

THE SHAPE OF ABSOLUTISM

© James C. Alexander
All Rights Reserved

In the previous chapter, we discussed the notion of myth and the role it plays in religion. To reiterate, a myth is another way or form of knowing. (Recall in this book, the term "myth" also refers to many ancient legends and legendary sagas.) In the positivistic sense, one might argue it does not really involve "knowing" at all. There is some validity to this statement. Mythic knowing certainly is not the same as knowing how to replace the deadbolt lock on my front door, and it certainly is not the same as knowing the population of New York City. Still, it arguably does constitute a type of knowing and some important knowing at that. It is narrow-minded to think there is only one way of knowing. That belief is at the heart of the mistake the absolutists make. There is indeed more than one way to know. The types and varieties of knowing differ; still myth does provide a way of knowing that is unique and directive. Remember, one of the main mistakes (*the* main mistake) an absolutist makes is thinking myths are scientifically, empirically verifiable knowledge. In a sense, they fail to recognize more than one type of knowing or, at least, more than one variety of truth.

In this chapter, we want to look at the shape or nature of absolutism. In broad-brush strokes, we wish to paint a picture of what absolutism looks like. It has some definite defining marks that grow out of the confusion of the mythic with the concrete, definite, and largely indisputable. What are some of these defining marks?

Coreno (2002) cites the results of a study of fundamentalists in which he concluded absolutists often share a distinct class culture. This conclusion appears many times in earlier research. There is some evidence that might make us doubt this finding, though it is robust and worth noting. It is a second finding Coreno uncovered, also found in many studies, I consider more typical of absolutism. This finding is that fundamentalists/absolutists share in a fundamentalist subculture.

Of course, it does not take much of scientific inquiry for an observer to arrive at this conclusion. There is an entire subculture involving music (much of it contemporary), "Jesus clothes" and other Jesus memorabilia, specialized publishing concerns, codified phrases and sayings, radio and television, and on and on the list goes. We might even mention there are organizations that provide music and media awards that cater to the absolutist subculture.

One might add to this the Christian counseling services operating largely from a fundamentalist/absolutist perspective. In the town where I live, there is a church that sports a large sign offering free counseling, although certainly this counseling does not involve counselors in the conventional sense. Still, from the church's perspective, the counseling is worth far more than conventional psychotherapy. Furthermore, we must not forget the ever-growing number of private elementary and secondary schools and fundamentalist colleges. Alternative education and alternative educational delivery systems are some of the clear defining points of absolutism.

One of the more amusing aspects of the whole subculture is "Bible mania." I am certain you have seen it. I really gave it little thought until my son, put off by the whole situation, pointed it out to me. Now I realize how right he is. Go into virtually any Christian bookstore, and you will discover Bibles. One would expect that. However, the stores do not simply sell Bibles;

they sell "specialty Bibles." One might find "The Mom's Bible." On the other hand, maybe you might be more interested in the "Dad's Bible." Then, of course there is the "Fisherman's Bible" to take on your next outing. Maybe you need the "Twelve Step Bible." Not enough money for that? Well there is always the "Six Step Bible" for half the price. This is, of course, hyperbole, but not by much. There is a specialty Bible for virtually any need and pocketbook.

What can we deduce from all of this? We can make a few observations. First, the subculture is real. Second, it involves large sums of money. Absolutism is big business. There is no denying that. Lastly, for whatever reason, our absolutist friends feel a need to "come out and be separate," and they put that need into action in many ways.

I recall being in the absolutist subculture as a child. It was well before the days that many of the aspects of the subculture mentioned above emerged. Still, we had our own boys' and girls' organization at the church to indoctrinate us into the fundamentalist mindset. We had our own concerts--in that day, mostly gospel quartets. We had our own youth camps. We had colleges, and, if your parents had the money, you might attend Kansas City Christian School, followed by Calvary Bible College.

Although the Beatles had just landed in the US, boys were to have short hair. Everyone was expected to dress appropriately and similarly for church. Sometimes we would have a movie at the church, such as *A Thief in the Night*, reminding us to be ready at a moment's notice for the rapture. Sunday school was largely a lecture format "back in the day." All of these aspects of the subculture--from children's clubs to the adult Sunday school, from the gospel concerts to the religious movies--served a purpose.

The point of all of this was indoctrination. Bawer (1997, 26- 27) speaks of fundamentalism as a nineteenth century reaction emerging from fear of Darwinism and the Civil War. I am not certain history bears this out in all of its detail, but one point is certain.

Fundamentalism/absolutism is a reactionary phenomenon. It finds unique ways to both engage and avoid the world. Moreover, it constantly uses the subculture to indoctrinate against the world.

When I became part of the ex-hippie Jesus Freak Movement in the early 1970's, our speech made our affiliation apparent. Phrases like "One way," "Truckin' for Jesus," and the constant rumble of "Praise the Lord," "I'm high on God," "Try Jesus, he's real," and "Thank you Jesus" were insider phrases we used as a way of differentiating Christians from the world. Buttons and bumper stickers sporting phrases such as, "Yep, Another Jesus Freak," or "In Case of Rapture, This Car will be Unmanned" were standard fare. You could always tell a fellow Jesus Freak if you met one in the park by the code phrases. Further, I was involved in the Charismatic (neo-Pentecostal) wing of the Jesus Freak Movement and there were certain nuances to our version of the subculture. I recall our leaders went so far as to suggest we join the "Order of the Silly Grin." We would always have a silly grin from constantly praying in tongues under our breaths.

All of this indoctrination and separation had an impact. Rambo (1993, 34) points out not all religions require the absolute abandonment of every other religious option. He goes on to state historically that it is the Abrahamic Faiths--Islam, Judaism, and Christianity--that require complete rejection of all other options. The subculture indoctrination provided a good way to mark separation from all other points of view.

Living in a Christian commune in the early 1970's, my housemates and I were well aware of other religious options; many were available in the neighborhood where the commune was located. Our leaders taught us, in no uncertain terms, that only the absolutist/fundamentalist view of religion was correct. We were encouraged to avoid conversations with those who did not follow the party line. We could only engage with followers of eastern religions to evangelize them. The subculture was a self-contained, indoctrinating, protective shield that kept members from harm.

Moreover, there was plenty of harm out there. There were two basic places we might live our lives. We might live life in the church among co-religionists who inducted us into the subculture, or one might live life in the world. By the term "the world," absolutists do not refer to the grocery store, laundry mat, or the children's park. The world is that place where the ideas of the subculture faced pollution or subversion. Present day absolutists frequently claim that one of the worldliest places one could visit is the public school. They see the enemy everywhere. He is there in the school reading textbooks. He is in the library with its *Harry Potter* novels. He is on PBS with its programs about evolution. The world is in the mainline Protestant denominations. Some would say the world is firmly entrenched in this book. God reigns in the church. The world is the domain of the Prince of Darkness. The name of the game is to get out of the world. Adopt different values. Be part of an alternative culture.

This alternative culture followed the pattern outlined in the Bible. At least that is what our leaders taught us. We were creating a community mirroring that of Peter, Paul, and the apostles. That meant being separate and engaged at the same time. We were to be "in the world but not of it." The world stood before us as an object of evangelism. Our task was to save souls but remain firmly in our subculture. We were ex-hippies. We liked rock music. No problem. Someone came up with the concept of Christian rock. We liked to read novels. There were plenty of thrilling Christian novels packed with both action and moral values. The subculture worked overtime to provide a Christian alternative to the things that might pull us away from Jesus. Moreover, since they closely approximated the worldly version--minus the sinful parts; our subcultural tools and art forms became ways to reach out to the sinful world for Jesus.

Much of the current emphasis on secular and spiritual absolutes in the subculture is a reaction to the world described by science. Absolutists are seeking direction for their answers, actions that can be justified. Since science offers no clear "quest for certainty" in the moral/spiritual realm, the subculture in large measure rejects it. This thirst for the absolute puts absolutism on a collision course with tolerance (Clark 1992). Science often becomes a scapegoat for narrow-mindedness.

I played in a band during my Jesus Freak days. We sang a song entitled *Monkey See, Monkey Do*. The song was a diatribe against science and scientists. The words of the song called scientists dummies because they believed in evolution. There was no tolerance for the evolutionary point of view. Absolutism constantly reminded us that science was to blame for abortions, evolution, and people's lack of belief in the Bible.

I really struggled with this, since evolution made perfectly good sense to me. The leaders told me to "believe my beliefs and doubt my doubts." This happened to be another catchy phrase

from the subculture. I spoke up about the sensibility of evolution a few times but quickly learned to keep my opinions to myself. There was no room for dialogue here. There was an official line on this matter. My only real choice was belief in the doctrines of the absolutist church.

You might ask, "How could you live with such intolerance? Who can dictate what you believe? Don't you just either believe something or not?" Those questions, from an absolutist perspective, do not matter in the final analysis. We choose what we believe. Those that cannot believe cannot claim exemption on judgment day because of their inability to believe. Unbelief is a choice. The teaching declares there are no honest atheists. Here is the evidence: the Bible clearly said that God made everything in seven days. God made Adam out of dust. God made Eve from Adam's rib. Don't I see what the Bible says? It is as plain as the nose on my face. If I still doubted, I can read some books written by Christian scientists that prove everything the Bible says. Never mind if most "worldly scientist" do not consider the work of these "Christian Scientists" to be real science. *God said it! I believe it! That settles it!* (another catch phrase).

From this point of view, what my fellow absolutists believe is just common sense. Forget asking why I should believe the Bible is accurate. After I left the "fold" and attended seminary, where I learned to question everything, I met a classmate in the bookstore. We started talking about class, and he indicated he really did not like all of this questioning I did in class. He had the Bible and that told him what was right and wrong. I tried to get him to see the Bible would not prove anything to anybody who did not already believe it--at least not in the "Thus said the Almighty" sense. However, he could not accept that. Those that could not accept the absolute truth of the Bible were just gullible fools. There was no need to demand proof. All the proof anyone needed was right between the covers of the book. The Bible became a self-contained truth system.

Adelman (1990) writes the following about the relationship of absolutism to the realm of science: "It is often intolerant toward other philosophies, militant in the need to proselytize, and totalitarian in its attempts to silence anyone expressing an opinion which evidences shades of difference from the official line." The same is true about fundamentalism/absolutism in general. It is not just differences concerning science it cannot tolerate. It is difference *period*. There is no room for two opinions. If there are any differences, it is a simple matter. Both views cannot be right. There is no room for relativism. There is no room to say something might be right for one person but not another. Absolutism is right and other views are wrong.

As a child, I remember going to church in the van of the Bible Club Lady who picked me up and drove me there weekly. On the drive, we passed many churches. She was a member of the General Association of Regular Baptists, and that was the destination of our Sunday (actually twice Sunday, Tuesday, and Wednesday) trips. Sometimes I would ask her, "What about THAT church?" The answer was always the same.

"No. Not that one. They baptize babies"

"No. That one doesn't use the King James Bible."

"That one? Not a chance! They speak in tongues."

"That place??? You must be kidding! Why, Jimmy, that's a Catholic Church! They pray to statues, and the pope is the antichrist. Don't ever go in one of those churches!"

Whatever the particular nuance of the subculture dictates is the one and only right way to think, be, and do. I found this very puzzling as a child because my Baptist Church told me repeatedly church membership could not save. Even a member of *my* church must not rely on church membership. Yet the message came through loud and clear: My church had the only truth. No matter how loudly they protested they did not believe my church was the only avenue of salvation, that was always the message I received.

Among the many varieties of fundamentalists/absolutists, the certainty of being right and fear of rule breaking provide the common denominators. One fundamentalist group my wife and I had some association with for a time (yes, I did have a few setbacks--even after leaving) forbade wedding rings. My wife and I thought that was a stupid rule, especially after we visited the health club together one afternoon. The manager asked me where my girlfriend was. I told him Irene was my wife, not my girlfriend. He told me he figured we were unmarried and cohabitating because he noticed we wore no rings.

I left asking myself if the church would rather we wear wedding rings or have people believing we were "living in sin." Therefore, the wedding rings went back on. We were firm about this, and we were not backing down. They stayed on. Well, they almost did.

Irene taught in the school this church operated. The church elders sent a delegation to check on the ring situation. Irene told them our story. It did not matter. The investigators informed her that if she dressed modestly (which she did anyway), folks would not make such mistakes. She attempted again to make her case, but the ring issue became a condition of employment and possibly church membership, so she took it off. One has to ask if the moral victory is not rather hollow when the conquered do not really believe the victors operate from the moral high ground. It seemed a bit to us like they had won a hollow victory. We felt bullied and demoralized.

Certainty and rules make a deadly combination. Years ago, a pillar of the church had an unsettling experience. His son came to him and revealed he was gay. This heartbroken parent discovered his son was hellbound unless he changed his way. "James," he confided to me. "I had a long talk with Bobby, and I really don't think he can help what he is. I do not have all the answers. Looking back, I think he was just born that way. Nevertheless, the elders say he is going to hell. What can I do?"

What words of comfort did I have for him? None. I sympathized with his conflict. Part of me thought God was unfair to send my friend's son to hell. Especially if he just "was" gay. Yet, were the leaders right? Did the young man really pick a life of discrimination and persecution by the righteous? Nevertheless, what could I say? Those were the rules. I did not make them. The church did not make them. God made them. There was no room for dialogue. I wanted to cry. I could do nothing. Bad theology makes for a cruel taskmaster!

Absolutism betrays Christianity in three ways. It replaces historical doctrines with beliefs without root in tradition, reason, or scripture. It replaces the central (Protestant) view of the competency of the individual with a top-down clerical absolutism. Finally, it replaces love with harsh and exacting laws (Bawer 1997, 11). These bold statements demand some commentary.

Historically, one would look long and hard before taking seriously the belief that anyone who

does not agree with what I think is going to hell, a belief held by many absolutists. People in the early church held many views about many things. Most folks were, of course, quite dogmatic about their beliefs. However, one person's dogmatism rarely affected what the other person thought.

There was not uniformity of thought about the way atonement worked, the age for baptism, the number of sacraments, the exact nature of the Eucharist, or even the permanency of hell. In fact, there was not even agreement over the scriptural canon; a debate rekindled during the Reformation. All of this is common knowledge. Any honest church historian would likely admit these things, even if in a qualified way. Orthodoxy was formative in the early centuries of the church, and there were frequent dissenters to the majority view. The absolutist says, "I believe in the Bible alone." Yet the Bible is never alone. It must cope with two- thousand years of interpretation and practice. I will say more about the absolutists and the Bible at a later point. Suffice it for now to say that all three--scripture, tradition, and reason--must be operative when the church reflects on faith and practice.

The competency of the individual and the competence of conscience means little in absolutist churches. Charismatic leaders often dominate churches and sometimes even hold the church property. Often, leaders have no one to whom they must answer for their actions. Without ecclesiastical oversight, a cult of personality often forms, with dictatorial leaders and congregants who meekly follow. After all, the teaching insists that you must do what you are told.

Love often goes by the wayside as rules and certainty move in. The New Testament pictures love operating within the framework of tolerance for differences. The apostle reminds us Christ accepted us and in like manner we should accept one another (Rom. 15:7). A reading of 1 Corinthians 13 should be sufficient to demonstrate that love puts up with all kinds of differences and keeps loving and listening. Sadly, rules and determined certainty can undermine true love.

Rambo (1993, preface) reminds us conversion involves social, personal, religious, and cultural dimensions. It is radical and reaches to the depth of the human predicament. We might add to that thought some points made by Hood et al. (2005, 15-16). Religious fundamentalism provides an overarching way of viewing life that provides a framework for meaning and purpose. For the religious absolutist, religion comprises a total way of life. Further, Hunter (1995, 97) reminds us certainty provides a consistent, permanent measure of goodness, purpose, value, and identity. It informs humanity concerning goodness and truth. It is an absolute sufficient authority applicable to all times and places.

Rambo, Hood et al., and Hunter seem to be focusing on the same point. The experience of becoming and being an absolutist is a central, formative, all-encompassing experience for adherents. Many people in the United States go to church. It is dangerous to judge the experiences of any of those people. We do not know their motivations and we do not know what is taking place in their interior lives.

Nevertheless, it is apparent that many of those folks come to church and just sit. I once had a friend who was a member of a mainline denomination. He attended faithfully. He rarely missed a Sunday. However, when I asked him what the sermon was about, I discovered he had not a clue. If I asked him if the service on any given day was a moving experience, and he

did not really seem to understand the question.

Why did he come? He loved the choir. I am sure this friend had a spiritual depth many never saw. He was honest to a fault. He would help any neighbor in need. He was a good man. I have always respected him. Still, I never quite knew why he went to church.

In the US, this experience of churchgoers occurs frequently. Our society is not nearly as secular as European society. It is, in many respects, as things go in the world, a church-going society. We are a nation of churchgoers. Still, unfortunately, it is difficult to see exactly where religion for many of them intersects their lives.

Not so for our absolutist friends. Although I think there is a better alternative than absolutism, I will give them this: religion affects their whole lives. For some, it becomes an obsession. Devotion is a great thing. I do not think many ministers exhort their congregations to go forth and be lukewarm. No. It simply does work that way. Ministers are in the devotion business. We might wish all church members were as devoted as absolutists.

Nevertheless, therein lies the problem. For many, it far exceeds devotion and crosses into the realm of obsession. There is a word for that. That word is fanaticism.

When I was a Jesus Freak, I thought about religion all day. I witnessed to everybody I met. I found a way to turn every conversation to religion. I argued about it. I spent a lot of time thinking, "I'm right, and they're wrong." I was obsessed. I was a fanatic.

I told the story of my righteous friend, whose church going for no apparent reason puzzled me. I do not think I helped him much. I met him during the deepest depths of my absolutist days. Personally, I think he thought I was a nut. He considered me as a fanatic, although he was far too kind to say so. Whatever I had, he certainly did not want. Fanatics think they are helping the cause of religion, but really, they only serve to alienate folks from religion.

As we will discover later, leaving is not easy. I left the absolutist fold almost thirty years ago. I still find myself thinking in absolutist terms when I am confused or frightened. Then I have to stop and ask myself if I really want to be a fanatic. I think Frkyholm (2006, 25-28) gets to the heart of the matter when she writes that adherents to fundamentalism embrace the absolute with the enthusiasm of a child and, yet, with "careful adult decision."

A look at fundamentalism as a trans-religious phenomenon might be helpful. Thus far, we have spoken only of Christian absolutism/fundamentalism. Yet it is a force present in many of the world's religions. What can we gain by looking at the larger picture? A good bit rings true in Christian absolutism. In a comparison of absolutist/fundamentalist movements among the world's religions (Slackhouse 1985, 769-771), some similarities are noted:

1. When religious people feel the fundamentals of the faith are in danger, fundamentalism becomes a possibility. Today, for example, many absolutists believe American morality is disappearing while the church sits complacently by. They believe they must act to save society while there is still time. This is no time to surrender the absolutes.

2. Fundamentalism appears as a phenomenon of the lower middle-class and lower-classes. Although Stackhouse and many others have made this point, I have encountered research that

would lead to contrary conclusions. However, my personal experience leads me to say there is some truth to this, but it certainly does not paint the whole picture.

3. Fundamentalism tends to be a phenomenon of prophetic religious traditions. It tends to spring up in environments in which the idea of the absolute, undeniable Word of God seems possible. There is little in the way of, for example, Buddhist fundamentalism. This is not to say it is impossible. The environment in which a charismatic figure declares God said this or that is simply more conducive to fundamentalism.

4. Fundamentalism may be left-wing or right-wing in orientation. Still, it must be said, in general, political opinion seems to follow religious opinion. (See the comments below for additional observations I have made relative to this point.)

5. Fundamentalism centers on a holy text. It is a movement of primitivism--an attempt to return to the root of the religion as specified in holy text. It would be hard to have much in the way of an enduring fundamentalism without a sacred text.

6. Enduring fundamentalist religion is difficult to maintain. This is true even in the cases where there is a sacred text. Over the years of Christianity, one can chart times when an absolutist movement has grown, only to wane.

7. Fundamentalism tends to link its version of orthodoxy (right belief) to its version of orthopraxis (right doing). Belief leads, or should lead, to doing. In recent history, we often see this at the ballot box.

Please take special note of item number four. It is easy to think of fundamentalism as representing only the right-wing. Yet, when I spent some years among members of the Mennonite Church, I discovered a few members held to a very absolutist view of the Bible but were quite progressive about peace and justice issues. The combination of absolutism and left-wing views is, I think, quite rare. Still, it is not beyond the realm of possibility.

No matter what the religion or political view, for Kimball (2002, 41-70) the heart of fundamentalism/absolutism is the belief in absolute truth claims. He sees these claims as inflexible, unreasonable, and possibly dangerous. Such claims ignore the mystery of God and religion and press on in naked faith-- faithfully clinging to claims often completely incapable of being tested. Religion does not easily lend itself to much empirical investigation. Since these claims rely on God-language, believers will go far to defend what they believe to be the person of God. While it is dangerous to live without absolute truth, recent history seems to be proving it may be far more dangerous to live with inflexible, absolute truths.

Bawer (1997, 6-7) provides a catalogue of views that might be said to characterize absolutists, which he refers to as "legalistic Christians." His points are worth noting:

1. Legalistic Christians see the big picture concerning God, Jesus and Christianity mostly in terms of vicarious sacrifice, while non-legalistic Christians see the cross in love terms as opposed to forensic terms.
2. Legalistic Christians believe the main concern of Jesus was atonement. His concern was mostly all about appeasing God and getting things right with God. Non-legalistic Christians believe his main concern was to enact and teach love.
3. Legalistic Christians see heaven as the ultimate reward for proper belief. Non-legalistic

- Christians are more concerned with experiencing God's love in the here and now.
4. Legalistic Christians often see God's love as limited and small. God loves only the saved. Non-legalistic Christians believe God loves everyone.
 5. Legalistic Christians see Satan as a real personage and view non-believers (those not like them) as deceived by Satan. Non-legalistic Christians see Satan as a personification of evil that exists in each person.
 6. Legalistic Christians are careful to warn against relying too much on thought or reason. Non-legalistic Christians believe God gave all humans reasoning powers as a gift.
 7. Legalistic Christians believe they can know absolute truth from the Bible. Non-legalistic Christians believe only God possesses ultimate truth.
 8. Legalistic Christians take the Bible in a literal sense. Non-legalistic Christians believe the Bible is best read critically.
 9. Legalistic Christians see very little place for aesthetic values in religious experience. After all, it is not about art you know! Non-legalistic Christians see a place for beauty, mystery, and aesthetics in their experience of God.

In this chapter, we have covered a lot of ground. We have also used several terms, such as left-wing, right-wing, fundamentalist, absolutist, legalistic, and non legalistic. There is one term, however, some might find curiously absent from this discussion of absolutism. That term is "evangelical."

I have consciously avoided that term. My main reason for avoiding it is I do not think I understand it in current usage. Zoba (2005, introduction) points out some evangelicals reject the identification of evangelical believers as fundamentalists. Zoba summarizes Bebbington's list of evangelical distinctives. First, evangelicals share a belief in conversion and embrace the idea of being "born again." Second, evangelicals embrace missionary activity. Third, Biblicism is essential. The Bible is completely true in all it affirms. Lastly, the idea that Christ's death on the cross makes redemption possible distinguishes evangelicalism.

So what should we do with all of this? As I said, I have heard the term used in a multiplicity of ways. Whether the reader regards evangelicals as absolutists will probably depend largely on experiences with self-described evangelicals.

I want to end this chapter with a cautionary note, lest the reader misconstrue the point I am making. None of what I propose in this book aims to detract from the radical nature of the gospel or authentic Christian devotion. As Donald Kraybill (2003) so eloquently points out, the Kingdom of God, which was certainly the burden of Jesus' message, is quite revolutionary. Throughout this book, I repeatedly attempt to demonstrate that the absolutist subculture is a dangerous and indoctrinating one, demanding conformity. This does not imply there is no radical counter-culture proposed in the gospels. Jesus is a radical figure making a call for disciples to forsake the ways of the status quo and follow his way of radical peacemaking, justice, acceptance, and love. So what, then, is the difference between radical discipleship and absolutism? If the absolutist and the non-absolutist both proclaim a call to fully surrendered discipleship, is there any substantive difference?

A review of the sources Krabill (2003, 281-295) cites to make his case is instructive in answering this question. Kraybill, while painting Jesus' call as a call to a radical community of justice and liberation (quite upside-down, as Kraybill describes it), does not shy away from the best in critical research. By not absolutizing the text and by realizing the tentative nature of

our understandings, we become committed and yet free to admit our mistakes. We search for a clearer understanding of Jesus and his message--since that is what is normative to authentic Christian community.

Kraybill (2003, 26) discusses the symbolic nature of the gospel texts and points out that the "Kingdom of God" is a general symbol. It is quite elastic in meaning and open to multiple interpretations that are guided by scholarship, reason, and the Spirit. He goes on to state that the gospels *do not* provide a detailed blueprint for all of our ethics or behavior (p. 31). Absolutism is about a specific subculture with an attitude, or outlook proclaiming that it is always right. This is the distinguishing mark--fanaticism much more than devotion, fear not faith.

Therefore, we see modern scholarship is not something to fear but, rather, something to embrace. Instead of taking the secure, yet arrogant, road--*God said it! I believe it! That settles it!*--we embrace a humbler way that recognizes our limitation, fallibility, the fallibility of our fellow humans--even those who penned the Biblical text--and the need to be fully a part of the human community, always seeking, but refusing to claim that we have arrived.