



Fleeing Fundamentalism: A Minister's Wife Examines Faith

Carlene Cross

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At a time when the distance between church and state is narrowing and the teaching of intelligent design is being proposed for our classrooms, it is startling and provocative to hear the reasoned voice of a dissident from inside the church. For Carlene Cross, arriving at this shift in belief was a long and torturous journey.

In *Fleeing Fundamentalism*, Cross looks back at the life that led her to marry a charismatic young man who appeared destined for greatness as a minister within the fundamentalist church. Their marriage, which began with great hope and promise, started to crumble when she realized that her husband had fallen victim to the same demons that had plagued his youth. When efforts to hold their family together failed, she left the church and the marriage, despite the condemnation of the congregation and the anger of many she had considered friends. Once outside, she realized that the secular world was not the seething cauldron of corruption and sin she had believed, and found herself questioning the underpinnings of the fundamentalist faith.

Here is an eloquent and compelling story of faith lost and regained. Certain to be controversial, it is also a brave and hopeful plea for greater tolerance and understanding.

Fleeing Fundamentalism: A Minister's Wife Examines Faith Details

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Maphead says

I could not put it down.

Craig Hart says

Having been raised fundamentalist, Ms. Cross's book, "Fleeing Fundamentalism" rang true with me. I could identify with so much of the book that it was a little scary. Beyond that, however, the book was well-written and captivating. It could certainly be enjoyed by those not as familiar with the lifestyle.

I also admire the author's courage in writing the book. I know it is sometimes dangerous, from a societal standpoint, to make negative feelings toward the fundamentalist Church known. I respect Ms. Cross for putting that aside. I am personally grateful to her for writing this book, as I found it helpful, comforting, and insightful.

I encourage anyone to read the book, but especially recommend it to those struggling with a dogmatic, fundamentalist religious upbringing. I know you will find it as helpful as I did. It's always nice to know you are not alone in your struggles and Ms. Cross makes this clear with wit, grace, and style.

Kim says

Since I've read other books and experienced fundamentalist thinking, this story, while horrifying at times, wasn't a big shocker and was unfortunately very predictable. I feel for the author.

I recommend this for women who are experiencing toxic faith, and for anyone wondering about where current conservative Christian culture came from or why some Christian movements today are love focused and others are completely suppressive of anything different. The picture of the fundamentalist movement of the 1980s is even more influential today than it was then. I see similar pitfalls outlined in this book even in less rigid Christianity.

For some of us, we may not have to abandon our faith as completely as the author, but I think many thinking people, especially women and minorities, raised in a conservative church environment will relate to this book on some level.

Emma says

The back of this book says it's written "without invective or blame". I don't think that's entirely true, but it's certainly written with a LOT less invective and blame than I would have written with if I'd been through what the author had been through.

The title is fairly self-explanatory, but what struck me was how many of her close friends in the fundamentalist movement had husbands with sexual addictions. I don't know if that was just a bad bunch or if it's widespread in the fundamentalist arena.

It's hard not to see her shift in beliefs as motivated by her husband's behaviour rather than independent 'self'-determined reasons, but then at the end of the day, we are all motivated by our situations.

An interesting memoir that makes me cherish my freedom.

Featherbooks says

Fleeing Fundamentalism: A Minister's Wife Examines Faith was a class assignment which I resisted, it not being a topic of much interest but within thirty pages or so, I found the book to be a page-turner. The author is a good and descriptive writer with a sense of humor. I appreciated her thorough nature as she enhanced her biblical study with historical research. Her missionary junket behind the Iron Curtain was tense and suspenseful and the ways in which her marriage to a Northwest Baptist preacher evolved was a shocker, confirming my suspicions about fundamentalist conservatism and misogyny. Her exploratory journey into and away from the confines of this secretive, scary extremism is an enlightening and entertaining trip to another world.

Alece says

This is not the type of book I would normally read, but I happen to know the author. The story is engaging and interesting, and I learned a lot about Fundamentalism that I didn't know. The author uses a lot of metaphors and similes, some of which I enjoyed and responded to, and others which seemed a bit too elaborate (but maybe that's really the way Carlene thinks, who knows). Overall, a very thought-provoking and riveting read!

A says

Part of the reason I am a (very happy) former fundamentalist (of the IFB strain, God help us all), was because of this book. Not only does Carlene Cross give her personal story, but shares research that many in the church don't want people to know.

Regardless of your religious persuasion, this is a very compelling read.

Michelle Robinson says

I could not finish this book. She is such a snob. She has absolutely nothing positive to say about her father or how she was raised. It made me sad for him and for her. I found myself thinking, if she can be so harsh just because he happened to be a farmer and she felt that was so far beneath her, how could I find her perspective on fundamentalists to be less biased? Would her critique be from a place of such snobbery and bias as well? I did not like her enough to continue reading to find out.

Mary says

I'll be blunt. Ms. Cross has a strong story to tell, and she writes well. But, as a Catholic, I found some things in the early section of the book quite offensive. I think I need to give the book another chance, and will revise this review and rating if or when I finish it.

Barbara says

This memoir served to remind me of the scripture in 1 Timothy where Paul criticizes religious leaders stating that they pay lip service to God but disown him by their works. Raised a fundamentalist, Carlene goes to Bible college and meets her dream man, an up-and-coming preacher named David. They marry and have children and, over the course of their marriage, discover that they don't really believe the teachings of their church. David is also a sex addict and an alcoholic; Carlene's descent into David's twisted world is hard to read about, so it's gratifying to see that she left. Carlene becomes somewhat of a spiritual agnostic during the course of her life after being thoroughly disillusioned by false Christianity. To her credit, she does study religious and biblical history; one wonders exactly what she studied at Bible college, since she gives no mention in the book of having read the entire Bible herself. Her subsequent divorce from David is hard on her children, but her resilience pays off: she attends college and earns a master's in communication. The title is a bit misleading; Carlene doesn't flee fundamentalism as much as she flees religious hypocrisy.

Wendy says

The author marries a charismatic man who becomes a minister and completely jumps into the fundamentalist Christian view of way of life (creationism, women are to be subservient, etc) but then slowly and painfully leaves him and their church. It was interesting to follow her awakening. This review probably shows my bias.

Steve says

I first read this work in the physical form a few years ago. I now have it in ebook format. For those examining the religion, into which they have been indoctrinated or have been raised with, for the first time - it is recommended reading.

Publishers Weekly said it might be controversial for some. This might be true for very few who sit down and read the book. Ms. Cross makes it clear she is examining her own faith and life and she is not unnecessarily harsh towards anyone. She is harsh on hypocrisy, male privilege, and small minds within the church but there have been works, that are harsher, from those who have followed a similar path.

Publishers Weekly also said it might be a little simplistic for some. I could see this being true for those who have left religion many years ago or for those who never participated in any kind of religion, especially Christianity.

Rebecca says

Five stars for the importance of this story in our current time of tea-partyers and mega-churches. This is a story about a brave, highly intelligent woman who didn't buy into the hypocrisy of fundamental Christians. It may be hard for you to read the truths she reveals when studying the facts uncovered by unbiased scientists and academics, but what is clear is how the subservient attitude placed on women in this religion gives male followers the "right" to psychologically abuse their wives (because physical abuse is a no-no). Through reading this book, one gains insight into the psychoses of fervent religious followers, the cult-like teachings and the distrust of any outside information. I have a better understanding of how the tea-partyers gained such high ground in the minds of the U.S. citizenship - it is a look into how ignorance and fear plays a huge role in people's decisions and behaviors.

This is a must read book for anyone who wants to understand why it is important to learn communication strategies that help folks like this understand reality (read: facts) and not the stories their version of the Bible tell them.

Connie says

This book blew my mind. Heard things about Christianity (especially its history) I'd never heard before, though I too grew up in it. I grew up in Fundamentalism in fact, so I can relate to the environment she portrays.

I was originally going to give the book 4 stars because there were a couple of things about Cross's writing that I didn't like: One, in the preface she begins abruptly, I felt, and also darkly--relating a "vision" she had as a girl of some of the events portrayed in the Biblical book of Revelation. (Fortunately this book got more engrossing for me as it went along.) Two: I thought she made some odd metaphors, often enough that I noticed it as a characteristic of her writing.

Having said all that, I think this book is important enough and gripping enough for 5 stars. I don't know that I agree with all the conclusions Cross came to, but I don't think that's the most important thing. I highly recommend this book for anyone struggling with Christian fundamentalism.

Candice says

I really enjoyed this book and recommend it as an eyeopener for the ways of Christian fundamentalists circa 1980. The first part of this book is an autobiographical journey of the author's young womanhood, which includes her attendance of a fundamentalist Christian bible college and marriage to a pastor. The second half of the book, unfortunately, turned into a bit of a soap opera, and in parts was quite vulgar. Reading the entire journey though, gets you through, even though I wouldn't call the ending a typically "happy" one. (I tried to contact the author on Facebook to see where exactly her spirituality stands as of today, but she hasn't responded.)
