

Get UNSTUCK from FUNDAMENTALISM

A Spiritual Journey

By Robert Parson Crosby

EXCERPTS FROM A REVIEW BY DONALD S. WILLIAMSON

June 2005

Given the destructive influences of fundamentalist religion in the world today, including America, the first thing to be said about this book is that it is most timely.

This is a deceptively ambitious, delightfully written book. Yes, it does talk about fundamentalism, placing it within the Christian tradition, analyzing its logic (and illogic) and critiquing its impact on contemporary American politics. But it does much more, offering a life-giving alternative. So as an outcome of a lifetime of reflection, it addresses matters of life and death and meaning, all that in less than 150 pages, no mean achievement.

The book is intentionally as poetic as it is rational. This mix makes it as enjoyable as it is informative, for it stays clear and “gettable” from cover to cover. Again, no mean achievement.

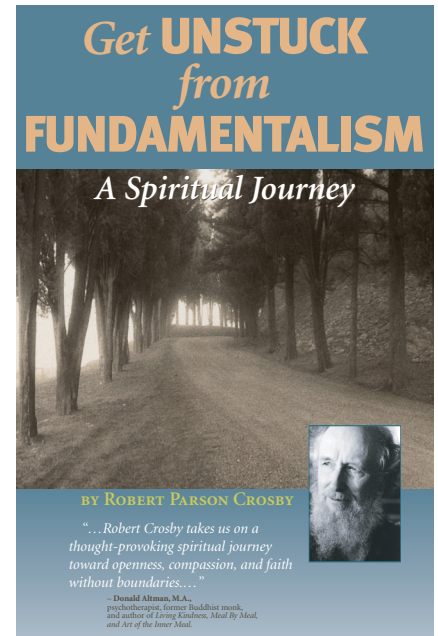
The author in his 76th year spent “doing nothing time” in Venice, Verona and Tuscany surrounded by religious icons and associations and revisited the question of salvation asking himself “who am I in this place?” He brings forth his mature answer in this book. Bottom line: “Salvation is being cleansed now, especially of pain, bitterness and regret about the past and repetitive worry about the future.” This is certainly a fetching proposition, but how do we get there from here? Clearly not through fundamentalism which he identifies as a belief system (as distinct from a faith system) generated by second hand learning and therefore founded in false-self.

So the message of the book is to “get unstuck from fundamentalism,” if one wants to know the kind of salvation “that says yes to life” and provides a road to freedom.

A foundational assumption of the author is that all language is interpretive. Consequently one can never know The Truth (the fundamentalist’s mistaken claim), but only one’s own truth, ideally held confidently but also modestly, that is open to influence. So learning to identify and take responsibility for one’s own interpretations and judgments is an important condition for entering this state of grace

He poses this question to the reader: who can and should create “reality” for you? Well, since we create reality with our thoughts (language) and only you can think your thoughts, then the answer can only be “you.” The critical follow-up question becomes, will you do this authentically through self differentiation or through second hand learning, that is through some externalized authority, the usual mode of fundamentalism?

If you choose the authentic path, then you will know that “you are accepted...whole, loved and loving just as you are...one with all of life.”



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The author's accompanying theology can be summarized as follows: "life is a mystery...faith is a leap beyond certainty: "true faith needs no proof," for it is comfortable in a place of "not-knowing..."

In concluding, Bob Crosby examines how fundamentalism has influenced the political debate on terrorism, school prayers, abortion and gay marriage. He puts forward his own progressive views, of a sort consistent with the editorial pages of the New York Times, an influential guide for his conscience as for mine. He also quotes mythologist Joseph Campbell, another important influence, who noted that life was, is and will be "a mess." So "follow your bliss." But Bob can't turn away so completely. And he reaches an alarming conclusion: "Most of the world fears American Fundamentalism as much as Islamic Fundamentalism." He worries that we are today moving towards a theocracy in the United States "more so than at any time since our founding." No wonder he felt moved to write this book.

How well has he succeeded? As the author would say, each reader will create her own judgment. But this reader experienced a loving spirit and a caring presence in the book that can only be a blessing to any open mind and heart. Last word from the author (echoing Joseph Campbell): "We are in a freefall into a future that is mysterious...we can't define it so just embrace it."

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