



Bill Moyers



ON FAITH  
& REASON

A VIEWER'S GUIDE

Athenä:

## Questions to Consider

### EPISODE 1

#### SALMAN RUSHDIE

- Where do you draw the line between satire and hate speech? For example, how would you react if the Danish cartoonists whom Rushdie defends had published derogatory caricatures of a “sacred” American icon, such as Martin Luther King, Jr., or George Washington?
- Do you agree or disagree that religion is an expression of a “hardwired” moral sense?

### EPISODE 2

#### MARY GORDON & COLIN MCGINN

- Gordon says, “Faith without doubt is a kind of nostalgia or addiction.” What do you think she means? What role does doubt play in your system of belief?
- If, as McGinn says, science offers a limited worldview, what completes it or complements it for you?

### EPISODE 3

#### JEANETTE WINTERSON & WILL POWER

- As Winterson left home with her lover, her mother called out, “Why be happy when you can be normal?” In what sense is your happiness driven by an inner desire or defined by societal norms?
- Power describes the hip-hop technique of “flipping,” making something old fresher and more relevant. What myths—ancient or modern—have particular relevance in your life?

## EPISODE 4

### ANNE PROVOOST & DAVID GROSSMAN

- Because Noah gets drunk and curses his grandson after the Flood, Provoost wonders whether he was indeed the story's "good guy." How do you explain his actions?
- In your opinion, how does Samson's eventual fate—bringing down a temple upon himself and his enemies—affect Grossman's portrayal of him as a role model for the Israelites?

## EPISODE 5

### RICHARD RODRIGUEZ & SIR JOHN HOUGHTON

- According to Rodriguez, Catholicism has "chosen" him, rather than the other way around. In what sense have you inherited your beliefs?
- Houghton says that "I don't know" is the most important statement for both a scientist and a believer. How do you react to uncertainty in the context of faith? In science or other professional disciplines?

## EPISODE 6

### MARGARET ATWOOD & MARTIN AMIS

- Both of these writers attempt to get inside the minds of extreme fundamentalists in their works. What is the value of portraying extremists in fiction?

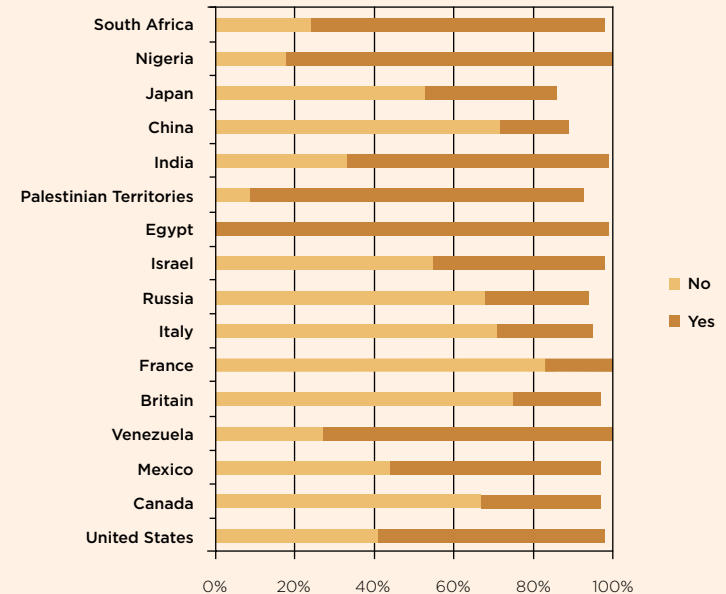
## EPISODE 7

### PEMA CHÖDRÖN

- In discussing Buddhism, Chödrön distinguishes between pain and suffering. What do you think she means? What is the difference for you?

- What do you believe is the alternative to "biting the hook" (as Chödrön says) when someone wrongs you? What is the difference between ignoring the bait and complete passivity?

## "IS IT NECESSARY TO BELIEVE IN GOD IN ORDER TO BE MORAL AND HAVE GOOD VALUES?"



Source: *Pew Global Attitudes Project*, Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life, Oct. 4, 2007. <http://pewglobal.org/files/pdf/258.pdf#page=120>.

## THE POWER OF PEN

### Where writers speak out

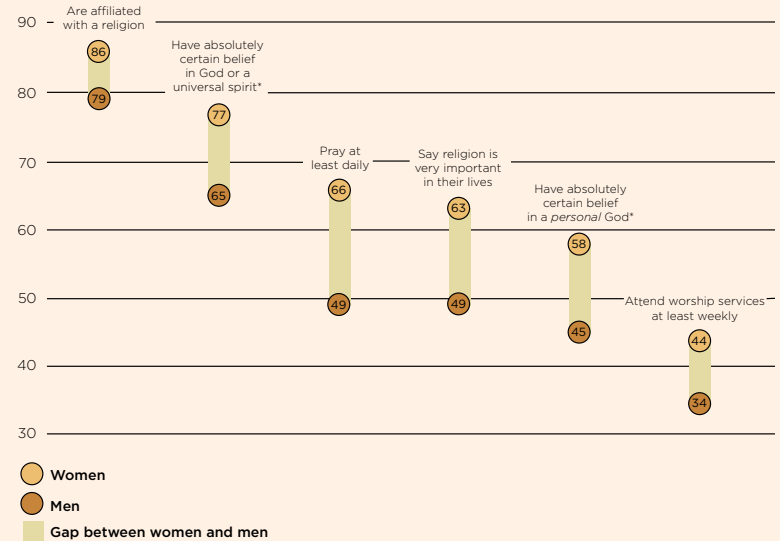
**B**ill Moyers drew the inspiration for *Faith & Reason* from World Voices—an annual conference organized by the PEN American Center in New York City. Since 2005, World Voices has hosted hundreds of writers from around the world for a week-long series of readings, talks, performances, and panel discussions. Salman Rushdie serves as the chair for this cross-cultural exchange of literary ideas.

With more than 3,400 members (as of 2010), the PEN American Center is the largest branch of PEN International, a worldwide organization that promotes free expression for all writers, regardless of race, religion, or nationality. (PEN stands for poets, playwrights, essayists, editors, and novelists.) The British novelist C.A. Dawson Scott founded the organization in London in 1921, with John Galsworthy (*The Forsyte Saga*) as its president. They hoped to foster goodwill among writers across political boundaries and provide an example to governments healing from the scars left by World War I. Today, as the world's oldest human-rights organization and the oldest international literary organization, it comprises 145 branches in more than 100 countries.

In addition to awarding literary prizes and organizing conferences such as World Voices, PEN actively campaigns for writers and journalists wherever governments attempt to silence them. Recently, it has raised worldwide awareness and worked for the release of political prisoners such as Cuban journalist Normando Hernández González, Chinese essayist Liu Xiaobo, and Burmese poet Saw Wei. In the United States, the PEN American Center's "Freedom to Write" campaign focuses on protection for bookstore and library records, federal shield laws, and other issues involving privacy and free expression.

## THE STRONGER SEX—SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING

% of women and men who . . .



THE PEW FORUM ON RELIGION & PUBLIC LIFE  
PEWFORUM.ORG

Data: *Pew Forum U.S. Religious Landscape Survey*, conducted in 2007, released in 2008.

\* Question wording: Do you believe in God or a universal spirit? [IF BELIEVE IN GOD, ASK: How certain are you about this belief? Are you absolutely certain, fairly certain, not too certain, or not at all certain? [IF BELIEVE IN GOD, ASK: Which comes closest to your view of God? God is a person with whom people can have a relationship or God is an impersonal force?]

Source: Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life, © 2009, Pew Research Center. <http://pewforum.org/>.

## WHAT IS FUNDAMENTALISM?

**F** *aith & Reason* touches on many themes affecting the world today: the conflict between science and faith, the separation between church and state, the tension between belief and doubt, sensitivity to gender issues, and the balance between tolerance and free expression. In discussing this series, Bill Moyers has stated that “the tug of war between reason and faith is a strong current running in the mainstream today, one more reminder of the old debate over absolutes and values.” That old debate has been renewed by the globalization of modern society. As cultures with different religious, political, and social traditions come into contact, some people react by strictly embracing certain religious beliefs—a movement known as fundamentalism.

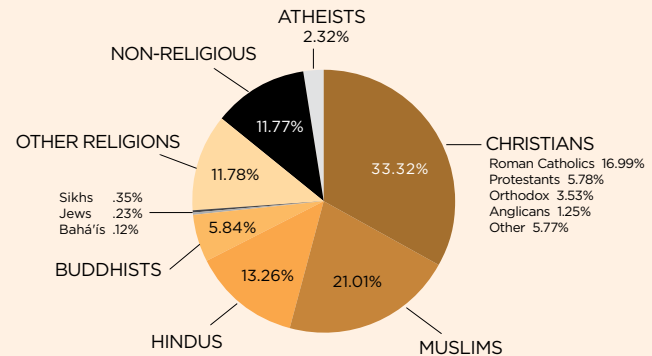
In the early 20th century, certain American Protestants adopted the term “fundamentalist” to describe their back-to-basics approach to faith, which included a literal reading of Scripture and the affirmation of important doctrines that they felt had been eroded or distorted. Since then, “fundamentalist” has become a catch-all term to describe any conservative religious reform movement, regardless of its faith tradition. While recognizing differences among these movements, scholars now generally think of fundamentalism not necessarily in terms of particular religious beliefs, but as a mindset or worldview. In the early 1990s, scholars Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby directed a massive study of worldwide fundamentalism and identified some common characteristics. Here are a few.

- Fundamentalist movements arise from what researchers call “reactivity”—to the prevailing culture, to a particular government, to other religions, or to certain ethnic groups. Regardless of tradition, fundamentalists feel embattled by new forces beyond their control, which they feel attack their identity as people of faith.

- Fundamentalists tend to focus on particular doctrines, rites, or practices in their faith at the expense of others. Similarly, fundamentalists single out certain aspects of modern culture as especially threatening while tolerating or even adopting others.
- Fundamentalists tend to perceive the world in either/or terms—good or evil, friend or enemy, saved or damned. As a result, they consider themselves members of the “elect” or the “chosen.” Some fundamentalist movements segregate themselves from the larger community by living in separate enclaves, dressing distinctively, or enforcing other restrictions.

## RELIGIOUS AFFILIATIONS WORLDWIDE

(Percentage of World Population, 2007 est.)



Source: CIA World Factbook

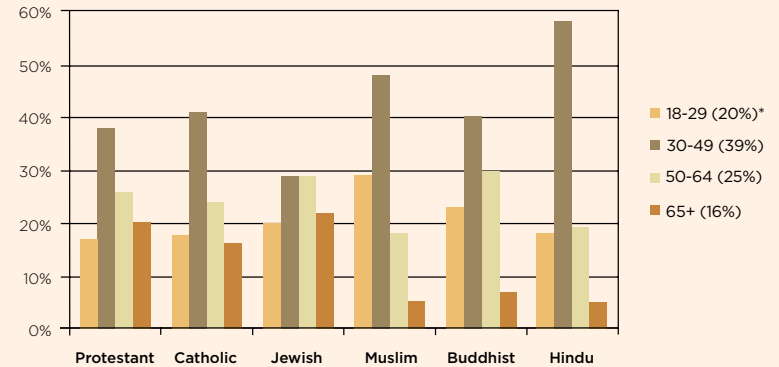
- Researchers characterize fundamentalists not necessarily as literalists, but as absolutists. They interpret their sacred texts and doctrines in an authoritative and exclusionary manner, rejecting alternative readings.
- As an extension of their dualistic worldview, fundamentalists perceive the conflict with their opponents not as an isolated political, social, or religious struggle but as part of a cosmic war between the forces of good and evil that will end in an apocalypse. For context, they draw inspiration from apocalyptic writings, prophecies, and traditions of their particular faith.

For many religious historians, including Niels C. Nielsen and Karen Armstrong, the fundamentalist movements that have flowered around the world in the late-20th and early-21st centuries have their roots in two different ways of perceiving truth. Since the scientific and technological revolutions of the last 200 years, modern societies all over the world and particularly in the West have come to exclusively prize *logos*—rational, pragmatic, empirical thinking—to solve problems and make decisions. They seize on this approach at the expense of *mythos*—a transrational, intuitive, subconscious mode found in art, music, literature, and religion. *Logos* seeks to answer the question “How?” *Mythos* seeks to answer the question “Why?” The former investigates causes and effects and proposes solutions; the latter delves into mysteries and invests meaning. If modern, technologically driven societies focus mostly on *logos*, fundamentalists react by focusing on *mythos*.

In the end, scholars agree that fundamentalism isn’t about a particular doctrine; it’s really about a particular way of thinking. Understanding it illuminates the roles of faith and reason in a world that seems increasingly divided.

For more information on religious movements, including fundamentalism, visit the University of Virginia’s Religious Movements Homepage, [www.religiousmovements.org](http://www.religiousmovements.org).

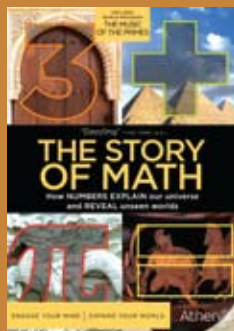
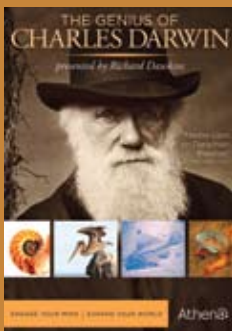
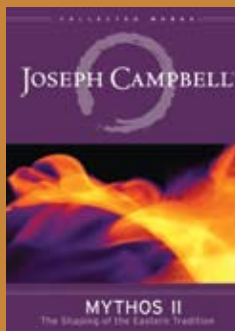
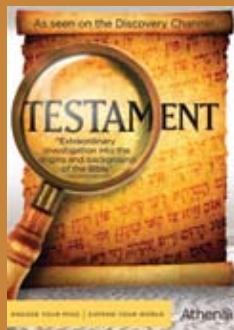
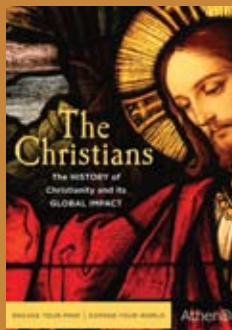
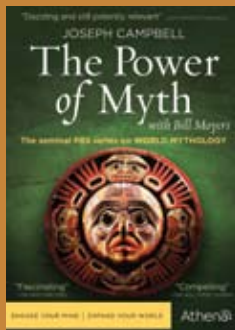
### AGE DISTRIBUTION OF MAJOR U.S. RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS



\* Percentage of total population

Source: *Pew Forum U.S. Religious Landscape Survey*, Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2008. <http://pewforum.org/uploadedImages/Topics/Demographics/Age/millennials-age-table.gif>

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