

*The wicked plots against the just,  
and gnashes at him with his teeth.  
The LORD laughs at him:  
for He sees that his day is coming (Psalm 37:12-13)*



**Fundamentalism and Belief in Divine Humour**

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## Introduction

In the film 'Bruce Almighty', we see God give His responsibilities to Bruce, a seemingly ordinary man who has to figure out very quickly how to manage his new job as Divine Creator of the Universe. It seems that this God, played by Morgan Freeman, does have a sense of humour, and indeed a sense of irony. Divine humour is a potential characteristic of God that has received very little philosophical and theological attention. Nevertheless, the role of humour in fundamentalist movements more generally is of particular significance, and has been researched and investigated by various philosophers of religion, practical theologians, and anthropologists across more recent years. The lack of attention given to humour and divine humour is likely due to the lack of scriptural reference to it, in addition to certain a priori ideas about humour and the nature of God. This in turn limits what we can and cannot say about the holiness of humour, as well as God's own sense of humour. That is not to say that a lack of humour attributed to the Bible is proof that God is not humorous, or that religion and humour are not compatible, only that the nature of the Biblical narrative may leave very little room to showcase humour in general. Perhaps God could only find the funny side on His day of rest.

## Question and Methodology

My question is, what is the relationship between belief in divine humour and religious fundamentalism? There are several possible outcomes of this research question. First, we might find that there is indeed a relationship between divine humour and fundamentalism, and that the more fundamentalist a person's beliefs, the more humorous they become. Alternatively, we might find that the more fundamentalist a person is, the less humour they experience. And finally, we might find that there is no relationship between the two phenomena and that fundamentalist attitudes have no influence on a person's ability to experience humour. I postulate that there is in fact a relationship between fundamentalist beliefs and attitudes, and an inability to experience humour. This may or may not be as a

direct result of the fundamentalist beliefs themselves, but I intend to explore this in later sections.

Investigating this question and its subsidiary questions will be relevant for a wide range of audiences including academics (i.e., philosophers and theologians) as well as religious believers and society at large given the moral and ethical implications that can arise. For academics, my question is important because it looks towards creating a theology of humour, and I investigate the compatibility of humour with other divine attributes such as omnipotence, omnibenevolence, omniscience and so on, in order to better understand humour, or a lack thereof, in God Himself. It will also help us better understand whether humour in God could influence the presence of humour in religious movements more generally.

The key terms and concepts that will prove a vital and significant part of my research are belief and what it means to believe, humour and, more specifically, how to understand humour in God and, of course, fundamentalism. This means that a significant part of my thesis will be dedicated to making terminological advances so that we can come to better understand the nature of these concepts and the relationships between them.

In order to answer this question, I will use critical and conceptual analysis in order to grasp more clearly the definition and function of humour, its influence on our beliefs and identity, and its overall importance in our lives. I will criticise and evaluate different theories of humour, offering strengths and weaknesses of the arguments and evaluating which is most effective. I will then apply the theory to humour in God and evaluate whether there are any obvious examples of divine humour that could play a critical role in transforming the beliefs and identity of a religious person. Similarly, I will also use critical and conceptual analysis in an attempt to develop a working definition of fundamentalism that helps us to distinguish it from other branches of beliefs. In doing so, I will be able to critically evaluate the compatibility of humour and fundamentalism, and grasp more deeply the ramifications of this relationship.

## Relevance

Furthermore, I hope that my question will be relevant for religious believers and faith communities as it offers an opportunity to better understand the nature of religion and the nature of God, particularly how His behaviours and attitudes reflect and influence beliefs themselves, as well as how they affect the behaviour of wider religious communities more generally. With the focus being on fundamentalism, I would hope it would also offer a better understanding of fundamentalist motivations and the ideologies that drive those beliefs, in such a way that religious believers can better understand (and prevent) the evolution of these beliefs within their own communities. Similarly, I think my question will be relevant and important for wider society because of this focus on fundamentalism. Being able to consider possible reasons for and sources of fundamentalist beliefs I think is of vital importance to tackling and preventing such beliefs from developing further and continuing to damage society.

It is based on the reasons I have outlined above that I find humour and divine humour a worthwhile topic to study. Practicing religion can sometimes be associated with being uptight, taking life too seriously, and being unable to let loose and have fun. By investigating the nature of both human and divine humour, I intend to uncover if there is truth to such stereotypes and where they come from. I postulate that a lack of humour and the overall seriousness associated with religion comes not from the nature of religion itself, but from the socio-cultural context within which it is practiced. This means that it is conceivable that seriousness can be separated from religion rather than a deeply ingrained part of it. More importantly, this means there is an opportunity change and reformulation of religious practice that is less inclined towards seriousness, a feature that I will argue brings with it the potential development of fundamentalist beliefs.

This possible separation of religion and seriousness also means that, although I am paying particular attention to Christian fundamentalism, my work will be relevant when taking into account non-religious and multi-deity religious fundamentalisms. By being critical of our own

beliefs and practices, religious or non-religious, we can better understand how they develop, how they influence us, and how we can reformulate them to avoid problematic behaviours and uncritical belief that are often left unchecked and unchallenged.

## Overview

In the first section of my thesis, I intend to explore the very nature of humour. I will investigate how we define humour as a society and the role it plays in our lives, paying particular attention to how humour can influence the development of both personality and rationality. A theory of humour is necessary for my argument because it gives a clear framework for understanding humour in the divine, which in turn allows us to critically evaluate the relationship between humour in God and its potential influence on religious beliefs, particularly fundamentalist ones. It may seem unnecessary to consider the *actual* humour of God rather than what fundamentalists merely believe about the humour of God, but I think it is important to consider the logical and practical implications of such a belief in order to assess its influence and how it is perceived more generally. To develop such a theory, I will consider pre-existing theories of humour present within the philosophical and psychological literature such as superiority, incongruity, and relief, amongst others, alongside different proposed styles and subtypes of humour, with the aim of developing an account of humour that I can use in the second section of my thesis to develop a theory of *divine* humour. The psychological literature will be particularly relevant for understanding both the influence of humour and the motivations behind fundamentalism. I will pay close attention to the social theory of humour, an account that I feel is often overlooked within the philosophical literature. Overall, I conclude despite the somewhat helpful contributions of incongruity, humour can be better understood using a family resemblance concept. I also add that laughter is a sufficient condition for humour, even if it is not a necessary one. In the second section of my thesis, I apply this account of humour to the divine. I evaluate the limited scriptural evidence for divine humour and investigate whether humour and divinity are in any way compatible in light of the comments I make in section one regarding incongruity.

Humour itself seems to be a very humanising experience, so my question is, can that experience be translated into an experience in the Divine? In addition to this interpretation of divine actions, I consider the compatibility of humour with key divine attributes such as omniscience, omnipotence, omnibenevolence and, more controversially, omnisubjectivity. I ultimately conclude that divine humour plays a necessary role in sustaining God's reputation as an omniscient and omnipotent being, but not as an omnibenevolent one. What I mean by this is that divine humour is a necessary aspect of omniscience and omnipotence, so much so, that without divine humour, God could be considered neither omniscient nor omnipotent.

In the third section of my thesis, I consider how the representations of divine humour, as well as their interpretations, may play a role in how we experience humour in our everyday lives. More specifically, I investigate whether or not a lack of explicit divine humour in scripture and otherwise can account for (or at least contribute to) a lack of humour associated with fundamentalist beliefs and fundamentalist movements. This includes a critical analysis of extracts from the Bible that promote seriousness. I will also consider an alternative reading of the Bible that favours a humorous approach to theology as proposed by Arbuckle. However, I ultimately conclude that humour seems to come from ourselves as human beings, rather than God Himself.

In section four, I look more closely at what a fundamentalist belief is (in the context of fundamentalism, not merely as a foundational belief) and what it means to hold such a belief. I will consider specific examples of fundamentalist beliefs in the context of certain fundamentalist movements, in particular Christian fundamentalist beliefs, in an attempt to understand and evaluate the roots of fundamentalism and what drives such a conception of reality. Through a consideration of Ruth Tietjen's work, I will develop a working definition of fundamentalism based on certain criteria in order to get to grips with how we categorise fundamentalist beliefs and behaviours. I will ultimately argue that fundamentalist beliefs are separated from other beliefs based on the presence of anger-like passion that motivates violent action towards out-groups.

This will lead into section five, where I investigate what fundamentalists themselves say about humour and what this means for the relationship between humour and religion. I will focus on a paper by Skimming where we see the relationship and subsequent incompatibility between humour and fundamentalism as demonstrated by ex-fundamentalists themselves. Furthermore, I consider these ideas in relation to a particular fundamentalist group, the Army of God. Upon analysing the propaganda produced by the group, I argue that the nature of their beliefs, as well as their interpretations of certain Biblical passages, renders their fundamentalist ideas both incompatible with and incapable of producing humour. The disturbing nature of their materials is far beyond that of the dark humour I describe in section two, in that it is difficult to comprehend how anyone could find such things funny. As such, I conclude that this obvious lack of humour tells us everything we need to know about the nature of such a fundamentalist group.

In section six, I explain, analyse and justify a connection between the lack of humour and the presence of seriousness within religion, but specifically within divine Biblical representations, and the existence of fundamentalism. In other words, I evaluate the existence of a potential relationship between a lack of humour and the development of fundamentalist beliefs. I consider several scientific papers that investigate the relationship between humour, seriousness, and religiosity, in an attempt to understand what drives our humorous responses, and whether exposure to religion could impact them. Overall, I conclude that exposure to religious materials of a serious nature is going to have a lasting impact on a person's seriousness, but also their self-identity. Based on Moore's paper, we will see that there is a relationship between self-identity and humour style, which I feel is responsible for the incompatibility of fundamentalist attitudes with humour more generally.

And finally, in the concluding section of my thesis, I pull each of the sections together in order to more clearly outline the connections I have made between philosophical accounts of humour, divine attributes and divine humour, fundamentalism, and the relationship between fundamentalist beliefs and a lack of humour in God, leading to the conclusion that there is at

least some connection between a lack of humour in God and the seriousness of religious belief that often contributes to fundamentalist attitudes, but ultimately further research is required.

## Section 1: What is Humour?

'Humour' refers to our ability to find things amusing, funny or generally entertaining. As such, to have humour, or a sense of humour, is the characteristic of being able to find something funny. Such a characteristic is not one so often associated with the Almighty being that is God, but is this intentional? Or is it something we, as scholars, have simply overlooked in favour of upholding our image as serious philosophers and theologians? In this section, I will consider different philosophical approaches to humour, how we experience it, and what it means for us. This section is relevant to my overall question because in order to understand the relationship between humour and fundamentalism, we must first understand what humour is and what it entails.

Post-Kant, there was a shift away from treating laughter and humour as a mere aspect of humanity, towards acknowledging laughter in itself as *what means is to be human* (Moland, 2018, p.1). In other words, being able to laugh, joke, and generally be a bit silly, are all things that separate us from other living things. Some philosophers have even argued that laughter signifies the relationship between humour and the divine, and an awareness of our finiteness (ibid.). Nevertheless, much of the literature on the philosophy of humour focuses on the theories of superiority, incongruity, and relief. The superiority theory suggests that we find humour in things when we feel ourselves to be better than others, or better than an alternative version of ourselves, which can be attributed to Hobbes (1991, p.43) and his description of laughter as 'sudden glory'. The incongruity theory argues that humour arises when there is a disconnect between our reality and our expectations, and is often associated with Schopenhauer's work (2011, p.95). The relief theory, to put it simply, indicates that laughter relieves tension, as outlined in Lord Shaftesbury's work 'An Essay on the Freedom

of Wit and Humor' (1971, p.5). It should be noted that the relief theory is no longer popular. There are, of course, other theories such as play, but the three I have described above are the most prevalent. It is also important to note that there is no general consensus regarding which theory is the most appropriate, and it is very much still up for debate. To complicate matters further, some of the theories even overlap: humour can stem from feelings of superiority and incongruity simultaneously. One theory I feel is sometimes overlooked in the philosophical literature, however, is the social theory of humour and laughter. For example, there is significant research in the psychological and social sciences into the role of laughter and humour in our daily lives, much of which indicates, in addition to the physical and psychological benefits of laughter, that there are social benefits of laughter. Humour and laughter play an important role as a sort of social lubricant, encouraging the development of relationships between both individuals and groups. An experiment from Provine (2001, p.252) indicates that the likelihood of laughter dramatically increases in a group context, which supports this idea that laughter is an important and effective tool for social bonding. I would argue, then, that humour is a natural extension of laughter that has an important function in our lives as social beings. In later sections, I consider the impact of the sort of function humour has in our lives on the compatibility of humour with the divine.

It is important to note, however, that each of these theories do have some problems and can be criticised accordingly. For example, not one of them, when considered in isolation, can account for all types of humour. In other words, not all examples of humour fit with the theories of superiority, relief, incongruity, playfulness or social bonding. I will respond to this criticism later in this section, where I propose we turn to a family resemblance approach in order to understand humour. For now, let's turn to the other criticisms.

### Criticisms of Key Humour Theories

The relief theory has been criticised by Peels (2015, p.275), on the basis that it does not differentiate between humorous and non-humorous laughter. For example, in order to experience feelings of relief, the physical component of laughter becomes a necessity.

Nevertheless, nervous laughter is non-humorous and also rooted in feelings of relief since this kind of laughter releases tension felt in potentially stressful situations. As such, if laughter is considered a sufficient condition of amusement, this non-humorous nervous laughter would fit the criteria. Arguably, we do not want nervous laughter to be included in our definition of amusement, rendering the relief theory problematic if we try to apply it as a universal theory of humour.

The superiority theory is criticised by Smuts (2006) on the basis that not all experiences of humour necessitate feelings of superiority. As we will see later, there are many different manifestations of humour, some of which are indeed incompatible with feelings of superiority, such as self-deprecation. It is clear that *some* forms of humour do in fact stem from feelings of superiority, and this should be acknowledged. As such, to abandon the theory completely because it cannot successfully explain all forms of humour, I think, would be academically irresponsible. It may not follow that superiority theory can make a universal claim about the nature of laughter and amusement, but the fact still remains that some kinds of laughter *are* rooted in superiority, and that should not be ignored.

The incongruity theory is also criticised by Peels and others, on the basis that we do not find all instances of incongruity amusing. But is this a sound criticism? I would argue that it is not necessary for all examples of incongruity to be amusing in order to conclude that the theory is useful, even if it is not universally applicable. This fact is simply an indication that certain kinds of incongruity are humorous, and others are not. As such, we can only conclude that not all cases of incongruity are amusing. What we cannot conclude is that all cases of humour are *not* incongruous. To do so, we would have to find a counterexample; an instance of humour that is not incongruous. In what follows, I will discuss and evaluate potential counterexamples. As with superiority theories, I accept that incongruity does not work *alone* as a universal theory of humour. What I am going to argue, is that the theories can work alongside each other as part of a wider family resemblance concept in order to offer a more complete account of humour.

Generally speaking, there are four styles of humour: affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, and self-defeating (Martin et al, 2003, p.53). Affiliative humour is humour that positively influences our relationships with others, and is most likely to take the form of observational humour (humour that involves making humorous remarks about people or life more generally), as this stems from shared experiences and would therefore promote the strengthening of relationships. As we will note later, however, observational humour can also be used negatively. Given its positive nature, affiliative humour is not compatible self-deprecation. This kind of humour would making critical comments and observations about oneself to make others laugh. Self-enhancing humour is humour that is associated with having a constructive mindset and ability to laugh at oneself. Like affirmative humour, there are positive associations with self-enhancing humour that make it incompatible with self-deprecation. I would argue that self-enhancing humour is most likely to manifest as physical humour. It is important not to take life too seriously, and to be able to see the funny side of things when we trip or fall, or say something awkward. These things can be inherently embarrassing, but individuals who can use self-enhancing humour can overcome these feelings and find joy in their own mishaps. On the other hand, aggressive humour is rather self-explanatory and refers to humour that disregards the experiences of others with the aim of belittling and potentially hurting them, but in a way that some people may find amusing. Aggressive humour is most commonly found in forms of observational humour. Examining other people and making jokes about their shortcomings, stereotyping groups of people and making jokes at their expense, these are all examples of aggressive, observational humour. Lastly, we have self-defeating humour. This is the form of humour most compatible with self-deprecation. It is humour that makes the speaker the subject of the joke, and allows others to laugh at their expense. It is often used as a defensive mechanism, and is most likely to take the form of, not only self-deprecating humour, but also dark humour. Dark humour is humour that finds itself on the peripheries of what is deemed socially acceptable to joke about. Jokes about death, murder, kidnapping, and so on, are risky and considered to be dark because of their intrinsically bleak nature.

## The Significance of Incongruity

When considering each of these humour types, I think it is possible to argue that each of them can be eventually stripped back to humour derived from incongruity. As noted above, affiliative humour is often positive, observational humour, but it could be argued that this most often stems from our shared experience of the absurdity of life. And what is absurdity if it is not the observation that our expectations are incongruous with reality? Similarly, self-enhancing, aggressive and self-defeating styles can be traced back to incongruity in this way. Self-enhancing humour is the ability to laugh at ourselves, which is arguably inherently incongruous. This is so on the basis that tripping, falling or verbally embarrassing ourselves are all incongruous actions that do not fit with societies expectations of us. The act of laughing at ourselves is also in itself incongruous because society expects us to be humiliated by these supposed faux-pas. Aggressive humour also stems from incongruity on the basis that it comes from the observation of incongruous characteristics and actions. In other words, it stems from making fun of both individuals and groups that do not fit into society's expectations. The incongruous nature of self-defeating humour, I think, is fairly obvious. Like self-enhancing humour, we do not expect individuals to make fun of themselves. As such, when we do observe this behaviour, it is entirely incongruous with our expectations. Dark humour in particular can be especially incongruous given the fact that it is something we do not often observe in society. It is rather taboo, and it can be surprising when we encounter it. I think it is this incongruity that contributes most significantly to its humorousness.

So, it seems that, more often than not, incongruity can explain laughter and humour, even in cases that seem unrelated. However, this may not be enough. Moreover, I feel that we are perhaps making a category mistake when we try to locate humour so specifically. Perhaps humour can simply be defined as the presence of laughter, even if that laughter is merely internal, and when we ask what form humour takes and what is its cause, we can simply say laughter without fretting over which theory best explains it. This may not be the most

satisfying conclusion for many, particularly given the fact that physical laughter does not always accompany humour, as well as the difficulties that we might encounter when measuring and accounting for internal laughter. So, I will continue to argue in favour of a particular approach to understanding humour.

### A Family Resemblance Concept

Given the complex nature of humour, I find a family resemblance approach most persuasive.

This means taking a step away from sufficient and necessary conditions and recognising that there are examples of humour that do not resemble each other in any way, but are linked by other kinds of humour that do share with them certain traits and characteristics.

The appropriateness of a family resemblance approach becomes more obvious when we consider Wittgenstein's (1958, p.32) examples of games. There are so many different kinds of games such as card games, board games, sports games, Olympic games, and so on, and yet there is no single characteristic that can be used to define them all or put them in the same category. The same can be said about humour. We have self-enhancing humour, self-deprecating humour, aggressive humour, passive humour, dark humour and light humour, humour that necessitates laughter, humour that does not necessitate laughter, and so on.

These complexities and apparent grouping of opposites seem to make it impossible to find a singular, uniting characteristic of humour.

In the Wittgensteinian sense, it is often assumed that when we say that X "resembles" Y, we are saying that X "shares characteristics with" Y (Gert, 1995, p.182). But this seems to be in opposition to the anti-essentialist views of Wittgenstein himself. As noted earlier, a family resemblance concept is intended to discourage essentialist thinking and take a step back from identifying necessary characteristics in order to gain a more insightful and accurate understanding of certain categories, particularly those that are difficult, or even impossible, to define. Consequently, when I am using a family resemblance concept to define humour, I do not want that to mean that each type of humour shares a certain trait. What I do intend to show is that there are certain overlapping similarities that lead these humour forms to

resemble one another, like a rather large and complex Venn diagram. At first glance, the only relationship between self-deprecating and self-enhancing humour is their being directed toward the self. In all other senses, they seemed to be opposed and ultimately unrelated. However, if we examine these types of humour more closely, we see that, at some point along the chain, they are actually more closely connected than previously anticipated. For example, self-deprecating humour might overlap with dark humour because they both include humour that can hurt certain groups, and dark humour might overlap with aggressive humour given that they both often touch upon violent topics, and aggressive humour might overlap with self-enhancing humour because of their potential to assert dominance over one group in order to elevate another. This demonstrates that, despite their being seemingly unrelated and opposed, both self-deprecating and self-enhancing humour are indirectly related through their connections to other types of humour. I would suggest that this can be used to connect any kind of humour.

By taking a combined approach to understanding humour and its function, we ensure that each type and form of humour is included and considered in a way that gives us a more thorough and detailed understanding of humour itself. Sometimes humour comes from feelings of superiority, but sometimes it comes from feelings of relief or playfulness. Sometimes humour comes from observing incongruities, and sometimes it comes from an evolutionary need for social bonding. As shown above, there is no overarching essential trait that unites humour, only a vague resemblance, as in the case of games.

Overall, expressions of humour are varied and complex, but more than that, there are other experiences and emotions besides humour that can arise as a result of superiority, relief, incongruity, playfulness, or a need for social bonding. So, what exactly do we find funny? I do not think there can ever be a concise answer to this question. I would argue that humour is intrinsically subjective. As Polemi and Reiss (2006, p.350) suggest, humour is complicated and ultimately rooted in our subjective interpretations and associations. How we view the world, how our brain comes to understand concepts and images, the meanings we ascribe

to objects and words, each of these things are subjective and not the same for every individual, which in turn is going to influence how we come to find things humorous and if we find them humorous at all. In other words, the things that tickle our funny bones are not universally laughter-inducing. As such, I think the closest we can come to understanding humour rests in this broader understanding of humour using a family resemblance concept, and accepting the subjective nature of humour more generally.

## Section 2: Is Humour Compatible with the Divine?

Having discussed the different theories of humour and its key characteristics, I will now investigate whether humour, as it is experienced in the human context, is compatible with God as well as whether it is likely that God experiences humour at all. I find this section to be particularly relevant to the overall question I am asking because of the concept of *imago Dei*. This is the debated and contested theological doctrine found across classical theist religion(s). For example, earlier interpretations from Philo and Aquinas find that being made in the image of God merely refers to our capacity for reason (Simango, 2016, p.188). On the other hand, Luther and Calvin suggest that man was created in the moral likeness of God (*ibidem.*). I am most concerned with the latter kind of interpretation. Ultimately, it is suggested that humans were created in the image and likeness of God, that we therefore share certain characteristics with the Divine, and that it is our imperfections caused by original sin that negatively impact our capacity to fully embrace these divinely bestowed characteristics. If we are careful, however, it seems plausible that we can reverse engineer our own characteristics, minus the imperfections, to discover which characteristics have been bestowed upon us in the image of God. As such, understanding the relationship between humour and fundamentalism rests on our understanding of humour, not only in ourselves, but in the broader context of religion and in God Himself. By attempting to understand more clearly the capacity for humour in God Himself, I think we can better understand the role of humour in religion.

On the cover of this thesis, you can see the following quote from the Bible:

“The wicked plots against the just,  
and gnashes at him with his teeth.  
The LORD laughs at him,  
for He sees that his day is coming.”

(Psalm 37:12-13)

This is an example of one of the few instances of divine laughter we see in the Biblical literature. Such instances are more often than not interpreted figuratively or metaphorically, based on the fact that, if we take a closer look at it, laughter is the contracting of muscles in the stomach; it is impulses in the brain that make the muscles in our faces turn upwards, and it is the making of strange, loud noises that emanate from our throats. Surely then, laughter necessitates a material body, which would suggest that it cannot possibly be compatible with God. And yet, according to the biblical authors, God laughs. It is, of course, possible to argue that biblical passages should not be interpreted literally. Perhaps we should only consider the things we find in the Bible to be metaphorical, or merely poetic. However, this is not in-line with the lived experience of religious believers. The Bible itself is often considered to be the word of God, and to dismiss it as a metaphor is to disregard the power and meaning it holds for religious believers themselves. Most importantly, the Bible can be and is interpreted literally, rightly or wrongly, and that leads to the development of significant problems such as fundamentalist and extremist behaviours. This will become clearer in later sections.

So, how can we understand laughter in God?. Does it fit with the family resemblance idea I described in section one? I think so. I noted earlier that a kind of internal laughter seems to be possible, and I will come back to this idea shortly. But first, if we look at the quote above once again, we can see a sense of irony in the laughter of God. He is laughing in the faces of the wicked, for He knows what the future holds for them, and He knows that they will be punished accordingly: ‘for He sees that his day is coming’. This ‘day’ could be interpreted as

a reference to Judgement Day, the day of God's reckoning. The laughter of God in this context certainly fits with the theory of superiority. God is omniscient and omnipotent and, as such, possesses a power beyond our imaginations. He knows what is in store for us, and He knows us better than we know ourselves. He is entitled to these feelings of superiority, and thus is entitled to laugh in the faces of those of us who doubt His power. Given God's omniscience and omnipotence, it is plausible for Him to still experience laughter and humour without its bodily components. I would argue that humour, even in human forms, is most importantly a mindset. For example, imagine a person is completely disabled. They cannot move or speak, and require round-the-clock care. As such, this person is quite unable to experience the physical aspects of laughter. Nevertheless, providing that their brain function is normal, and they have the capacity to understand jokes, this person is still capable of experiencing humour and laughing *internally*. Perhaps this would be better understood if we consider the social function of humour I discussed in section one. It is there that I examined the increased likelihood of laughter occurring in a social setting. As such, it seems that laughter is an outward indication of our *humorous mindset* towards other beings. This means that even though laughter is a sufficient condition for humour, it is not a necessary one, and we can experience humour without laughter. In a divine sense, it is possible for God to experience humour and laughter internally, without having to experience laughter within the limits of a body. I would argue, then, that the laughter of God as it is described in the Bible can best be understood as a mental state directed at some object or being as a result of the divine experience of humour.

We have now established that divine laughter is not necessarily bodily. Though, I would argue that it is necessary for God to have this experience somehow, perhaps through omnibus subjectivity; a topic which I will discuss later. As I argued in section one, laughter is more than the physical, it is these feelings of superiority, or relief, or playfulness, or social bonding, or an observation of incongruity. In the above example, God laughs out of superiority, but I also think He laughs at the incongruous nature of the situation. The wicked

are acting cruelly towards the just and the worthy subjects of God Himself, as if they have the power and the authority to behave in this way. God laughs at the audacity of their actions, and at the fact that they do not know the reality of what He has in store for them.

In some ways, God's omniscience would logically deny Him the experience of humour rooted in incongruity. If He knows everything, then His reality cannot differ from His experience; they are simply one and the same. However, as I have shown in the example above, this may not necessarily be the case. Even if it is true that God's omniscience prevents Him from experiencing the humour of incongruity directly, it still stands that He can see the incongruity and absurdity of our actions as finite and imperfect beings. There is nothing more humorous than watching someone make a fool of themselves, particularly when they are entirely convinced that they are right when in reality they have no idea. God is in the ultimate position to perceive this absurdity and laugh at the incongruity of humanity, and I think He would find it particularly amusing that us scholars are trying to understand His immaterial nature in any deep and meaningful way. After all, we are still unable to fully understand the observable universe within which we live, so how can we even begin to postulate and understand the nature of God? And yet, we continue to try.

Despite the incongruity of such an endeavour, I am going to, rather ironically, do just that. In the remainder of this section, I will analyse the relationship and compatibility of humour with certain attributes of God, and whether or not it follows that God can experience humour at all. I will be paying particular attention to traditional characteristics such as omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence, but also more controversial characteristics such as omnisubjectivity.

### Humour, Omniscience and Omnisubjectivity

Firstly, as we have already touched upon the relationship between humour and omniscience, it seems logical to continue the discussion. As noted above, omniscience has often been perceived as an impediment to humour, based on this idea that knowing-all makes it impossible to experience incongruity. But what if omniscience was not an impediment at all?

What if omniscience necessitates the experience of incongruity that can often lead to humour? I would argue that omniscience and “knowing-all” would necessarily entail having the experience of humour, including humour arising from incongruity. This follows on the basis that if God did not experience humour, He would not be all-knowing. There are, of course, different arguments for different definitions of omniscience that try to delineate what “knowing-all” really includes. There are several problems that accompany omniscience, such as predeterminism, but I do not have the space to analyse them here. What I will say is that I think it is possible for God to be all-knowing without His knowing infringing upon our freewill, and that this omniscience must include all real and lived experiences, including humour.

One way in which this is made possible, is through the consideration of omnisubjectivity. As it is put forward by Zagzebski (2008, p.2), omnisubjectivity is the ability to consciously grasp ‘with perfect accuracy and completeness the first-person perspective of every conscious being’. She argues that being able to grasp consciousness in this way is an epistemic state that it is better to possess than not to possess. As such, I would argue that it is better for God to experience humour than for Him not to experience humour. However, I disagree with Zagzebski’s assumption that whether or not the information made possible by this epistemic state should count as knowledge is an unimportant question. I would argue that direct experience of something is, in and of itself, its own dimension of knowledge. For example, in his article ‘What Mary Didn’t Know’ (1986, p.291), Jackson asks us to consider a person who has never experienced colour. They have only ever experienced a world that is black and white, and yet they know every fact there is to know about the colour blue. They know that blue is a very rare colour to find in nature; they know that the wavelength of blue light on the electromagnetic spectrum measures 470 nanometres; they know if you mix red and blue it makes purple, and so on. And yet, this individual has only ever lived in a black and white world, and has therefore never directly experienced the colour blue, or any other colour for that matter. Would we not argue that this person lacks some specific knowledge of what it means for something to *be blue*? I think the same can be said about omnisubjectivity in God.

Like this person living in a black and white world, God can know every fact about what it is to be human. After all, He is the creator of humanity. Nevertheless, the fact remains that even if He knows every fact about humanity, how we reproduce; how we interact; the decisions we have made or will make; what the future has in store for us; the exact date of humanity's end, and so on, if God does not have access to first-person consciousness, He does not really know what it means to be human. He does not know what it means to be me, or you, and that means that He does not know *everything*. This would certainly undermine the claim that God is omniscient.

One obvious objection to both my argument and Zagzebski's is that certain human thoughts and consciousnesses are going to be immoral, and this would threaten the moral perfection of God. As Green (2017, p.696) writes, 'Zagzebski needs there to be a difference between what evil people have in their soul and what a simulating God has in his mind, and yet that difference means that God actually doesn't experience what it's like to be an evil person'. Zagzebski addresses this within her paper, however, when she argues that God has perfect empathy. For example, it is possible for us to empathise with someone, even a murderer, without personally holding the same beliefs or adhering to the same moral code. As such, it seems to follow that God, in His perfect and total empathy, can sustain these "immoral" consciousnesses without being implicated in their immorality (Zagzebski, 2013, p.49). I have also previously responded to Green's criticism (Longworth, 2020a, p.13) (Longworth, 2020b, p.6) by arguing that there is a distinction between the conscious state of the individual and the conscious state that God experiences. This distinction, however, does not undermine the nature of the experience in the way that Green describes. Ultimately, I suggest these experiences differ in terms of *intention* and *action*, meaning that God's total empathy allows Him to have these experiences and feelings without possessing the intention to act on or uphold them. I demonstrate this further using a thought experiment (ibid.). In short, a person hooked up to a simulator emitting electrical impulses into their brain so that they can experience the life of an evil person is not going to be held responsible for those feelings.

Nor are they going to be considered immoral for experiencing them, since these feelings were merely a consequence of the electrical impulses themselves. God's experiences of immoral states can be thought of in the same way. It is God's perfection and total empathy that allow Him to experience these conscious states without necessarily entailing that He is also immoral.

## Humour and Omnipotence

Now let us analyse the relationship between humour and omnipotence. At first glance, they may seem unrelated. Anyone can laugh, make jokes, see the funny side of things, anyone can be humorous regardless of power status or power dynamics but, in fact, as we will see in section six, humour is often used as a tool to subvert and challenge these power dynamics. But what does this have to do with the power of God? And, if humour has a primarily social role, does God really need it? Although humour and laughter may not be necessary representations of God's power, I think they can be interpreted as important references in terms of our relationship with God. For example, we find another potential example of divine laughter in the following extract:

'Deliver me from my enemies, O my God; defend me from those that rise up against me. [...] You, therefore, O LORD God of hosts, the God of Israel, awake to punish all the nations; do not be merciful to any wicked transgressors [...] But You, O LORD, shalt laugh at them; You shall have all the nations in derision.'

(Psalm 59)

Unlike Psalm (37:12-13), there is no clear indication that God is laughing. There is only reference to David's desire for God to laugh at his enemies, and a request for Him to have no mercy upon them. Nevertheless, there are several important things we can extract from this. The first thing to note is that David is asking for God Himself to laugh. He would be perfectly capable of laughing scornfully at his own enemies and treating them with derision. The fact that he does not do this himself but instead requests this behaviour from God is indicative of the relationship between ourselves and God, in the sense that only God has the

power to scorn, and to mock, and to punish. We, as humans, have no right or power to do so. Making this request of God serves to consolidate the power of God Himself, particularly in relation to His subjects. We should also note that, if God were to laugh, His laughter would be rooted in the same incongruity we discussed above. He would once again be laughing at the ignorance and audacity of the heathen's actions.

However, God's laughter here could also be particularly problematic. It would seem that, if God were to laugh, He would be laughing at the pain and suffering He has to the power to inflict on those 'wicked transgressors'. If this were the case, God might be considered a malevolent force, and His laughter, despite its power, would conflict with His omnibenevolence. As such, this kind of laughter seems to be unavailable to God, at least outside of omnisubjectivity, if we are to maintain that He is omnibenevolent. To understand this extract without undermining God's omnibenevolence, I think we have to reject this initial interpretation that God is going to laugh derisively. Instead, in addition to superiority, we could understand God's potential laughter here as humour rooted in incongruity. In the same manner as Psalm (37:13), we can interpret God's laughter as a reaction to the absurdity of humanity. We might interpret this laughter as scornful because we only have our human experiences as a framework for understanding divine behaviour, but I think it can alternatively and more appropriately be interpreted as a reflection of God's superiority and His response to the incongruous actions that result from freewill, particularly those actions that go against God Himself.

### Humour and Omnibenevolence

This brings us nicely to the relationship between humour and omnibenevolence. Does humour play an important role in love, and is it therefore necessary for God to have and display humour in order to be all-loving? And what are the implications of this given the lack of humour associated with God? I would argue that humour is an important aspect of love, particularly in a human context. It can, for example, be an important tool for discussing problems and criticisms within the context of our relationship without hurting our partner

(School of Life, 2020). It can help us gently and carefully communicate our needs within our relationship without needlessly making our partner feel attacked. Furthermore, as I discussed in section one, humour is a vitally important form of social lubricant that simply brings us closer together. In addition to this role that it plays as a means of communication, it deepens our bonds as friends, family members, partners, lovers, and even as strangers sharing the experience of a stand-up comedy show. All of this occurs through the shared enjoyment of something that makes us genuinely happy.

Humour, then, is a significant and integral part of communicating our human love. But what does this mean for our relationship with God, and His love? I would argue that, unlike human relationships, our relationship with God is direct and unconditional. In doing so, I am not arguing that our relationship with God is inherently individualistic or private. As Flood (2011) writes, 'the idea of a personal relationship with God should not be taken to mean a privatised faith. A relational faith, by its very definition, is inherently social'. What I am suggesting is that God's omniscience, omnipotence, and omnibenevolence, all add up to Him knowing us deeply, personally, and absolutely:

O LORD, You have searched me and known *me*.  
You know my sitting down and my rising up;  
You understand my thought afar off.  
You comprehend my path and my lying down,  
And are acquainted with all my ways.

(Psalm 139:1-3)

Based on this idea that God knows us deeply and personally, humour as a social lubricant and method of strengthening bonds between people seems entirely obsolete when it comes to our relationship with Him. He already knows us deeply and personally, so what is the use of joining us in laughter and humour? Although it may not be necessary for God to participate in humour, it would seem that in not doing so, He puts us at somewhat of a disadvantage and challenges our devotion to Him unnecessarily. As pointed out by Peels, a God who is able to express and experience humour with us is going to have a distinctly

different relationship with us than a God who is not. The way we interact with God and our relationship with Him would be revolutionised if it were allowed to be humorous. Peels argues that the nature of prayer would change, and we would have an additional reason to love and worship God if He were to engage in humour more generally (Peels, 2015, p.290). He also adds that the presence of humour in God could potentially change the way we worship, with humour becoming part of religious services and liturgy.

It is also somewhat plausible that the humour we use as an expression of our human love and relationships might be considered a part of experiencing God's love: 'if we say we love God, but do not love our brother, then we are deceiving ourselves. We cannot say we love God if we do not love those around us,' (ibid.). In the context of our relationship with God, I would interpret this to mean that our relationships with others can reflect our relationship with God. For example, the love we have for our fellow human beings, or agape love, can be viewed as a branch of divine love. As such, if humour is a significant and important part of human love, so too is it an indirectly significant and important part of God's love when it is translated into a human context.

However, despite the fact that there would be several benefits of humour on *our* love for and relationship with God, there does not seem to be any intrinsic value to humour in terms of God's love for us. It ultimately plays a social role in the context of our mundane, human lives, a role that is not necessary in the life of God given His access to omnipotence and omniscience. However, this does not undermine the importance of humour for the other divine attributes I have discussed above. It seems that humour could be necessary for consolidating God's power over us, as well as for ensuring His omniscience through the lens of omnisubjectivity. As such, even though humour is not a necessary component of omnibenevolence, it could be argued that an omnipotent and omniscient God should engage with humour in order to be described as such.

## Section 3: Does Divine Humour Influence Human Humour?

Generally speaking, the lack of humour ascribed to God in scripture, but also in theological discussions, may be a vital contributing factor when it comes to manifestations of our own humour, particularly within a religious context. I think that exploring the relationship between our own humour and humour in God is particularly relevant to the main question because the humour ascribed to God in scripture is going to have a significant influence on our own humour. By grasping more clearly the influence God's humour has on our own, we begin to gain a better understanding of the presence of humour, or lack thereof, in fundamentalist thinking. As shown in later sections, there is evidence to suggest that highly religious backgrounds (and especially fundamentalist ones), are not conducive surroundings for humour. Exposure to religious stimuli, for example, is shown to cause a significant increase in seriousness. But what is it that makes these stimuli religious, and what about the content of such materials contributes to its overall seriousness? I would argue that the lack of humour in scripture, and consequently God, may be responsible for this.

In section two, I analysed the limited examples of explicit divine laughter and humour present in the Bible. Now, let us consider examples of seriousness and a lack of humour that could be a considerable driving force for religious fundamentalism. First and foremost, God's actions, particularly in the Old Testament, are indicative of an angry and vengeful God:

'For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness'

(Romans 1:18)

'He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him'

(John 3:36b)

As I hope I have demonstrated convincingly in previous sections, a humorous God is both logical and desirable. However, with the limited examples of divine humour and abundant examples of divine wrath and seriousness, there seems to be plenty of evidence that

undermines this ideal. As such, despite my desire to depict God as a being who feels and understands humour in a way that strengthens His love for us as His creation, this is not a narrative that rings true for most. It is clear that unbelievers should be and *are* punished for their disbelief, as seen in these extracts. It is evident that the dominant view of God is that He is not going to see the funny side of our sins and transgressions, He is not going to find the dichotomy of human existence a laughing matter, and He is most certainly going to punish those who deserve to be punished (if they do not repent, of course). This anger as it is portrayed in the Bible is an emotion and a passion. This kind of anger is arguably one of the defining traits of fundamentalism that separates it from other kinds of beliefs, as we will see in section four.

But does this anger prevent God from experiencing laughter and humour? According to Descartes, laughter itself is an expression of scorn and ridicule that is rooted in the basic emotion that is hatred, 'there is just this difference: the Joy arising from good is serious, while that arising from evil is accompanied by Laughter and Mockery' (Descartes, 1989, p.54). Later, however, we see a somewhat contradictory passage regarding the nature of laughter in banter:

'And it is not unseemly to laugh upon hearing another's bantering; it may even be such that it would be peevish not to laugh at it. But when one is bantering oneself, it is more fitting to abstain from it, in order not to seem either to be surprised by the things one is saying or to wonder at one's ingenuity in making them up.'

(Descartes, 1989, p.118)

So, what can we say about the laughter of God and its influence on human emotions? Is He peevish because He does not laugh at the humorous nature of human existence, in turn making us humourless and serious? Or is He arrogant for laughing at His own ingenuity, also forcing us into seriousness as we realise our powerlessness in the face of an Almighty God? Descartes would undoubtedly respond by stating the God is free from passions given their bodily nature, and, as such, that He is incapable of experiencing laughter. He felt that

these bodily passions are the reason for our fallibility as a species, and affliction which cannot apply to God, who is infallible. As I discussed in section two, however, it seems that passibility and omnisubjectivity, and therefore the experience of passions, may be a necessary characteristic for God to have in order for Him to remain omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent. At the very least, God should be able to experience passions of the mind, even if He cannot directly experience the bodily aspect of humour that is laughter. I would argue that humour is one of these particular passions of the mind.

Nevertheless, it seems that the seriousness that so often accompanies religion comes from this prevailing assumption that God is impassible, infallible, unfeeling, and completely serious in His nature, as so often outlined in scripture. As such, when I say that a lack of humour in God may be responsible for a lack of humour in a religious context, I am referring to the humour we ascribe to God ourselves, rather than the humour within Godself. I make this clarification on the basis that it is difficult to make evidence-based assumptions about the nature of God in terms of divine humour, ultimately based on the fact that there is virtually no discussion about humour in God outside of the modern philosophical discussion surrounding passibilism. And yet, as we saw earlier, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that God is not unfeeling, but passionate and angry and vengeful.

### A Reinterpretation of Divine Humour

According to Arbuckle (2020, p.277), 'as any parent loves a child, God as our parent is not revengeful, but a merciful, loving One. Mercy overshadows justice. This is divine humour,'. Throughout his paper, he appears to be arguing that incongruity is a sufficient characteristic of humour. He adds that physical reactions such as laughter or smiling are not necessary, and that 'an inner feeling of joy, peace, and renewed energy' is a better indicator of humour. This, he writes, is laughter of the heart. As such, Arbuckle argues that divine humour is present in the Bible through incongruity, and that misinterpretation is responsible for our misreading of the Bible as an entirely serious text. Divine humour is not explicit within it, but can be identified by this laughter of the heart we may feel when reading certain passages,

particularly those that are incongruous. I would argue that this laughter of the heart coincides with my descriptions of an internal laughter in earlier sections. For Arbuckle, the resurrection is the ultimate example of divine humour being shown through incongruity. If we are to accept this reinterpretation of scripture through the lens of divine humour and incongruity, there would certainly be consequences for our own humour.

The most obvious consequence of this is that we would have evidence to suggest that God finds incongruity funny. Camel's fitting through the eyes of needles, life after death, virgin mothers, and so on, the incongruity we find in the Bible is endless. And so, Arbuckle argues, we should understand this incongruity as God's own humour. Nevertheless, it becomes difficult to decipher which kinds of incongruity God would find humorous in the modern context, and there are certainly examples of bad or even evil incongruities that would be incompatible with an all-loving God. For example, does God see the funny side of parents choosing not to vaccinate their children despite the fact that He created a world within which vaccines are possible? There is a clear irony here, one that is often used to make jokes with the clear intention of making people laugh, and yet it feels intuitively wrong to ascribe such humour to God. But what separates this incongruity from those incongruities described in the Bible? I would argue that there is no clear way of separating these kinds of incongruity, which causes considerable difficulties when ascribing humour to God. Even in the Bible itself, God Himself is the ultimate example of incongruity, as a being who is both vengeful *and* all-loving. The inability to separate incongruities is a problem because it means that problematic actions could potentially be defended on the grounds that they are incongruous and possibly humorous in the divine sense described by Arbuckle. Ultimately, the incongruous humour of God has the potential to be woefully misinterpreted, thus negatively influencing our own humour.

Although I appreciate Arbuckle's arguments and intentions, the divine humour he describes, for all intents and purposes, is only evidence of God *employing* humour, rather than *experiencing* it Himself. As such, I would argue that there is still an apparent lack of humour

in God that may have reaching consequences for religious believers, and potential implications for the development of fundamentalist beliefs.

It may seem plausible that we could find alternative sources to determine that God does in fact experience humour, such as the one outlined by Arbuckle, but, as we have seen, this is quite a difficult task. We can try asserting that we are made in God's image and therefore that our humorous nature is indicative of divine humour, but this only demonstrates that God is capable of using humour by ascribing it to His creations. Furthermore, even if this were not the case, it can be easily countered by the Cartesian idea aforementioned: laughter and humour are merely a product of our infallibility, making them incompatible with an infallible being such as God. We can even try reinterpreting scripture, but that brings with it the potential for further misinterpretation and the abuse of certain passages. As such, we are once again left with this assumption that God is humourless, and it is this notion that determines how we act within a religious context, how we pray, how we view ourselves in relation to God and, finally, how attitudes develop into fundamentalist behaviours.

## Section 4: What is fundamentalism?

Defining fundamentalism is notoriously difficult and yet vitally important task when trying to investigate the motivations behind such beliefs and their presence in theology. In this section, I take it upon myself to come up with my own definition of fundamentalism so that I can better understand the motivations behind these kinds of beliefs and their compatibility with humour. I chose to do this instead of working with a pre-existing definition found in current research because I wanted to specifically explore the role of anger and religious zeal in fundamentalist thoughts and behaviours, but in a way that I could use to understand the broader relationship between fundamentalism and humour. As such, this section is relevant to my main question because understanding fundamentalism and the kinds of people it attracts will be vital when it comes to understanding its relationship with humour.

Firstly, one of the most interesting, and potentially important things to note, is that when you search for the term 'conservative Christianity', you are almost immediately directed to webpages describing Christian fundamentalism. This raises several questions about the distinction between conservative Christianity and religious fundamentalism more generally, and understanding fundamentalism is foundational to my primary research question. So far, I have investigated what humour is, how it manifests itself, and how we can understand its function in our ordinary human lives. I have also tried to understand the role of humour in Godself, if it is present in Him and if it is compatible with Him at all, paying particular attention to the relationship between divine humour and the other divine characteristics, as well as the relationship between God's humour and our own. The remainder of my thesis focuses on the relationship between humour and fundamentalism, but in order to move forward, we have to understand what it means when we describe a person or a belief as 'fundamentalist', and what differentiates religious fundamentalism from other forms of belief, such as religious conservatism.

### Fundamentalism, Conservatism and Passion

The distinction between fundamentalism and other kinds of belief, as already noted, is not so obvious. However, through the following discussion of some of the different characteristics that might accompany fundamentalist thought, namely violence and zeal, I outline a potential approach to distinguishing between them. In her paper, Ruth Tietjen talks about the theoretical and practical implications of religious zeal, and its significance as an affective phenomenon. She differentiates between two kinds of religious zeal, namely, 'love-like passion', and 'anger-like emotion' (Tietjen, 2020, p.77). In what follows, I will argue that it is this religious zeal that drives this separation of fundamentalist religious beliefs from other kinds of beliefs. More specifically, I think it is the presence of anger-like religious zeal that distinguishes fundamentalism from conservatism.

According to Tietjen (2020, p.83), 'religious zeal as a passionate phenomenon is partly defined by the fact that it involves a willingness to sacrifice'. This 'willingness to sacrifice'

does not always evolve into violence, but when it does, it is driven by the anger-like emotion side of the zeal dichotomy. Furthermore, Tietjen (2020, p.85) suggests that anger-like religious zeal is strongly linked to the relationship between the zealot's identity, and obeying religious norms. In other words, the more a person associates their life and their actions with obedience to religion, the more likely they will show manifestations of anger-like religious zeal. For the zealot, religion is more than a ritual, it is a way of life. As such, anyone seen acting outside of this way of life or violating these norms can be deemed a threat. Anger-like religious zeal is a defensive response to this threat, but it is not a mature anger. It is an anger that is expressed in the form of vengeance and retaliation (Tietjen, 2020, p.86). I would argue, then, that the presence of anger-like religious zeal in a person with conservative beliefs is what transforms their beliefs into something that is fundamentalist in nature. This desire to act, this intention to annihilate, this desire to sacrifice, this all culminates in the crossing of the boundary between conservative and fundamentalist attitudes.

Moreover, like anger-like emotion, love-like passion is associated with all-consuming feelings and fire that is identity-defining, in such a way that it also promotes action. The difference between these two manifestations of religious zealousness is that, on the one hand, we have anger that is motivated by a desire for vengeance and destruction, and on the other hand, we have love that is motivated by devotion and a desire for restoration. I would argue that both branches of religious zealousness represent different sides on the religiosity spectrum: liberal religion and conservative religion. Let me demonstrate the distinction more clearly. Take Martin Luther King Jr., a powerful voice and advocate for the civil rights movement. He spoke with a passion and a fire, but also with a firm belief in non-violent protest and civil disobedience. He is a man clearly motivated by religious zeal, but the source is love-like passion rather than anger-like emotion. That is not to say that religious zealots motivated by love-like passion cannot be angry. In fact, it is quite the opposite. I would argue that this love-like passion can be represented by the mature anger that Tietjen argues is missing from

anger-like emotion. This mature anger, driven by love, is powerful, restorative, and intentionally aimed, whereas the immature anger is vengeful, destructive, and somewhat irrational.

On the entirely opposite end of the spectrum, we have organisations such as the Klu Klux Klan. Their entire belief system is predicated on this idea that white, heterosexual, Christian conservatives are the norm, that they are superior, and that anyone outside of this norm deserves to be annihilated. In other words, if you are a minority, you are disposable. Their actions as an organisation are evidently motivated by the anger-like religious zeal described by Tietjen. Their actions are aimed at those who violate the supposed religious norms, they blame minorities as a whole for their religious transgressions, and they intend to annihilate these transgressors rather than change or rehabilitate them. Each of these things contribute to their characterisation as religious zealots motivated by anger-like motivation, as outlined in Tietjen's paper (2020, p. 83). Of course, the distinction between the two kinds of zeal is not so black and white, and there are going to be exceptions and outliers, and a range of different manifestations of zeal across the spectrum. This dichotomy between the two kinds of zeal outlined by Tietjen is what makes it so complex and ambiguous. Nevertheless, I think that it is important to recognise the role of religious zeal in fundamentalist thinking, and how it manifests itself through different kinds of action in both liberal and conservative circles.

Now, I want to clarify that the anger-like passion I have argued is associated with fundamentalism does not mean that violence is a necessary component of fundamentalist movements. This is simply untrue, and many agree that violence is not an intrinsic part of fundamentalist behaviour. What I intended to show, however, is that these *feelings* of anger, whether acted upon or not, are a key contributing factor to fundamentalist attitudes and behaviours. As we will see in later sections, this anger can come for a variety of reasons, such as conflicts regarding self and group identities. It is this anger, *not violence*, that I think drives the distinction between fundamentalism and other kinds of belief. I will elaborate on this idea further below.

## Fanaticism, Fundamentalism, Extremism, Conservatism, Confusion-ism...

As already highlighted, defining fundamentalism is a technical and terminological minefield. There are frequent and complicated definitional overlaps that continue to persist, rendering discussions on the topic almost impossible without misunderstandings. Furthermore, not only does fundamentalism overlap with conservatism, so too does it overlap with extremism and fanaticism. Separating these key terms is not without difficulties, but I will do my best to make some progress in setting boundaries between them in order to better understand fundamentalism and adequately evaluate its relationship with humour. Firstly, we have extremism. I would argue that much like fundamentalism, extremism involves anger-like passion and a desire for destruction. The key difference between the two terms is that fundamentalism does not always necessitate *action* based upon this anger, whilst extremism does. I would also argue that extremists, unsurprisingly, are going to participate in more “extreme” forms of violence. For example, in section six, we see an experiment that asks subjects to allocate hot sauce to an individual they perceive to be an outsider. This is a fairly mild form of violence against an out-group that one could classify as fundamentalist rather than extremist. On the other hand, the murder of Dr. George Tiller (a doctor providing late-pregnancy abortions) by Scott Roeder in 2009 is more obviously a case of religiously motivated extremism. Of course, it is difficult to draw a line between different levels of violence, but the presence of it and the decision to act upon it in more “extreme” ways takes us some way in separating fundamentalism from extremism.

Now, let us consider fanaticism. Fanaticism can be loosely defined as enthusiasm rooted in a sort of naivety or a lack of critical awareness. It is the unwavering and steadfast support of something even in the face of opposing ideas and arguments. I would argue that fanaticism is at the heart of both fundamentalism and extremism, but in a way that represents a kind of foundation for the development of these beliefs. More specifically, fanaticism is a premature form of fundamentalism and extremism. I would go as far as to suggest that fanaticism, fundamentalism, and extremism exist upon and share the same spectrum. Fanaticism, I feel,

represents uncritical and unwavering belief, but in a way that is not necessarily driven by anger, and therefore does not necessitate violence. As the name suggests, it is rooted in appreciation, enthusiasm and enjoyment of something. As such, I would argue that when religious fanaticism is driven by anger-like passion, it moves into fundamentalist territory. Similarly, the moment that religious fanaticism and fundamentalism evolves into violent action, they can arguably be moved into the extremism category.

So, what is religious fundamentalism? I would argue that religious fundamentalism is adherence to a set of strict principles but, more than that, it is adherence to these principles accompanied by discontent towards those that do not adhere to them. Most importantly, it is this discontent manifesting itself as religious zeal as anger-like emotion that determines the fundamentalist nature of the pattern of beliefs. As I have argued, it is the presence of this anger-like religious zeal that is a sufficient characteristic of fundamentalism. This is not to say that a fundamentalist will necessarily act upon this anger-like religious zeal, only that the potentiality is there. In the following sections, we will see different writers define their criteria for fundamentalism in different ways. As such, we will have to be critical in our analysis of each paper and pay close attention to how fundamentalism is defined, particularly in the experimental literature that attempts to draw conclusions about the nature of fundamentalism and its presence in Christianity.

## Section 5: What Do Fundamentalists Say About Humour?

In this section, I consider what it is that fundamentalists do and do not say about humour. This is relevant to my main question because I am exploring the relationship between humour and fundamentalism, and considering what fundamentalists themselves say about humour, as well as how they do or do not use it, is going to play a vital role in understanding and drawing conclusions about this relationship.

In her paper 'Narratives of Laughter and a New Ideological Becoming' (2016), Skimming analyses some case studies involving individuals who have separated themselves from

fundamentalism: 'through double-voicing, the absolute bonding of authoritative ideology to inner speech is destroyed, with laughter and parody becoming 'powerful forces for freedom' (Morris, 1994b: 16)' (Skimming, 2016, p.193). As we can see from the outset, there seems to be apparent opposition between humour and fundamentalism. In fact, Skimming goes on to argue that humour is used as a tool by ex-fundamentalists to separate and distance themselves from their old communities. She suggests that laughter and humour can be used as a means of power degradation (Skimming, 2016, p.199). In other words, it is a way for ex-fundamentalists to take the power and control away from their ex-communities, and instead to empower *themselves*. What is most interesting is that every single subject that Skimming interviewed laughed at some point during questioning. As the quote from Morris suggests, laughter is empowering and, as such, is used as a means of escaping what can be considered an oppressive atmosphere.

### Humour and Reconstructing Identities

Based on Skimming's findings, I would argue that humour and fundamentalism are, in some ways, foundationally incompatible. As I discussed in section one, there are many different types and forms of humour, but ultimately I concluded that they are all interrelated through a family resemblance concept and can most often be rooted in incongruity. Fundamentalism, however, does not appear to leave much space for laughter, particularly incongruous laughter. It seems that the ex-fundamentalists laugh at the incongruous nature of their past experiences with their now reality, but this would mean that it is impossible for a fundamentalist to laugh at this incongruity from within the community itself. As Skimming goes on to highlight, the laughter of the subjects is rooted in irony, mimicry, celebration, but also identity change (Skimming, 2016, p.199). At the very least, laughter and humour in these forms and circumstances would be totally incompatible with active participation in a fundamentalist community. Ultimately, laughter in these scenarios represents a kind of religious disaffiliation and, as Skimming highlights, humour is an important part of reframing

the experiences and identities, especially for ex-fundamentalists who have arguably been denied access to this process whilst they were active members of these communities.

Furthermore, this movement towards an 'alternative identity' as Skimming (2016, p.205) describes it, could in some ways be indicative of a complete identity overhaul. Humour and laughter itself could be a symptom of this new-found freedom outside of fundamentalism. In other words, subjects go from one extreme; the absolute seriousness associated with fundamentalism, to the other extreme; the laughter and humour associated with freedom in direct opposition to fundamentalism. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the kind of humour aimed at creating an alternative identity and reframing experience is only one particularly branch of humour that we have ruled incompatible with active participation in fundamentalist communities. Perhaps there are other kinds of humour, such as the dark or aggressive humour described in section one, that remain compatible with fundamentalist thinking. In what follows, I will evaluate sources from a Christian fundamentalist group, the Army of God, in an attempt to assess this idea that humour and fundamentalism remain incompatible.

## Humour and the Army of God

The Army of God are a Christian fundamentalist organisation that actively, and often violently, oppose abortion. Their website contains very sensitive and upsetting materials, including images of allegedly aborted babies, alongside quotes from the Bible that supposedly support their mission, 'who will rise up for me against the evildoers? Who will stand up for me against the workers of iniquity?' (Psalm 94:16).

After praying, fasting, and making continual supplication to God for your pagan, heathen, infidel souls, we then *peacefully, passively presented our bodies* in front of your death camps, begging you to stop the mass murder of infants [...] Yet you mocked God and continued the holocaust. No longer! All of the options have expired. Our Most Dread Sovereign Lord God requires that whosoever sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed. Not out of hatred for you, but out of love for the persons you exterminate, we are forced to take arms against you. Our life for yours - a simple

equation. Dreadful. Sad. Reality, nonetheless. You shall not be tortured at our hands. Vengeance belongs to God only. However, execution is rarely gentle.

(Army of God, 2001)

The Christian fundamentalists that call themselves the Army of God view themselves as saviours and warriors in this “new holocaust” caused by abortion, which they describe as the legal slaughter of children. In the extract above, they quote Genesis 9:6, ‘whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man’, for the dominant belief put forward on their website is that doctors who perform abortions (also referred to by the group as ‘abortionists’) must be stopped. In some places, it is indicated that removing the thumbs of these murderers would be sufficient. In others, death is the only way to stop them. And it is the responsibility of the Army of God to fulfil that duty. As we can see, there is no use of humour, no sarcasm, no sense of irony. There is no appreciation of metaphor or rhetoric. There is only the literal word of the Bible that tells them that God commands that murderers must be killed. *And execution is rarely gentle.*

What I find most interesting about the propaganda available on the Army of God’s website is the irony that seems so obvious from an outsider’s perspective that seems to elude those within the organisation. Putting aside arguments about the sanctity of life and debates about where life is thought to begin, if God commands that murderers should be killed, and you go out and *murder them*, would God’s commandment not also necessitate that you should also be killed, even if you claim to be committing murder in His name? What separates an abortionist from the abortionist killer? The passage quoted by the Army of God makes no distinction between those who kill, and those who kill in God’s name. By taking into consideration the beliefs and practices outlined by the Army of God, it becomes clear that there is no space for humour in this movement. This would require an openness to change and a light-heartedness that is just foundationally in opposition with the views expressed by this group.

Now, based on my own definition in section four, the Army of God is not merely a fundamentalist group. Their active and extreme violence towards others means they would be more accurately characterised as extremists. So, the question arises, do less extreme religious fundamentalist groups experience humour in the same way? Although I do not have the space to consider further examples here, I will end this section with two final points. The first is that human nature is multi-faceted, and that an inability to access and use humour in the context of fundamentalism does not necessitate that all fundamentalists lack the capacity to be humorous in all contexts. As such, a fundamentalist laughing at a joke (outside of their fundamentalist context) or enjoying a film of the comedic genre, is not an oxymoron. Secondly, if my definition of fundamentalism holds, it seems plausible that the anger-like zeal that is characteristic of fundamentalist groups, both violent and non-violent, is going to actively prevent participants from experiencing certain kinds of humour. Feeling as though their identities are threatened, alongside subsequent feelings of anger and resentment, are in direct opposition with the feelings associated with humour. This becomes clearer in the following section where I discuss Skimming's paper. To put it simply, although not all fundamentalist groups are going to participate in such extreme and violent behaviour, I postulate that their shared discontent towards outgroups and feelings of anger-like passion are going to limit their access to humour. As becomes clear in the following section, however, this is not merely a characteristic of *religious* fundamentalism.

## Section 6: What is the Relationship Between a Lack of Humour and Fundamentalist Belief?

In this section, I will investigate the relationship between a lack of humour and fundamentalism. In order to do so, I will discuss and analyse two independent experiments, one from Saroglou and Jaspard, and one from Blogowska, with the aim of assessing the relationship between humour, seriousness, religiosity, and fundamentalism, in light of previous sections. I will examine these experiments and their findings alongside a paper written by Moore who investigates humour styles in both religious and non-religious groups.

## The Link Between Humour, Aggression, Religiosity, and Fundamentalism

In the former experiment by Saroglou and Jaspard, the correlation between religiosity and religious fundamentalism is put to the test. They hypothesise that exposure to religious stimuli would negatively impact a subject's ability to respond with humour in certain situations (Saroglou et al. 2001, p.33). Three groups of students were asked to each watch different stimuli: a religious stimulus, a humorous stimulus, and a control stimulus. They were then asked to answer questions about how they would respond to certain daily inconveniences or hassles. The results had some interesting outcomes. Firstly, there was a reduction in ability to respond humorously when exposed to a religious stimulus, when compared to both the humorous and neutral stimuli. However, when the experimenters examined the individual beliefs of the subjects more closely, they did not find a correlation between a person's religiosity and their inability to respond humorously. This suggests that, whilst exposure to a religious stimulus might promote seriousness and a lack of humour, we cannot conclude that a person's religious beliefs have any actual impact their ability to create humour. Therefore, we cannot conclude with certainty that religious fundamentalism would negatively correlate with an individual's ability to create humour (Saroglou et al, 2001, p.43).

Although we cannot draw any concrete conclusions about the relationship between humour and fundamentalism from this experiment, we can learn a lot about the relationship between religion and humour. For example, there is clear evidence to suggest that exposure to religious stimuli is going to increase seriousness and reduce humour when responding to other situations, given the correlation found by Saroglou and Jaspard. From this, we can at least postulate that the more religious a person, the more serious (and less humorous) they are going to be, based on the fact that a more religious person is likely to be exposed to *more* religious stimuli such as attending church and praying more regularly, and so on. Of course, further investigations would have to take place in order to confirm that this was actually the case, but that is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Similarly, Blogowska's aim was to investigate whether religiosity can predict social and anti-social behaviour. She found that previous experiments did not focus on individual behaviour and action, but rather intention, which she finds problematic. As such, she developed two experiments to investigate prosociality and prejudice. In the first experiment, students were asked if they would help another student with their research project, and then asked to give a reason for their response. Results showed a correlation between religiosity and spirituality, and offering to help. There was also a negative correlation between religiosity and spirituality, and unkind justifications for refusing to help (Blogowska, 2013, p.528). All in all, those who were more religious, and spiritual were more likely to help, but also more likely to be kind when refusing to help.

On the other hand, the second experiment was designed to test anti-social behaviour. Subjects were divided into two groups and asked to read a text supposedly written by fellow students. The first group read a text written by a gay person supporting gay rights, and the second group (the control group) read a text written by different person supporting technological advancement. After reading the texts, they were asked to fill a cup with the amount of hot sauce they wanted the writer to consume. They were also asked to answer some questions that measure their self-reported aggression towards gay people, as well as the conservative nature of their views (Blogowska, 2013, p.529). Results showed that there was a correlation between the self-reported aggression of a subject and the amount of hot sauce they chose to give to the writer of the text. More importantly, there was a correlation between aggression and religiosity (Blogowska, 2013, p.530). This seems to suggest that the more religious a person, the more aggressive their actions towards out-groups.

According to Blogowska, the general consensus is that fundamentalists (which she characterises as individuals with more conservative views) are going to demonstrate out-group prejudice whilst non-fundamentalists are going to demonstrate prosocial behaviour (Blogowska, 2013, p.534). Nevertheless, the results of her experiments indicate that those with more fundamentalist views also show prosocial behaviour. As such, it seems that the

paradox between prosociality and prejudice is not merely a characteristic of fundamentalism, but of religion more generally.

Blogowska's experiment raises questions about how we define fundamentalism, and how it can be distinguished from conservatism, since she does not clearly define her own understanding of the terms. As discussed in section four, religious fundamentalists are often described as people who adhere strictly to religious books or scripture, but defining fundamentalism is a lot more complex. I argued that fundamentalism boils down to anger-like passion and a desire to act upon these feelings of aggression that characterises religious fundamentalism. It seems that, based on her findings, Blogowska draws the conclusion that both non-fundamentalists and fundamentalists alike are going to show in-group prosociality, which means the dichotomy between prosociality and prejudice is equal for both groups. However, her experiment was a clear test of this anger-like passion aforementioned, particularly as she excludes those individuals who refuse to allocate hot sauce. I would argue, then, that her findings can only lead us to conclusions about fundamentalism, even in its mildest of forms. The presence of prosociality in fundamentalist groups does very little to undermine the key characteristic of fundamentalist behaviours, and that is this anger-like aggression that is less present in non-fundamentalist groups. To put it simply, the subjects in her experiment demonstrate behaviour that is fundamentalist in nature, so it is difficult for us to make any assumptions about non-fundamentalist groups. Moreover, as we will see in my later discussion of Moore's paper, prosociality and out-group prejudice is not only limited to religious communities.

What both the papers by Saroglou and Jaspard, and Blogowska have in common is that they demonstrate a relationship between exposure to religion, and seriousness. It would be interesting to know if any of the responses recorded by Saroglou and Jaspard might have indicated levels of aggression after being exposed to religious stimuli in the same way as Blogowska's experiment did. Nevertheless, what both papers lack is a consideration and comparison of humour in a non-religious or atheistic context. I think the authors are aware of

this, as they point out that in their conclusions that not much can be said about the religious beliefs themselves as contributing factors to this seriousness, nor can fundamentalism be held solely accountable for aggression towards supposed outgroups in the Blogowska paper. However, as we will see in my following discussion of Moore's paper, there are clear distinctions between the humour employed by the atheists and the humour employed by the theists that he investigates.

### Self-Identity and Humour Style

First and foremost, Moore (2017, p.447) establishes that humour is a mechanism for creating social solidarity in groups, and that the key contributing factors to humour in these groups are self-conception, perceptions of outsiders, and micro-group culture. From this, he determines that even humour between groups in the same faith communities can differ greatly. In his paper, Moore compares the self-conceptions and humour styles of the Lake Church, as well as the Prairie Atheists. He observes that, despite being on opposite sides of the religiosity scale, both communities were 'extremely sensitive to outgroups', and both groups expressed their sensitivity in very different ways (Moore, 2017, p.451). Humour was used frequently within the Lake Church and, somewhat surprisingly, it had more light-hearted and humble undertones than the humour employed by the Prairies Atheists. It seems that the Prairie Atheists were more likely to make fun of outgroups, particularly religious outgroups, whilst the Lake Church were more likely to make fun of themselves.

Moore's findings paint a very different picture of the humour found within religious communities than previously described. The humility and laughter he observed is opposed to the seriousness observed by Saroglou and Jaspard, and Blogowska. But I think these distinctions are very important. Moore concludes that conflicts in humour within faith groups could actually be indicative of a deeper conflict in the group's self-concept (Moore, 2017, p.461). With reference to the Prairie Atheists, for example, viewing freedom as part of one's identity seemed to predispose individuals to appreciating offensive humour. I think this distinction is vital, and of great significance to our discussion about religiosity and humour.

On the arbitrary scale of religiosity, we can find an array of corresponding identities ranging from broadly liberal to deeply conservative, and each of these identities seems to align with different self-conceptions, in the same way that Moore describes. For example, stereotypically, a liberal Christian might describe themselves as modern, rational, scientific, and as an advocate for both religious and human freedoms. On the other hand, again stereotypically, a conservative Christian might describe themselves as traditional, literal, and as an advocate for the actual word of God. It is these self-conceptions that are going to contribute most to humour styles, and I would argue that it is these humour styles that are going to determine the seriousness afforded to an individual's religiosity. In other words, the way a religious person identifies is going to impact their capacity for certain kinds of humour.

Now, if we consider the experiments highlighted earlier in light of Moore's conclusions, we can critically analyse the relationship between religiosity and humour more deeply. For example, the subjects from Saroglou and Jaspard's experiment projected more seriousness when exposed to a religious stimulus. This seemed unrelated to their individual religious beliefs, but we do not know how the subjects would have self-identified. However, as noted earlier, we can reasonably expect that *regular* exposure to religious stimuli (i.e., church attendance, prayer, etc.) is going to make individuals more inclined to act seriously. I would argue that long-term exposure to religious stimuli, in turn, is going to impact how a person self-identifies. As such, not only will more religious individuals likely be more inclined to seriousness, their capacity for certain kinds of humour is also going to be affected.

Furthermore, the subjects in Blogowska's study were asked to rate their self-reported aggression towards gay people alongside the conservative nature of their views. Those with the highest scores were considered to be more fundamentalist. Although Blogowska's experiment measures how the subjects self-identify, I think a misstep is made when asserting that this self-identification amounts to fundamentalism. Nevertheless, their self-identification as conservative-leaning individuals is going to contribute to their humour-style, as outlined by Moore.

Overall, it seems that exposure to religious stimuli that is serious in nature, is responsible for increased levels of seriousness, and extended exposure to such stimuli could arguably lead to a change in one's self-identity. I postulate that fundamentalist groups are exposed to these kinds of stimuli on a more regular basis, which would in turn contribute to the increased seriousness, but further research is required. Based on Moore's paper, I would argue that it is not the religious nature of the stimuli that is responsible for the lack of humour, but the *inherent* seriousness of it, given the fact that, when compared with the Lake Church attendees, the Prairie Atheists took themselves far more seriously, which in turn led to a more limited and aggressive sense of identity and humour. The humour style appropriated by certain groups ultimately determines which kinds of humour are available to them, and which ones are closed off. But how and why this can lead to fundamentalism remains a complicated and troubling question.

## Conclusions

In this thesis, I have tried to argue that there is a significant relationship and subsequent relationship between the lack of humour found in God and the development of fundamentalist movements. Section one saw an attempt to properly define humour using the theories of humour prevalent within philosophical literature. I considered different theories, styles, and subtypes of humour in an attempt to understand what it really means for the individual to experience it within a human context and found that the theory of incongruity is somewhat helpful, whilst at the same time proposing a less restrictive approach through a family resemblance concept. I also argued that laughter, whether it be physical or internal, is a sufficient condition of humour, even if it is not a necessary one.

In the second section of my thesis, I argued that humour is not only compatible with God, but is also a necessary divine characteristic that serves to strengthen the certain classical theist attributes. For example, omnipotence necessitates humour in God because it consolidates His superiority in relation to humans as His creation. I also argued that God's omniscience

would necessitate humour, on the basis that as an all-seeing, all-knowing being, He is in the ultimate position to perceive the incongruity of human existence. Most importantly, I argued that in order to be truly omniscient, He must also be omnisubjective. This means that God experiences humour from a human perspective, in addition to the experience of humour derived from His omnipotence and omniscience. The last divine trait I considered was omnibenevolence. I concluded that humour is not a necessary part of divine love, although it is an important aspect of the love found in human relationships.

In the third section of my thesis, I considered the relationship between divine humour and human humour, paying particular attention to the possible *influence* of God's humour upon our own. To do this, I evaluated and analysed some potential examples of humour in the Bible, as well as possible ways they could be interpreted. Ultimately, I found that there were limited examples of divine humour, and that to try and find any concrete examples would mean overanalysing what is actually written. I also considered Arbuckle's reinterpretation of scripture that attempts to redefine divine humour as the so-called 'laughter of the heart' that accompanies reading the text. Despite his best intentions, I found that Arbuckle's argument can only show that God uses humour rather than experiences it Himself. As such, the prevalent seriousness of scripture undermines our attempts to find humour in God, despite having argued that humour is necessary for the maintenance of several divine attributes.

In the fourth section of my thesis, I took on the considerably difficult task of defining fundamentalism. The biggest challenge of this section was ensuring that we could differentiate fundamentalism from other kinds of behaviour. As such, I attempted to formulate a definition of fundamentalism that is capable of distinguishing itself from often overlapping categories such as conservatism, fanaticism, and extremism. I argued that the terms could be placed on a spectrum based on the capacity for violence associated with each of them, with conservatism and fanaticism being the least violent, fundamentalism involving a potentiality for violence, and extremism arguably requiring a commitment to excessive violence. Overall, I defined fundamentalism as a dedication to certain principles, likely

founded upon conservatism and fanaticism but, most importantly, it is a commitment to these principles alongside the zeal as anger-like passion discussed by Tietjen.

After defining fundamentalism, I moved onto section five where I discussed what fundamentalists say about humour. I began by outlining a thesis by Skimming that evaluates the use of humour in creating identity. I argued that the humour observed by her in ex-fundamentalists illustrates an incompatibility between both humour and fundamentalism more generally, given the fact that humour is used by the interviewees to distance themselves from their old communities. In addition, I found that there were little to no materials written by fundamentalists on the topic of humour, but that this was unsurprising given the nature of fundamentalist beliefs and behaviours. As such, I used the absence of humour in the propaganda distributed by an extremist group, the Army of God, to begin building the foundations of the argument I would pursue in section six; that humour and fundamentalism are incompatible, and the seriousness of religion could contribute to the development of fundamentalist beliefs.

In the final section of my thesis, I tried to pull each of the questions together to argue that seriousness (or a lack of humour) is a significant contributing factor to fundamentalist beliefs. I examined several experimental papers that tried to investigate the correlation between religiosity, aggression, and capacity to respond humorously. In light of Moore's paper on the topic of humour styles and self-identity, I argued that a lack of humour could significantly contribute to how one self-identifies, which in turn will influence humour style and capacity to respond humorously. I also noted that it is not the religious aspect itself that contributes to the seriousness and lack of humour, given the fact that the Prairie Atheists discussed by Moore had a more serious self-identity and humour response when compared to the Lake Church attendees who were much more light-hearted and had the capacity to laugh at themselves. Instead, I postulate that it is the absence of humour that we interpret in scripture and liturgy, and subsequently the lack of humour we interpret in God, that leads to the overwhelmingly serious associations with religion itself.

Overall, I think that my thesis could make some fruitful contributions to the study of both fundamentalisms and divine attributes. We have come to better understand the importance of humour in both ourselves and God, and how this is something that is quite often missing from and, at times, entirely incompatible with fundamentalist beliefs. Through my investigation of humour, its relationship with God, and its potential connection to fundamentalism, I have found that it is social and cultural influences upon our attitudes towards religion that contribute to our understanding of it as a serious topic, but also the lack of humour we ascribe to God that plays a significant role in this seriousness. I would argue that finding humour, at appropriate times, is not going to undermine or be a detriment to religion.

By understanding the essentiality of humour in God, we take a step towards re-evaluating the role of humour in religion and understanding its importance when it comes to our identities. Being able to laugh at ourselves, I think, is an important skill that teaches us not to take life too seriously. It is this self-reflection and ability to laugh at oneself that I believe fundamentalists lack, and this is driven by their possession of zeal in the form of anger-like passion. Humour can teach us to live and let live, and that what we and others believe is not a matter of life and death. If we can prove that God has humour, then, it becomes a question of why we continue to take ourselves so seriously when we could be living our lives according to God and His image.

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