a key hallmark of fundamentalism; the most forceful vehicle through which fundamentalists express themselves. I do not think I need to demonstrate this point with examples. Yet there is course plenty of violence in this world, but it is only religious violence that carries the title fundamentalism. We do not call people who attack laboratories where animal testing is carried out “fundamentalists.” But people who attack or demonstrate in front of abortion clinics are known as such.

Third is the tormented relationship between fundamentalism and modernity. Fundamentalists are often labeled as people who represent religion’s “failure to embrace modernity.” Malise Ruthven’s *Fundamentalism: A Very Short Introduction* cites a letter sent to Ruthven in the wake of the July 7th, 2005 atrocity in which three young British Muslims committed a suicide attack, killing 53 people and wounding hundreds more. Its writer, a curator at the British Museum, writes:

¹ Craig Freedman, *Chicago Fundamentalism* (Singapore: World Scientific, 2008), p. 6.

Crucially, [these attacks] allowed me to realize that whatever the motive cause was that drove these young men to kill themselves and take too many others with them, the key context where we need to look for understanding is not 'Islam,' but the failure of traditional religion to encompass modernity.²

This is true; and I particularly applaud the curator's care in distinguishing between Islam and traditional religion in general – with which latter, in his view, fundamentalism is linked. But if fundamentalism is about religion's failure to encompass modernity, what are we to make of the fact, for instance, that fundamentalists use modern technologies in order to spread their word or launch attacks.

Yet there is something to the idea that fundamentalists are suspicious of modernity: fundamentalists commonly insist on the idea of return and restoration. They are concerned with "returning" to a more correct way of life. They seem to repeatedly claim that something has gone fundamentally wrong and that we all – Christians, Jews, and Muslims alike – have gone astray. It is of course impossible to explain or generalize what is it that fundamentalists want all of us to return to. So I limit myself to asking a more basic question: What is a fundamental? If we say that fundamentalists are people who adhere to certain religious fundamentals, we need to explain what is a fundamental. Otherwise the statement is nothing but an empty tautology.

In the remaining time, I would like to offer a reflection about these questions. I am fully aware of its limitations and hasten to say that what I offer is not a coherent or comprehensive analysis of fundamentalism. What I would like to do instead is approach the question of fundamentalism using the Talmudic manner for discussing and clarifying things known as *Pardes*. The Hebrew word *Pardes* is probably the word from which the English word *paradise* comes, and appears in all monotheist scriptures in reference to the Garden of Eden. In Talmudic culture, however, it is an acronym formed from the names of the four approaches to texts: **Peshat** – "plain," or "simple"; the literal meaning of text. **Remez** – an "allusion"; "hints" relating to the hidden or symbolic meaning beyond just the literal level. **Derash**, which refers to the analogical that is, the comparative meaning. And finally, **Sod** – "secret," which is the mystical meaning, as given through inspiration or revelation. P-R-D-S, *Pardes*. So my *Pardes* today is very different paradise than the one some fundamentalists like to offer.

Let us turn to **Peshat**. We begin with one plain and simple definition of fundamentalism. The *Webster's New World Dictionary* defines fundamentalism as "religious beliefs based on a literal interpretation of the Bible." This is of course not the whole story but it does point to the very first instance in which the term fundamentalism was used in this context. As is well known, Fundamentalism takes its name from *The Fundamentals: A Testament to the Truth*, a huge book that is a series of tracts aiming at protecting the faith from evils such as modern Liberalism. A collective undertaking of British and American Protestant conservative theologians in America, the book was composed between 1910 and 1915. Many scholars today identify the origins of this specific movement in earlier stages within Protestantism. But certainly this book is the moment when the connection between the notion of religious fundamentals and the need to protect them that is so crucial to fundamentalist thinking is born. And that moment was almost all about scripture. As is well known, the book's main concern is scripture's truth and authenticity. Its contributors were particularly concerned with the dangers that higher criticism, the historical-critical method of reading the bible, posed to scripture and to the faith. One contributor, Dyson Hague (1857-1935), a Canadian evangelical Anglican theologian, thus sums up the problem and its solution:

But we desire to stand with Christ and His Church. If we have any prejudice, we would rather be prejudiced against rationalism. If we have any bias, it must be against a teaching which unsteadies heart and unsettles faith. Even at the expense of being thought behind the times, we prefer to stand with our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in receiving the Scriptures as the Word of God, without objection and without a doubt. A little learning, and a little listening to rationalistic theorizers and sympathizers may incline us to uncertainty; but

² Ruthven, *Fundamentalism*, p.1.

deeper study and deeper research will incline us to the [...] profoundest conviction of the authority and authenticity of the Holy Scriptures, and to cry, “Thy word is very pure; therefore Thy servant loveth it.”³

We take from the dictionary’s plain definition a crucial connection between undoubting belief in Scripture and fundamentalism. That is indeed plain and simple, as any *peshat* interpretation might suggest. But it is of course a simple definition for a very profound religious experience. As Hague says “deeper study and deeper research will incline us to the [...] profoundest conviction of the authority and authenticity of the Holy Scriptures.” We can also learn from the book which “fundamentals” its various authors considered most important: the divine of authorship of the bible, the various revelations, the virgin birth, etc. Yet we still need to ask what it is in the fundamental that drives the fundamentalist to stand up and cry, “Thy word is very pure; therefore Thy servant loveth it”?

Next, *Remez* a deeper level of understanding that is hinted at or alluded to. An important clue lies in a translation of the word fundamental into Chinese, made centuries ago by the famous Jesuit missionary to China, Matteo Ricci. Ricci was one of the very first Christian missionaries to China, arriving there in 1582. He is also one of the very first Sinologists as well, well versed in the Chinese classics. More importantly for us, Ricci is the first Christian who tried to explain Christianity to the Chinese in a systematic way using Chinese words and concepts. The choices he made when he translated texts and concepts into Chinese might therefore teach us a lot. At the very least, they give an important clue, or *remez*, regarding what concerns us today. We find this clue in the Chinese character *yao*, which Ricci used for the word “fundamental” in a book he published in 1605: *Fundamental Christian Teachings*, or *Tianzhujiào yào* (天主教要). There are many words in classical Chinese that might make a better choice for the word “fundamental,” and Ricci was well aware of them. For instance, in his famous catechism the *Tianzhu shiyi* 天主實義 or the *True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, Ricci speaks of the “fundamental Lord of things,” that is God, and uses another, better, term, *zhu* 主 “main,” for “fundamental.”⁴ But when it came to the fundamentals of religion, Ricci used the term *yao*.

It certainly carried a great deal of weight for him. Ricci’s colleague Michele Ruggieri (1543-1607), had used the same character *yao* in 1593 when he translated the ten commandments. *Yao* there appears, and it is already an unusual choice for it was not necessary, as the first word in the first commandment *Thou shall have no other gods but me*.⁵ But what is the meaning of *yao* in Chinese? In modern Chinese it is commonly used simply for wish, will, or intention, as in “I want” or “I intend.” But in classical Chinese it carries many more meanings: “important,” “necessary,” “to require,” “to need.” The same character read slightly differently in a different tone also means: “to agree,” “to demand,” “to force.” There is one combination of characters, *yaozhi* 要之, where *yao* could also mean “to summarize,” which would have made sense for Ricci’s fundamentals; but Ricci avoided using it and used *yao* alone. I think he wanted to convey something deeper than just a summary. Let us imagine that we peek over Ricci’s shoulder as he tries to explain to the Chinese – using their own terms – not only the specific fundamentals of Christianity but also what a is “religious fundamental.” It seems as if Ricci wanted to convey all these meanings: a fundamental is important, necessary, demanding, forcing.

Interestingly enough, Ricci later tied the character *yao* to Islam in an essay he wrote on mnemonic strategies. There, he made a connection between *yao* and a “Muslim women coming from the West,” and built on this

³ Dyson Hague, “The History of the Higher Criticism,” in *The Fundamentals: A Testament to the Truth*, vol. 1. Ch. 5, p. 120.

⁴ Matteo Ricci, Douglas Lancashire, Kuo-chen Hu, and Edward Malatesta. *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven = Tianzhu Shiyi*. Series I--Jesuit primary sources, in English translations, no. 6. Taipei: Institut Ricci, 1985, pp. 86 (Chinese), 87 (English).

⁵ Jonathan D. Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* (New York, N.Y.: Viking Penguin, 1984), pp. 93-95. Spence does not discuss Ruggieri’s choices so see also Ruggieri’s actual translation and the relevant part (要誠心奉敬一位天主，不可祭拜別等神像). This translation is different from the standard Chinese translation today that does not include *yao* (除了我以外，你不可有別的神).

connection to imply a relationship between *yao* and all Abrahamic faiths.⁶ Two decades after Ricci's time, two Islamic texts appeared in China with the word *yao* for "fundamental" in their titles. The first to appear was the *sipian yaodao* 四篇要道 or "Fundamentals of four chapters," a translation of a medieval Persian about the Shi'i doctrine of *ta'lim*, or Authoritative Instruction, known simply as the Four Chapters (*chahar fassl*). Its original author, Hassan I-Sabbah is actually quite known. He is the founder of the mystery cult known as the Hashashiyun, or Assassins, a cult within Shi'i Islam whose members, all trained killers, were known for their fondness of systematic elimination of opposing figures.⁷ The second book was the *Guizhen yaodao* 歸真要道 or "Fundamentals of Returning to the Truth," an translation of an important Sufi work. The two Muslim authors, educated natives of China, were familiar with Ricci's work and were undoubtedly borrowing his usage of *yao*. But they introduced a crucial twist--instead of just *yao* for "fundamental," they used the term *yaodao* (要道) adding the character *dao* to the term *yao*. *Yaodao* in modern Chinese is usually used in transportation and traffic jargon and means "main way." But in classical Chinese it carries great import. The phrase *yaodao* appears in the ancient Chinese Classic *Xiaojing* 孝經 or *Book on Filial Piety* where it means "Rule of Conduct" or "Crucial Doctrine." The term *yaodao* was rarely used by Chinese scholars at the time when these two Islamic texts were composed. Thus it is clear that the authors were making a careful choice, following Ricci and adding to him, when they considered the meaning of the term "fundamental."

We have already clarified what cargo the term *yao* brings with it. But what about *dao*? "Dao" is actually quite familiar to Western ears. It is the famous "way" or "path" that is central in most East Asian religions and philosophies. It is what we sometimes call "Tao," as in the *Tao of Pooh*. And it is the "Do" in the Japanese term "*Bushido*" 武士道 or the "Way of the Warrior": a code of honor emphasizing virtues such as loyalty, honor, obedience, duty, filial piety, and self-sacrifice. Interestingly enough, the term *Bushido* itself, though referring to very ancient code, is in fact quite young. It was most probably coined in 1899 by Nitobe Inazo, a Japanese covert to Episcopal Protestantism (later he became a Quaker) and a resident of Philadelphia. In his *Bushido: The Soul of Japan*, first published in English and only later Japanese, Nitobe sought to distill and recover the traditional Japanese way as he saw it.⁸

This Japanese example helps us understand what the Muslim authors of the 17th century wanted to convey by making the term "way" part of word "fundamental." Indeed the term "way" is crucial also in Abrahamic religions. Our scriptures, think of the psalms, often talk about "he who walks the right path." In Islam there is a wonderful word for this kind of person—a *Rashid*, from the Arabic verb *Rashada* which means: "walked the right Path." The *Rashid*, as in Harun al-Rashid, walks the right path because he is Rightly Guided by god. The first four caliphs in Islamic history, those who were personal friends of the Prophet and whose pure faith is never questioned are collectively known as Al-Rashidun, the "rightly guided," or those who walk the right path. Similarly, in the *Acts of Apostles* chapter 19, verse 9, we read about people who quarreled with St. Paul and "were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that Way before the multitude." In order to protect the way, Paul, quote, "*departed* from them, and *separated* the disciples." The Way therefore is an important tool with which people imagine their religious life, but also decide who is with them and who is not. It is a life of walking a certain right path, and also of separating and departing. This view allows us a glimpse of what the Chinese Muslim authors might have been thinking when they added the term "way" to Ricci's "fundamentals." They could not imagine the "fundamental" without the notion of "way." In concluding our *Remez*, or allusion, we can say that the term *yaodao* alludes to the idea that a religious fundamental is closely related to an important, necessary, demanding and forcing--**Way**.

⁶ This is Spence's interpretation, which I embrace. Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* (New York, N.Y.: Viking Penguin, 1984), pp. 95-98.

⁷ The *Chahar Fassl* (In Arabic, al-fusul al-arba'a), was written by the important Persian theologian Hasan Sabbah (1050-1124) during a period of war. On the Assassins see Bernard Lewis, *The Assassins: a Radical Sect in Islam* (New York: Basic Books, 1968).

⁸ Inazō Nitobe, *Bushido: The Soul of Japan: an Exposition of Japanese Thought* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1905).

These clues bring me to my **Derash**, to a comparative intellectual exercise that may help us understand another thing about fundamentalism. I take as point of departure the story of King Josiah, who ruled the kingdom of Judah in the second half of the 7th century BCE (649-609). The book of Kings is the main source about Josiah's career. It gives an important clue right from the start: each righteous king in the Bible is referred to as one who "did what was right in the eyes of the LORD as his ancestor David." This is a standard phrase that occurs plenty of times in the Bible. Josiah is a righteous king all right, but he stands out. The authors of the book of Kings tell us of him that "He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD and followed completely the *ways* of his father David, *not turning aside to the right or to the left.*" Josiah is the only King who is described as walking in David's path. The inclusion of the phrase the "ways of David" and the insistence that Josiah NEVER "turned aside to the right or to the left," send us a powerful message. Josiah is not just righteous. He is a *Rashid*. The ultimate *Rashid*. Indeed, the very first conscious *Rashid* in the history of Abrahamic faiths.

This ties Josiah to what I just discussed in the Chinese context, but I would like also to tie him to the earlier *Peshat*. Josiah, as is well known, is most famous because of what scholars call the Deuteronomic Reform, a moment during which scripture was written or, as the Bible has it, discovered at the temple in Jerusalem. We need not enter into this debate right now; I'll just emphasize that it is under Josiah's reign that the word of God appears for the first time in the history of monotheism not as a vision or speech but as a specifically written word. It is during his time that we first encounter the writing God, as we read in Exodus (32:16) "And the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tables." Historically speaking, it is no wonder that the writing god appears during Josiah's time: scholars tell us that at that time literacy in Judah reached a new height and Scribal culture in Jerusalem became dominant.⁹

So what happened during Josiah's time? The book of Kings tells that he was put on the throne at the age of eight after his father Amon, who had been on the throne for less than two years, was murdered by a certain faction in Judah. Josiah's grandfather was king Manasseh, a king that the Bible loves to hate for his idolatry. But he is also the king under whose reign Judah enjoyed the longest period of peace in the history of this region down to this day. Manasseh reigned for fifty-five years with unusual political skill. He maintained internal stability by allowing religious pluralism – which is code for idolatry – in Judah, and managed to have a good relationship with the global empire to the East, Assyria. Assyria, let us remember, was the destroyer of the northern kingdom of Israel in 721 BCE, and even laid siege to Jerusalem in 701, just before Manasseh was put on the throne. The siege failed but Manasseh knew well not to mess with the empire. He even adopted some of the Assyrian cults and introduced them in Jerusalem, for which he earned the title "wicked," along with the eternal wrath of the biblical authors.

His grandson Josiah is different. When he was eighteen he ordered the restoration of the temple and something dramatic happened: Hilkiah the high priest emerges from the temple declaring: "I have found the Book of the Law in the temple of the LORD." He gives the book to Shaphan, the royal scribe, who reads it and reports to the king. Upon hearing the news, the king tears his garment and sends his scribes to speak to the people: Tell "all Judah about what is written in this book that has been found. Great is the LORD's anger that burns against us because those who have gone before us have not obeyed the words of this book; they have not acted in accordance with all that is written there concerning us." The finding of the book triggers a train of events centered on destroying and purifying. Josiah first declares the "renewal" of the covenant with god: "The king stood by the pillar and renewed the covenant in the presence of the LORD – to follow the LORD and keep his commands, statutes and decrees with all his heart and all his soul, thus confirming the words of the covenant written in this book." Then Josiah rushes from one corner of the country to the other smashing and burning and destroying all that is not according to the book. The peak is reached when Josiah turns against what his great ancestor the great King Solomon did: "The king also desecrated the high places that were east of Jerusalem [...] the ones Solomon king of Israel had built for Ashtoreth the vile goddess of the Sidonians, for

⁹ See Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2007); and William M. Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book: The Textualization of Ancient Israel*, (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

Chemosh the vile god of Moab, and for Molek the detestable god of the people of Ammon. Josiah smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles and covered the sites with human bones." When the destruction of everything that is not according to the book is over, Josiah declares it Passover, the ultimate sign of redemption. We have enough clues in the text suggesting that this is indeed the first Passover ever celebrated, the first redemption: Quote: "Neither in the days of the judges who led Israel nor in the days of the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah had any such Passover been observed. But in the eighteenth year of King Josiah, this Passover was celebrated to the LORD in Jerusalem." But we must remember that all of this is presented as a "return," a renewal, a restoration of a right path that had once existed.

After Passover, Josiah turned against everything else that was left. He "got rid of the mediums and spiritists, the household gods, the idols and all the other detestable things seen in Judah and Jerusalem. This he did to fulfill the requirements of the law written in the book that Hilkiah the priest had discovered in the temple of the LORD."

Here we have it. Josiah's way of doing things, of making everyone walk the right path, is just as Matteo Ricci chose to explain "fundamental": important, necessary, demanding, and forcing.

Since this is the part, *derash*, where analogies and comparisons are made we should ask: isn't this episode the epitome of what fundamentalists do? Blowing up giant Buddhas in Afghanistan and declaring it a moment of redemption; placing the tablets in front of a US court and calling it a resurrection, dreaming of blowing up the mosques on Temple Mount so that the Third Temple descend on it from the sky. Being so sure that the word coming out of you mouth and not anybody else's is the word of god. Josiah is not only the first Rashid, he is also the first fundamentalist.

Let us remember, again, that this is the very first moment in history that the word of God appears as written word. The repeated mention that Josiah does all that he does in accordance with a written book sends us the powerful message that scripture, and the idea of scripture, is behind all this uncompromising campaign. This episode is so powerful that many centuries later the Talmudic sages said that when Hilkiah found the book it was open to the verse: "Cursed is anyone who does not uphold the words of this law by carrying them out." Isn't this the ultimate fundamentalist justification for killing in the name of god? That anyone who does not uphold the law (as *they* understand it) is cursed?

Not everyone in Jerusalem at the time was so sure about the written word of God. Standing in front of the scribes, the Prophet Jeremiah, whose devotion to God is unquestionable, utters one of the most enigmatic phrases of his entire career: "How can you say, 'We are wise, for we have the law of the LORD,' when actually the lying pen of the scribes has handled it falsely?" He cries.

But Josiah was sure of his wisdom. His end gives us further proof that he was the first fundamentalist. Misreading the geopolitical reality, he thought that Assyria, whose power was waning at this point, would not retaliate if Judah conquered the old kingdom of Israel, which had been an Assyrian province for the past century. Sure that God was with him, in 609 he launched an expedition to conquer, rectify, and purify the north. Its embarrassing end came at Megiddo, the place that gave its name to Armageddon. After an initial military success, Josiah ran into the powerful Egyptian Army. The Egyptian Pharaoh Necho II (610-595) was on his way to fight the rising Babylonian empire, Assyria's successor. The Egyptian king fatally wounded Josiah, reminding him that he was nothing but the small king of a small kingdom. The book of Chronicles tells us that the pharaoh was actually reluctant to fight Josiah: "What quarrel is there between you and me, O king of Judah? It is not you I am attacking at this time, but the house with which I am at war. God has told me to hurry; so stop opposing God, who is with me, or he will destroy you." It turns out that the Pharaoh also had god on his side, but Josiah did not listen. He was sure that god was on *his* side, and paid with his life. With his death, Judah too was doomed; though the end took some time arrive.

This is, as I've said, the part where analogies and comparisons are made and one can only lament the comparison between then and now. And yes, I mean Jerusalem, where too many scribes right now are so sure that they are wise, that they have the law of the LORD. Shamefully, a few months ago one such group published a book discussing ways, according to Jewish law, they claim, of killing gentiles – Palestinians, to be sure. They title it, tellingly, *Torat Ha-Melekh*, the law of the king. It is astonishing to think that such a book can be written and published by Jews after the horrors of the 20th century. But this, I hope, is just one extreme example; though less extreme analogies are even more frightening for they are many: There are too many in Jerusalem who are so sure that god is on their side are trying to hold on to territories Israel took by force, completely disregarding and misreading the geopolitical reality and refusing to listen. Those who ask, like Jeremiah, "how can you say we are wise?" are under siege, and some, like Jeremiah himself, are put in prison. What is worse, as in the episode between Josiah and Pharaoh, the leaders of Jerusalem are not the only ones who are so mistaken in thinking they know what god wants; there are others, all over the Middle East, who think they do, too.

Also all over the Middle East we see repeated campaigns to destroy, smash, burn and grind to dust – not only giant Buddhas but also churches, synagogues and mosques. Ironies and stupidity are not missing – the municipality of Jerusalem is at this very moment building a "Museum of Tolerance" on the site of Muslim cemetery.

And now that I must conclude I need to come to the secret, the *Sod*, which is the level of mystical meaning, as given through inspiration or revelation. I am afraid that I have nothing particularly revelatory or mystical to say. Thinking about fundamentalism has showed me that there is a very deep link between the idea of scripture, God's specifically *written* word, and religious violence and intolerance. If you accept my reading of Josiah's story, this link is built into monotheistic religion from the very first moment the word of god appears in writing. This is a depressing realization. But perhaps it can be the basis for fighting fundamentalism. For scripture is not only the problem; it could also be a solution of sorts.

The Talmudic sages insisted that the tablets that Moses broke after he first went to Sinai were placed in the arc of the covenant along with the complete set of tablets he received the second time he went up the mountain. The co-presence of broken tablets in the arc of the covenant should remind us that we should approach god's written word with caution. Furthermore, among the Ten Commandments there is only one that comes with a reward attached to it – honor thy father and your mother, so that your life on earth will be long. But there is also only one commandment, the third, that comes with a punishment attached: "You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name." Honoring parents is what god likes the most. And the misuse of his name is what he most dislikes. But god does not tell us *how* to use his name properly. So we'd do well to be very cautious whenever we *do* use it. Indeed, since the punishment for misuse is so harsh – no acquittal under any circumstances – perhaps we should *never* use it. It seems to me that fundamentalists commonly engage in the one thing that god really dislikes. We should ask them unrelentingly: how can you be so wise?

Finally, if *writing* and the written word is the problem, we should talk – *to* god, and *about* god. The Egyptian Islamic scholar Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd passed away few months ago. He had lived the last decades of his life in exile after being declared a heretic by fellow scholars, among other reasons for his emphasis on the oral dimension of the Qura'nic message. He reminded us that the transmission of the Qur'an was a moment in which god and man communicated orally. If the Qur'an was first and foremost an oral discourse between the Prophet and God, then, and I quote, scripture was "the outcome of dialogue, debate...argument, acceptance and rejection." I think that this view, which forcefully restores the human dimension to the making of scripture itself, applies to *all* scripture. In scripture, it is *we* who talk. Only in remembering this, and in not mistaking our voice for the voice of god, we can avoid misusing his name – for which we will never be acquitted. Perhaps this is one "fundamental" we would do well to keep in mind.

