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Book Review

Heidi Hadsell and Christoph Stückelberger, ed., *Overcoming Fundamentalism: Ethical Responses from Five Continents*, Geneva: Globethics.net, 2009. Pages: 212. ISBN: 978-2-940428-00-7.

This book is the collection of nine papers presented at an international conference of Globethics.net, held in Huissen (Netherlands) on “Fundamentalism and Ethics.” Besides the nine essays, there is a preface by Walter Fust and an introduction by Christoph Stückelberger. Instead of advocating the use of force to counter fundamentalism, the authors in this book call for an ethical response to fundamentalism, through a value-based development and mutual respect and active tolerance.

Nigel Dower, in his “Are Fundamentalist Conceptions of Development Compatible with Liberal Conceptions of Development”, focussing on North American Christian fundamentalism and Islamic fundamentalism, argues that these two conceptions of development are compatible in terms of goals, but not in terms of means (p. 31). Dower cautions that, “the polarization of the world into binary groupings such as liberal and fundamentalist is actually one of the most dangerous processes occurring in the world today...” (p. 32).

In “Fundamentalism versus Liberalism: Towards a Hermeneutical Turn to Ethics,” Girma Mohammed analyses the different Western and African perceptions of the relation between economic liberalism and fundamentalism and points out that the borders between the two are sometimes opposite in Africa and Europe. He argues that both fundamentalism and liberalism have raised vital questions and that grooming one wing with saint-like status while condemning the other to a devilish grade is very unlikely to do good for human society (p. 52).

Peter Pavlovic’s “Fundamentalism or Tolerance: What is the Public Role of Religion in Modern Society?” presents the relationship between fundamentalism, tolerance, identity and religion, focusing on the European situation. He points out that secularism has failed in Europe, but theocracy is not the solution. “To find a place for religion in public life is, however, a necessary condition for a healthy society” (p. 68).

“Religious Fundamentalism and Ethics of Recognition” by Joseph I. Fernando analyses the Hindu, Christian and Muslim fundamentalism and proposes an ethics of

recognition as a solution. “An ethics of recognition is not necessarily an ethics of unanimity and consensus, but a healthy, humane, mature, acceptance of difference” (p.82-83). He identifies the rejection of the dignity and worth of the human person as the root cause of the problems in the world today (p. 88).

Bernard Adeney-Risakotta, in his “Globalization and Religion from an Indonesian Perspective,” critically evaluates four narratives about globalization and analyses globalization and religion from an Indonesian perspective. He underscores that, “We are challenged to work together across religious, cultural and national boundaries, to raise awareness, oppose false consciousness, combat unjust structures, care for the victims and serve our neighbours” (p. 109).

Nick T. Wiratmoko’s “Democracy, Tolerance and Civil Society – Fundamentalism and Ethics in Indonesian Politics,” presents the development as well as the fragility of democracy in Indonesia and considers Muslim fundamentalism in relation to *Pancasila*, the Indonesian principle of tolerance and co-existence. *Pancasila* consists of admitting one and only God, just and civilized humanity, the unity of Indonesia, the representation of the people and social justice (p. 117). Following this, he presents the role of the civil society as an agent of reformation.

In “The Economic Ethics of Christian and Islamic Fundamentalism,” Yahya Wijaya depicts the economic ethics and mechanisms of Christian NeoPentecostal and Islamic fundamentalist movements in Indonesia. He observes that both Christian and Islamic fundamentalist groups in Indonesia are extensions of foreign movements and hence are unable to provide an ethical reference for the Indonesian economy. Hence they should be seen as challenges for contextual theologians to develop Christian and Islamic economic theologies for the Indonesian context (p. 147-148).

“Why Catholics Can’t Vote Pro-Life” by Brett Salkeld begins by pointing out that the right wing in the Western democracies is identified as pro-life in the sense that it rejects abortion and euthanasia. On the contrary, this demographic also tends to be more supportive of government policies that seem anti-life, such as capital punishment or aggressive military endeavour (p. 153). Salkeld puts forward a theological answer in a holistic pro-life perspective and urges public policy makers to value human life in all their policies.

According to Guillermo Hansen, Catholic integristism is the dominant form of fundamentalism in Latin America. In “Tolerance, Democracy and Fundamentalism(s): Challenges in Time of Systemic Bifurcations,” he shows that fundamentalism is a symptom of the disruptive forces of an unfair globalization, but not their cure (p. 205) and argues that tolerance is the basis for democracy and the answer to fundamentalism. Tolerance, for him, is not only a desirable moral virtue, but a necessary systemic quality for shaping our collective and global fate (p. 174).

The book has succeeded in bringing together scholars from different continents and different social and religious backgrounds to reflect on ways to overcome

fundamentalism. Yet another valuable contribution is that instead of finding fault with just one system, the authors try to present a balanced approach, analyzing the root causes of the conflicts. They are convinced that dividing the world into two groups and accusing one group alone will not offer any solution, but will only widen the gap. Violent reactions will not result in any positive outcome. Critical self-examination by fundamentalists and non-fundamentalists, tolerance, mutual respect and dialogue are the means to resolve the conflicts. The authors, in general, point out that fundamentalisms in the present world mainly come as a reaction to unjust globalization, insensitivity to cultural diversity and forced liberalization. They do not find fundamentalism as a solution, nor is violence the means to overcome fundamentalism. They invite us to think about alternative ways to overcome the divide in the world today. A contribution from the Indian subcontinent where different types of fundamentalism are on the rise, and including women's voices would have made this book richer. However, without doubt, Globethics.net has made a commendable contribution in bringing about this book.

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