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RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM : PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS

Religious Fundamentalism a Global Phenomenon

On February 14, 1989, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the spiritual leader of the Moslems in Iran, announced the following to the world Moslem community: "I would like to inform all the fearless Moslems in the world that the author of the book entitled *The Satanic Verses*, . . . as well as the publishers, . . . have been sentenced to death. I call on all zealous Moslems to execute them quickly, wherever they find them. . . . "Whoever is killed on this path," continued the Ayatollah, "will be regarded as a martyr."¹ As a committed Moslem, Khomeini is convinced that both the Christian West and the Jewish State are pawns in the hands of the Devil for the destruction of Islam. Hence his propaganda machine portrays the U.S. as 'the great Satan' and Zionism (alias the Jews) which had been at work 'for centuries everywhere, perpetrating crimes of unbelievable magnitude against human societies and values', as an emanation of Satan.² As Paul Johnson remarks, 'Khomeini followed the medieval line that Jews were subhuman or inhuman, indeed antihuman, and therefore constituted an exterminable category of creature'.³ Khomeini 'found it difficult to decide whether Satan was manipulating Washington via the Jews or vice versa'.⁴ In his own country, Khomeini 'succeeded' in making a quarter million of his people 'martyrs' for Islam. Khomeini knew how to use the 'weapon' of Islam even against an Islamic country. He presented President Saddam Hussein of Iraq as an 'infidel' who dared wage a war against the government of God and Islam. Therefore, to fight until the overthrow of Saddam Hussein is a religious duty of all Moslems. Those who perish in the war die for Islam and therefore are all martyrs.

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1. Tehran Radio, February 14, 1989, as cited in Dilip Hiro, *Islamic Fundamentalism*, London: Paladin Grafton. 1989. p. 296.
 2. Paul Johnson, *A History of the Jews*. New York: Harper. 1987. p. 577.
 3. *Ibid.*
 4. *Ibid.*

In Saudi Arabia, the oldest of the present-day Moslem fundamentalist states, the Islamic law known as *Sharia* is still the law of the land. Accordingly, at least one Saudi Arabian princess was publicly beheaded for adultery. In Egypt, on October 6, 1981 Islamic fundamentalists in the army brutally assassinated President Anwar Sadat, a man who had deliberately cultivated the image of 'The Believer President'. His 'crime'? He had signed a peace treaty with Israel, Islam's 'arch-enemy'.⁵ Moslem fundamentalists in Egypt, Pakistan and other Islamic countries accuse that Western influence is steering their people away from the Islamic way of life, and they demand that the respective governments 'purify' the laws of the country of its non-Islamic elements. In Pakistan, with the ascent of Benazir Bhutto to the prime ministership of that country, a debate is going on as to whether a woman can be the head of government, with the fundamentalists insisting that Islamic law does not permit a woman to hold that office. 'It is not Benazir Bhutto who is on trial, but Islam itself and the role of women in Islam'.⁶

Of late, religious fundamentalism has become an alarming global phenomenon. No religion or country has succeeded in making itself an exception. Fundamentalism is there in the less advanced countries of the East as well as in the advanced countries of the West; it is there in Islam, in Judaism, in Hinduism, in Sikhism, and in Christianity. Its global nature becomes all the more clear from the fact that almost everyone seems to be worried about the threat fundamentalism poses, not only in his own country but also in other parts of the world. Thus *The New York Times* in its editorial in the wake of the 1989 parliamentary elections in India expressed concern over the growth of fundamentalist political parties in India and worried about the threat that rising Hindu fundamentalism poses to the country.⁷ *The Washington Post* also shared the same view and expressed the same degree of apprehension.⁸ *Newsweek*, following suit, has drawn a glaring picture of Hindu fundamentalism in India.⁹

Indians themselves are now suddenly discovering that the fundamentalist menace is not merely a problem of some distant countries like Iran,

5. cf. Dilip Hiro, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-87.

6. M.V. Kamath, "The Benazir Debate." *The Times of India*, Sunday Review. November 26, 1989. p. 3.

7. Editorial, *The New York Times*. November 28, 1989.

8. Editorial, *The Washington Post*. November 29, 1989.

9. *Newsweek*. December 11, 1989. p. 24.

Lebanon, or Israel, but is very much alive and active in the Indian soil. Fed up with 'the upsurge of fundamentalism in the Moslem world,' Khushwant Singh wondered aloud whether 'the faith founded by Prophet Mohammed 1400 years ago' 'is viable for conditions prevalent today?'¹⁰ In an attempt to explode an oft-propagated myth, others have argued that Hindus are *as* communal as Moslems.¹¹ Many religious leaders and political commentators see in the Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Masjid row an indication of the emergence of militant Hindu fundamentalism in India. Faced with the rising tide of Hindu, Moslem, and Sikh fundamentalism, the minority Christian community in India worries about how safe their own future is going to be.¹² Here it will be interesting to note that the Christian West, which often complains about the ethical and religious 'barbarism' of the rest of the world, has its own brand of fundamentalism: Christian fundamentalism. In the United States, the Fundamentalist and Evangelical churches and the televangelists represent Christian fundamentalism, with their literal interpretation of the Bible, belief in the complete "inerrancy" as every word in the Bible is divinely inspired, political conservatism, religious exclusivism and intolerance, and the more dangerous alliance of the fundamentalist-conservative Christianity with conservative political parties. Christian fundamentalism in the West is so closely associated with Protestantism that it is often remarked, 'Scratch a Protestant and underneath you will find a fundamentalist.'

The Nature of the Fundamentalist Experience

The fundamentalist experience is a *deviant* experience. It is by no means a better, deeper, or fuller expression of man's religiosity or religious experience. The fundamentalist experience, in most cases, is at odds with the generally accepted, rational, norms of human behaviour. They attribute rationality to what is otherwise irrational; they ascribe meaning to what is otherwise absurd. 'Holy war', 'martyrs', and the claim to the exclusive possession of absolute truth are typical examples. Their world-vision is one that is out of touch with contemporary realities. Their thought system is a class by itself. A number of pseudo arguments merge into a few conventional catchphrases and reign supreme, 'un-

10. Khushwant Singh, "Islam on Trial". *Sunday Magazine*. October 22-28, 1989. p. 7.

11. "Hindus are as Communal as Muslims". *The Times of India*, Bangalore. December 16, 1989, p. 7.

12. *Indian Currents*. Vol. I, No. 1. 1989.

challenged' by the rational arguments of others. The fundamentalists are at once both highly gullible and highly sceptical—gullible with regard to propaganda by their own leaders, sceptical with regard to things that other groups do and say. Their cognitive system is primitive, pre-scientific, and closed. To them, the whole source of truth and knowledge is Scripture—The Bible, the Koran, the Torah. As their rigidity does not allow them to expose themselves to other sources of information other than the one provided by their own leaders or group, they persist in their ignorance and in their deviant experience.

Religion and religiosity permeate their whole life. To them, it is not merely a question of *integrating* the sacred and the secular, it is rather a question of *divesting* the secular of its secular elements and giving it a new identity, a sacred identity. Thus war becomes 'holy war' (*jihad*) and those who are killed in action become 'martyrs.' Any act, however inhuman or cruel it might be, when committed against the 'enemy' becomes a holy act. As they see it, extremism in defence of faith is a virtue; moderation in defence of faith is an act of omission and so a sin. Group affiliation and group pressure always act as sources of both motivation and psychological support.¹³ A few, however, are different. They are conformers while in the community but deviants when left to themselves. While their minds crave for freedom and spontaneity, the external pressure to remain within the fundamentalist fold acts as a constant restraint on their basic longing to be themselves, without a mask. It is such normal individuals or moderates who later create cracks in the fundamentalist bastion.

Unconscious Motives

What motivates an individual to join a fundamentalist group and continue to be active in it? The role of a number of unconscious motives and depth factors of the human psyche can not be overlooked.¹⁴ *Frus-*

13. Jewish fundamentalism, for instance, survived because of the Jews' strong group affiliation and group support. Even in the face of intense hatred and discrimination, the Jews continued to be 'classifiers' of other people. They went on classifying themselves as God's Chosen People and others as God's step children. cf. Thomas S. Szasz, *Ideology and Insanity*. Garden City, N.Y. : Doubleday Anchor, 1970. p. 53.

14. cf. John W. Atkinson, *An Introduction to Motivation*. Princeton, N.J. : Van Nostrand. 1964 ; Robert C. Bolles, *Theory of Motivation*. New York : Harper. 1967 ; C.N. Cofer and M.H. Appley, *Motivation : Theory and Research*. New York: Wiley, 1964.

tration, regression, repression (repressed motives), *reaction formation, rationalization, and complexes* of the ego are prominent among the unconscious mechanisms. Pessimism regarding the present condition of the world and the resulting over-caution, a conquering mentality, and repressed and displaced aggression also play a role.

Frustration at the existing situation and the subsequent *reaction formation* and the overwhelming desire to *regress* to the original 'purity' and 'authenticity' of the religion in question are at the root of Christian, Islamic, and Jewish fundamentalism. Thus the origin and development of Christian fundamentalism within Protestantism can be traced to the *millenarian* movement¹⁵ of nineteenth century. Pessimism and frustration regarding the state of the world at that time, and an over-caution for safety and security in matters of faith and religion, particularly salvation, prepared the ground for the emergence of new religious movements. A number of problems in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century upset the Protestant leaders in America: labour problems, the difficulties encountered in taking America to world prominence, the crumbling of the WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) ascendancy in the face of waves of Roman Catholic immigration, and the new method of Bible criticism which they felt was too liberal. To these threats they reacted first in the form of the millenarian movement and later by the founding of the Fundamentalist Churches. In other words, they re-asserted themselves by re-asserting the 'Fundamentals.' The theologically conservative movement, which began as a reaction to the Liberals or Modernists, finally articulated itself more formally: the World's Christian Fundamentalist Association was founded in 1919. The Millenarian movement thus finally became the Fundamentalist movement. In the 1960's and the 1970's, the 'death of God' theology and the Godless secular humanism drove many more people into the fundamentalist camp. Televangelism, which is a recent offshoot of Christian fundamentalism, also has its roots in the above factors.

In the twentieth century, Islam also found itself 'cornered.' And a cornered tiger fights back. Islamic leaders realized that the influence of

15. *Millenarianism*: A Christian religious movement of the last century, based on the belief that the end of the world is at hand, that shortly there would take place the Second Coming of Christ who will inaugurate the millennium. Psychologically, a *wishful thinking* of frustrated people.

the Christian West and the westernization process have taken away the 'purity' of Islam. They found that the truly Islamic lifestyle and the grip of Koran on the lives of people were waning. This change was especially glaring in Iran where the late Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, with the help of the United States, set in motion a process for the westernization of Iran.¹⁶ Naturally, where the suppression was the most brutal, the reactive outburst was the most ferocious. The Ayatollah whipped up the Iranians' Islamic passion, and they fought back until they succeeded in overthrowing the Shah and re-claiming Iran for Allah and Islam. Elsewhere in the Middle East, the Arabs found that with the help of the U.S. the hegemony of Israel is imposed upon them. The Palestinians, who are deprived of their homeland, also resorted to militant fundamentalism as a response out of sheer frustration and reaction. Jewish fundamentalism is the result of a hardening of attitudes that was caused by suffering and frustration for twenty centuries. The trauma of the Holocaust is the single most important factor that has affected Jewish thinking in our times. This has forced many Jews to 'put Jewish interests before any other consideration, by the moral right of suffering'.¹⁷

The situation in India is no different. Hindu fundamentalism is a rather new phenomenon. A sense of alarm and frustration and the feeling of being 'cornered' are strong among many sensitive, committed Hindus. The growing Christian influence, the increasing Moslem population and the growing Moslem influence through association with Arab wealth and power, and the conviction that Hindus have only themselves to support them have contributed greatly to the emergence of Hindu fundamentalism and neo-revivalist movements in Hinduism.

The Sikhs feel neglected and left out in the cold. They feel that they are an oppressed group, that as a group they are number one in India in their potential but the country does not allow them to actualize their potentials. Therefore, they too started to air their grievances and assert themselves. The Moslems as a minority group feel insecure, especially in the face of growing Hindu fundamentalism, and they organize themselves for the 'defence of Islam' and for 'self defence'.

Some other mental mechanisms also have played a role in the origin and development of fundamentalism. Some are attracted to funda-

16. cf. Dilip Hiro, *op. cit.*, pp. 153 ff.

17. Paul Johnson, *op. cit.*, pp. 545-46.

mentalism because it suits their personality type. Fundamentalism provides an occasion for deep commitment, passionate involvement, and militancy. One may also find in fundamentalism occasions for the release of some of the impulses that are repressed because they are socially censured. Thus, selfishness, aggression, jealousy, cruelty, feelings of inferiority and hatred may be "exercised as 'honourable' and 'heroic' characteristics when they are put at the service of a fundamentalist cause. Moreover, fundamentalism provides an avenue for substitute satisfaction of repressed wants and goals. Thus many of the Islamic and Hindu laws that accord only a low status to women in society are maintained to suit the convenience of men. An anti-conversion bill may be introduced in the Assembly or Parliament under the pretext of preventing forced conversions; the reality behind it, however, may be frustration, envy, and intolerance. American Christian fundamentalists engage in a malicious propaganda against the Soviet Union and *rationalize* it: 'The Russians, after all, deserve it because Russia is an "evil empire."¹⁸ Jewish fundamentalists justify every atrocity of the State of Israel against the Palestinians because Palestine is 'the land God gave to the Jews at the dawn of civilization' and Israel has the 'right to exist.'¹⁹ The Sikh fundamentalists cover political ambition with the veil of 'protection of the sacredness of the Sikh religion.'

Extremely militant fundamentalism may be the result of an unconscious process. It may arise out of latent feelings of inferiority and insecurity, and may reflect an uncompromising attitude and an over-zealous attempt for self-defence. Joining a fundamentalist sect, again, is used as a means for establishing a solid *ego-identity* as it is found that incompetent, aimless, confused people strive to develop a reliable, concrete ego-identity through attaching themselves to something 'solid' and 'stable'.

Satisfying Deep-seated Psychological Needs

Many people join fundamentalist groups and remain there because it satisfies some of their psychological needs. These people, for instance,

18. Words used by former U.S. President Ronald Reagan to characterize the Soviet Union.

19. "We were granted the right to exist by the God of our fathers at the glimmer of the dawn of human civilization nearly 4,000 years ago. For that right, which has been sanctified in Jewish blood from generation to generation, we have paid a price unexampled in the annals of the nations" - Menachem Begin's speech in the Israeli Knesset, June 20, 1977, as cited in Paul Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 546.

may want to escape from the loneliness, confusion, and estrangement that they experience in the secular world. And they find in the cohesion of the fundamentalist group what they are desperately looking for: acceptance, communality, order, certainty, and a safe haven – spiritually and psychologically. Sigmund Freud held that religion attracts people with promises of *comfort, power, and protection*.²⁰ Accordingly, one of the basic aims in taking shelter under religion is this need for comfort and protection, and the sense of power that it provides. As fundamentalism offers all the above in a 'fuller', 'more intense' measure, some people find it irresistibly attractive. Adherence to fundamentalist beliefs and practices is also a source of *tension-reduction*. When matters of theological or ideological confusion arise, the certainty and stability that fundamentalism and the characteristic conservatism provide are a source of comfort and solace to the adherents. For instance, their conviction of Biblical inerrancy, the belief that "every word in the Bible is spiritually, historically and scientifically true, without contradiction or error,"²¹ keeps their ship unshaken even in the midst of a storm.

Fundamentalism can satisfy some of the deep-seated psychological needs and impulses of its adherents. Among these are the need for power and self-enhancement, and the need to maintain self-esteem and pride. The need for affiliation and support, the need to overcome feelings of inadequacy and insecurity are also important. Militant, fanatic fundamentalism which thrives upon 'absolutism', 'exclusivism', and claims of 'uniqueness' is a way of asserting that one's own faith is superior to other faiths. This enables the individual who is otherwise insignificant and powerless in the eyes of others assume an air of importance and superiority. Hence the enhancement of ego and the improved self-esteem. That is to say, *powerless people make themselves 'powerful' by joining a powerful organization*. For instance, an individual may be poor, uneducated, unwelcome by family and friends and unwanted in society. But once he joins the RSS or Viswa Hindu Parishat or one of the sundry Islamic fundamentalist Palestinian groups, he suddenly finds himself powerful, accepted, and respected. Or, a poor, simple Christian may

20. Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*. J. Strachey (Ed.) Vol. 21, London: Hogarth, 1961; *Moses and Monotheism*, in *Standard Edition*. Vol. 23, 1964; *Totem and Taboo*, in *Standard Edition*. Vol. 13, 1955.

21. Terry Mattingly, "Baptists Signal Right Turn in St. Louis." *Champaign-Urbana News Gazette*, June 14, 1980.

regard himself as superior to a well-educated and well-positioned Jew because the latter is 'unredeemed' and so 'inferior' anyway. In other words, they create a class of 'inferior' people to whom they can always feel superior. Some high-caste Hindu fundamentalists are still for maintaining the caste system, for it enables even the least of the high-caste Hindus feel superior to even the most talented low-caste Hindu.

The fundamentalist framework gives respectability and honour even to the most virulent and anti-social of the impulses. An individual with impulses of raging cruelty, jealousy, criminal selfishness, sociopathy, paranoia, and hatred may find these traits as 'useful means' to win honour in a fundamentalist sect. Fundamentalism provides all sorts of excuses for justifying anti-social impulses. Thus racism is an acceptable philosophy to many fundamentalists. Most American fundamentalists are racists. They are opposed to the Equal Rights Amendment of the Constitution, and they are among the vociferous supporters of Ronald Reagan's economic 'reforms' that hurt the blacks, the Hispanics, and the poor. What is curious is that hatred of blacks and Jews is justified on Biblical grounds. In a similar fashion, anti-Semitism in Germany in the pre-Nazi period was justified on various grounds, although the real underlying factor was the envy that many Germans felt at the ascendancy of the hard working German Jews.²²

Skilful Use of Strategies

It is not solely on the basis of its intrinsic worth that fundamentalism catches adherents. The skilful use of strategies and manipulative mechanisms is part of the fundamentalist *modus operandi*. First of all, they have accepted a very powerful *central value*. Psychological studies show that a person's behaviour is to a great extent influenced by his *central value*. The pursuit of pleasure, fame, power, liberty, humanism, or wealth may serve as a central value for a person. To the fundamentalists, *salvation* is the central value. God and salvation and a set of other sub-values that emanate from the central value determine their behaviour. Since salvation is *the* important thing, they subordinate every other value and

22. Paul Johnson remarks : 'German Jews worked fanatically hard. They soon began to carry off the new Nobel prizes : two in physiology and medicine, four in chemistry, two in physics, all for work done before the first World War . . . German Jews were workaholics, hurrying men'. *op. cit.*, p. 405.

goal to this one core value. Theirs is a theocentric and not an anthropocentric world. They scorn the world of the secular-humanist where 'man' is the measure of all things' (Protagoras).

At the root of the strength and cohesiveness of any fundamentalist group is conformity and obedience. Free thinking is not encouraged, and questioning authority is never tolerated. God's will is communicated through authority. The followers need not know the 'why' of decisions. Total allegiance to authority is demanded; there is no compromise in this matter. Fundamentalists' objection to humanism is on the grounds that it places man and reasoning—not God, faith, and obedience—at the centre. Faith, they argue, is not based on reason. Any attempt for "rebellion" is ruthlessly put down. Rebelling against authority is rebelling against God himself. In short, blind obedience, total allegiance, and the 'holy brainwashing' and 'spiritual mass hypnotism' make the followers a sort of 'dumb sheep'.

Selective perception and selective cognition protect their belief system intact. They do not keep an open mind. They perceive only those ideas and things that reinforce the credibility and authenticity of their faith system. Things unfavourable to their faith object are simply shut out. Equally notorious is their manipulative logic.²³ American fundamentalists, for instance, 'equate' America with the kingdom of God. Hence, America's enemies are God's enemies too. Their apocalyptic preaching and Doomsday prophecies, reminiscent of John the Baptist's preaching in the Palestinian deserts, earn for them a number of followers. "The time is short. The Lord is coming soon" (referring to the Second Coming of Christ) is a favourite theme in Christian fundamentalist preaching, as well as in their songs and writings. Soviet Russia, socialism, terrorists, the 'unsaved', and the third world nations are the outgroups frequently selected as the favourite targets for hatred. Every fundamentalist believes there are two competing systems working in the world – God's and the secular world's. They are proud they have opted for God's system. Their preoccupation with the Devil and his power and his involvement in this world sometimes assumes pathological proportions. Catchphrases like the 'unsaved', the 'condemned', and the 'enemies of faith' perpetuate stereotypes. Some fundamentalist theologians and religious leaders even

23. cf. David Rapaport, (Ed.), *Organization and Pathology of Thought*. New York: Columbia Univ. Press. 1951.

deny God's fatherhood to those whom they call 'unredeemed.' In order to instil the fear of God in people's hearts, a strict cause-effect interpretation is employed as sign of divine intervention. Thus, any misfortune or calamity, to oneself or to the 'enemy,' is 'God's punishment,' and any good received is God's 'blessing' or 'reward' for keeping his commandments.

The great organizational power, and the glitter and pomp and pageantry of televangelism attract many to that sort of fundamentalism. These leaders preach what the people want to hear: God wants his children to live in prosperity, comfort and happiness and to be victorious over their enemies, to be successful in career and in business. Their preaching of the rags-to-riches gospel earns for them many followers. Televangelist Bob Tilton, for instance, makes good use of the 'prosperity theme.' Equally well-known is televangelist Oral Roberts' prosperity-blessing: 'May God bless you in your bodies, in your spirits, and in your finances.' Some others stick to a bright message, a message full of promises and optimism. Their brand of Christianity offers only roses, not crosses. Other 'techniques' being used include claims of special powers like the healing power, appeal to emotion rather than to reason, and intense attacks on the 'gods' of the Godless secular-humanism.

Mixing Religion and Politics

Speaking from the psychological point of view, one of the great appeals of religious fundamentalism to its followers is derived from its effective coupling with politics. Zionism and Islamic fundamentalism would serve as typical examples. Religion, politics, and sex are the three consuming 'passions' that can overpower man. When two of these, religion and politics, are coupled together, they become capable of releasing great energies in man. The psychological appeal of fundamentalism becomes tremendous when it is a blend of God and country, salvation and earthly power.

One of the major reasons for the rapid initial triumph and later spread of Islam was that Prophet Mohammed masterfully fused religion and politics together. This, in fact, was the antithesis of what the founder of Christianity recommended to his followers. Christ asked his followers not

to mix God and Caesar together.²⁴ Islam, however, took the opposite course. 'There is no distinction between religion and politics in Islam. Besides being a messenger of God's word, Prophet Mohammed was an administrator, judge, and military commander.'²⁵ Thus in January 630 A.D., when Prophet Mohammed entered Mecca, he came not merely as a religious messenger of love and peace, but as 'the head of an army 10,000 strong,'²⁶ to punish and avenge the 'infidels' and the enemies. It was while making preparations to attack Syria that he died, on June 8, 632 A.D., following a sudden and severe illness.²⁷ At that time he was not only a highly respected religious figure, but also the most powerful man in Arabia.²⁸ Umar ibn Khattab, the second Calif,²⁹ followed Prophet Mohammed's policy of military conquests to aid the spread of Islam. Defeating the Byzantine forces he seized Syria in 636 and, in 637, barely five years after the Prophet's death, he captured what is today Iraq and part of Iran from the Sassanids.³⁰ From Calif Umar 1350 years ago to Ayatollah Khomeini today, Islamic leaders have always inseparably linked military conquests and the spreading of Islam. 'In the case of Islam, religion was the state – with its Prophet acting as the military commander, making war and peace, collecting taxes, laying down the law and dispensing justice.'³¹ On Tehran radio on February 22, 1989 Khomeini restated 'the inseparable link between religion and politics, and attacked revisionism.'³² In fact, in the nine-year long Iran-Iraq war defence of country and defence of Islam were one and the same for every Iranian.

With the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in the first century A.D. the Jews had lost their homeland and Jewish nationalism ceased to exist. With Theodor Herzl and Zionism, however, the Jews again began to think of their religious destiny in terms of their political destiny – a vision

24. "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" Mt. 22:21. In his attempt to keep Church and State separate, Pope John Paul II staunchly opposes clergy getting involved in politics, and has issued a ban on members of the clergy holding any political office.

25. Dilip Hiro, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

26. *ibid.*, p. 8.

27. *ibid.*, p. 11.

28. *ibid.*

29. The Arabic word *Calif* means 'successor' (of the Messenger of Allah).

30. Dilip Hiro, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

31. *ibid.*, p. 9. The author is basing himself on the authority of Bernard Lewis, a historian.

32. *ibid.*, p. 297.

that became a reality with the creation of the State of Israel in 1948. In today's Israel 'state and religion are often indistinguishable'³³ and inseparable, and Jewish fundamentalism and Jewish politics inseparably mix – both within and outside Israel.

India is not an exception to the mixing of political and religious fanaticism. The very division of the country into India and Pakistan on religious grounds, the demand for the creation of Khalistan as a homeland for the Sikhs, the Moslems in Kashmir agitating for the union of that state with the neighbouring Islamic country, and the cherished dream, on the part of Hindu fundamentalists and their political wing, of establishing a Hindu Rashtra or Ramarajya are ample evidence to the ominous situation in the country. When religion and politics are fused together, the situation becomes extraordinarily explosive and unmanageable.

American fundamentalism also is deeply involved in politics. Some fundamentalists are against Jews and the Jewish State while others are pro-Israel. The latter even organize the Annual Prayer Breakfast in honour of Israel. Jerry Falwell, televangelist and the founder of Moral Majority – a politically conservative, right-wing pressure group – is a staunch supporter of Israel and racist South Africa. On his return from a visit to South Africa, for instance, he even called Nobel Peace laureate and prominent black liberation activist Archbishop Desmond Tutu a "phony" – a remark that evoked much controversy. Televangelist Pat Robertson ran for a national office, trying to win the 1988 presidential nomination of the Republican Party. Most Christian fundamentalists are politically conservative and extremely patriotic. They actively support large military spending, and stand for the WASP values and culture. In Ronald Reagan they had their man in the office. In effect, most fundamentalists and televangelists think and act like the leaders of the Revolutionary War who prayed, "God, if you will help us, we will give this country to you."

Claims of 'Superiority' and 'Uniqueness', and the Consequences of Exclusivism and Intolerance in a Pluralistic Society

Probably at the heart of the fundamentalist problem is the claims of 'superiority' and 'uniqueness' that every religion makes. Exclusivism and intolerance naturally follow from such claims. God is the *Mysterium*

33. *Time*. April 30, 1990. p. 42.

*Tremendum*³⁴ and the 'Wholly Other'; no religion can claim that it has completely comprehended this *Mystery*. Yet, one should admit that each religion has succeeded in its own way in getting a glimpse of this *Mysterium Tremendum*. Only when man wholeheartedly accepts the truthfulness of other religions as authentic ways leading to God, and is prepared to 'go out with his whole being to meet his *Thou*'³⁵ in other religions in the dialogue spirit of the I-Thou encounter, there will be an end to the problems created by claims of 'superiority' and 'uniqueness.' Then only the danger of exclusivism and intolerance will give way to the harmony of pluralism. In the past, theological reflections of various religions stressed the differences; the time has come for all theological reflections to cease stressing the differences and instead converge on 'thought on the reality of God.'³⁶

There are many striking similarities between the psychodynamics of *ethnocentrism* and fundamentalism.³⁷ Both are based on the human psychology that tends to glorify what is one's own and reject or depreciate that which belongs to others. In ethnocentrism, people reject members of other ethnic or national groups, and over-appreciate the qualities of one's own ethnic or national group. In a similar fashion, every religion - Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, and Sikhism - presents itself as possessing the fulness of truth, and looks down upon other religions. In fact, there is no denying the fact that every religion has got many plus points which other religions do not have. Even a religion like Sikhism, for instance, which many may consider a minor world religion (compared to the other great world religions like Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism), can be proud of many plus points. Thus Sikhism may deem itself superior to both Hinduism and Islam as it (Sikhism) incorporates in it the best of Hinduism and Islam, purified of the irrationalities and superstitions of both these religions. Besides, some of the best, and most rational, treatment of God and the origin of the universe are found in the Sikh religious texts.³⁸ While religions like Christianity struggle to

34. Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (ET) J.W. Harvey. New York : 1923.

35. Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (ET) Ronald Gregor Smith. New York : Charles Scribner's, 1958. p. 79.

36. David Tracy, in Arthur A. Cohen, *The Tremendum : A Theological Interpretation of the Holocaust*, Foreword, p. xiii. New York : Crossroad. 1988.

37. cf. T.W. Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality*. New York : Harper. 1950.

38. cf. W. Owen Cole and Piara Singh Sambhi, *The Sikhs : Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, New Delhi : Vikas. 1978. pp. 68-75.

reconcile its own creation theories with the scientific theories of the origin of the universe, 'Sikhism has no difficulty in coming to terms with scientific theories of evolution, in fact they find them congenial to the belief in an expanding universe derived from the mind of God.'³⁹ In the practical realm also Sikhism maintains a high quality. Sikhism prescribes a very disciplined and dignified way of life. Manual work, for instance, 'is a high form of worship in Sikh eyes.'⁴⁰ No task is ignoble, but some work is declared unworthy on ethical grounds.⁴¹ The poor and needy must always be helped irrespective of their religious affiliation.⁴² No wonder, a Sikh who practises a religion with such lofty ideals will honestly feel that no other religion is a match to Sikhism.

Probably one can not find fault with a believer who feels legitimate pride in his own religion. The problem arises when this pride leads to *negative stereotyping* which in turn predisposes one to view others belonging to other religions as 'inferior,' 'unsaved,' 'condemned,' or 'gentiles.' Hence the tendency to be intolerant and hateful towards them. Intolerance of other or opposing views is built into the structure of certain religions. To put it in the terms of Transactional Analysis (TA), it is healthy to have an "I'm OK, You're OK" attitude, but it all collapses when you start assuming the "I'm OK, You're not OK" attitude.⁴³ For a typical illustration of exclusivism and inclusivism in history one may turn to the experience of the Jewish people.⁴⁴ As a religious (and racial) group, they were the object of intense hatred by Christians in antiquity as well as in the Middle Ages, and in our own times by the Nazis and the Moslems. All sorts of slanders were deliberately spread about them, both for religious and secular reasons. Thus Pope Innocent III (Pope: 1198 - 1216) said of the Jews: 'Jews, like the fratricide Cain, are doomed to wander about the earth as fugitives and vagabonds, and their faces must be covered with shame. They are... to be condemned to

39. *ibid.*, p. 71.

40. *ibid.* p. 108.

41. *ibid.* Among the work declared unworthy are running a gambling club, trading in alcoholic drinks, prostitution, and begging as a profession.

42. *ibid.*, pp. 108-109.

43. cf. Thomas A. Harris, *I'm OK-You're OK*. London: Pan Books, 1973. pp. 42 ff.

44. *Exclusivism*: Excluding other religions from truth and God's plan of salvation. *Inclusivism*: Including only one's own religion in God's plan of salvation; the 'Chosen People' concept.

serfdom.⁴⁵ If Innocent III's stereotyping is on the basis of religion, others found a secular basis for discrimination. 'The essence of Judaism...', said an article in the London *Times*, 'is above all a racial pride, a belief in their superiority, faith in their final victory, the conviction that the Jewish brain is superior to the Christian brain, in short, an attitude corresponding to the innate conviction that the Jews are the Chosen People, fated to become one day the rulers and legislators of mankind.'⁴⁶ Others attributed the causes of world unrest to Jewish machinations,⁴⁷ while others claimed that 'over 95 per cent of the present [1920] Bolshevik government are Jews.'⁴⁸ 'The Jews are our misfortune'-cries were common in Germany. Robert Wilton, the Moscow correspondent of the London *Times* even published a book claiming that the Bolsheviks [Jews] had erected a statue to Judas Iscariot in Moscow.⁴⁹ Years after the Holocaust, one Jewish theologian expressed in the following words the anomaly, the anguish, and the distress he felt at the suffering of his people in the hands of the 'redeemed' : '... martyrs are all saints, Dietrich Bonhoeffer or Karl Gerstein or six million Jews, but the slayers were all baptized ...'⁵⁰

Exclusivism and intolerance are the outcome of a pathological distortion of the *central value* and the many particular values that make up the fundamentalist's value system. The various particular values tend to maintain an *internal harmony* among themselves. Thus the belief that it is necessary to be born-again to inherit the kingdom of God necessarily leads one to believe that anyone who is not born-again is also 'unsaved.'⁵¹ To employ a related psychological concept, we may say that people whose *central values* imply notions of 'superiority' or 'uniqueness' tend to have unfavourable attitudes towards members of other religions because they have a psychological need to maintain *cognitive consonance*. Leon Festinger's concept of *cognitive dissonance*⁵²

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45. Letter to Count Nevers, A.D. 1208, as cited in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 11 th ed. Vol. XIV.
46. *The Times*, November 27, 1919, as cited in Paul Johnson, *op. cit.*, pp. 456-57.
47. cf. William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*. New York: Fawcett. 1950; Paul Johnson, *op. cit.*, pp. 456-57.
48. Paul Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 457.
49. Robert Wilton, *The Last Days of the Romanovs*. London, 1920. p. 148, as cited in Paul Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 457.
50. Arthur A. Cohen, *op. cit.*, p. 58.
51. Most Christian fundamentalists are born-again Christians.
52. Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*. Evanston, Ill. : Row, Peterson. 1957.

implies that if one holds that one's own religion is the only one true religion, then one can not at the same time hold that other religions are also equally true. If, on the other hand, one holds that other religions are also equally true, then it will be an instance of *cognitive dissonance* which will cause psychological tension in the person. The human being tends to avoid cognitive dissonance and maintain cognitive consonance as the former generates psychological discomfort and the latter psychological harmony and freedom from tension. Naturally the individual adopts the belief that his own religion is the only true religion and that he is right in holding fast to it. This is why many Christian fundamentalist leaders incessantly remind their followers that there is only One truth and One way leading to that Truth. Thus the leaders urge their followers not to have any fellowship with members of other religions as the 'redeemed' are not to be 'polluted' or 'contaminated' by the 'unredeemed' or 'those who live in darkness.' They find ample scriptural basis for *intolerance* and exclusiveness. One oft-quoted verse is in 2 Corinthians chapter 6: "Do not be miseducated with unbelievers. For what partnership have righteousness and iniquity? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? ... Therefore, come out from them, and be separate from them, says the Lord ..."⁵³

Since they believe that they are the sole possessors of the whole truth, the concept of 'search for truth' or 'dialogue' simply is not there in their language. Since absolute truth belongs to them, why should they? Christianity, Islam, and Judaism maintain such *absolutism* which is a grave threat to *pluralism*. However, fundamentalism, by its very nature, is a paradox and an enigma in a pluralistic society. For it is pluralism that has granted fundamentalism its existence; at the same time it (fundamentalism) poses the gravest threat to pluralism. In a pluralistic society, therefore, fundamentalism is a parasite. It sucks the blood of the very society that lets it live and thrive.

Personality Pattern of Followers

Is there a 'fundamentalist personality'? Probably not. However, it is people with a certain personality pattern that fall easy prey to fundamentalism. Many fundamentalists are found to have a personality pattern

53. 2 Cor. 6 : 14-17.

that is characterized by rigidity of thought and closed-mindedness, an uncompromising attitude, a self-centred world-view, and proneness to accept authoritarianism rather than democratic processes. They are extremely disciplined in life style, and lead a life of total commitment. Their willingness for martyrdom is one expression of this commitment. Theirs is a strictly regimented life. They are people with a *receptive orientation*.⁵⁴ Like the Germans during Hitler's time, they prefer to be the loyal followers of a charismatic leader. In other words, they want to be *led*, to be *told what to do*. They prefer to be led by a charismatic leader rather than function in the 'confusion' and 'wastefulness' of a democracy-like set up. They crave for conformity and structure and for the stability and certainty that absolutistic beliefs provide. They are resistant to change, and are unable to adapt themselves to new circumstances. They prefer the 'proven ways', the 'wisdom of the ages' to innovations and experimentation. That is why such people stick to the stability and certainty which a literal dependence on Scripture can provide. As they stand for absolutism, pluralism is intolerable. People with this type of personality pattern usually swallow 'facts' presented by 'concerned people' or 'authority' – no questions asked. It does not bother them that what is blindly swallowed may not be digested or may be poisonous.

Some of the extreme cases may have even pathological personalities. People with slight mental abnormality, obsessive-compulsives, people who crave for pathologically firm commitment to a cause, those with sado-masochistic tendencies,⁵⁵ people with slight depression, and aggressive personalities may find that a fundamentalist group gives them every opportunity for action, or they may take 'asylum' in the rigid atmosphere of fundamentalism. Some may use the fundamentalist arena as a place where they can safely give vent to many of their antisocial impulses. The question of the mental health and mental fitness of fundamentalists, especially the militant type, has drawn attention from psychiatrists and

54. cf. Erich Fromm, *Man for Himself*. New York : Fawcett, 1975. pp. 70 ff; Helen Peak makes the following observation on the characteristics of Germans during the Nazi era: 'Persons reared in the authoritative family, which is common in Germany, typically find the greatest security and satisfaction where they are dominated by superior authority on the one hand and where they can, on the other, 'lord it over' some one else of lower status'. *Psychological Monograph*, 1945. 59. No. 276.

55. cf. Erich Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*. Hammondsworth, Eng. : Penguin, 1973.

psychologists. They point out that involuntary mental diagnosis of certain fundamentalist groups can be clearly justified as the government is already doing involuntary mental diagnosis of (and treatment for) certain other high-risk groups.⁵⁶ Here it must be observed that although religions in general are 'forms of psychotherapy'⁵⁷ and authentic religions make people mature, fundamentalists are people who are closer to psychological immaturity than maturity.⁵⁸

The Role of Leaders

The role played by its leader in the emergence and development of any fundamentalist movement is undisputable. In many instances, as in Iran, the leader himself is the movement. Usually the leaders are charismatic men – men of vision and commitment – who can inspire the followers. They usually obtain complete control over the followers and take the group where they want it to take. The leader is the source of 'facts' for the group; he is also the group's model or ideal. If the leader is extremely powerful, there takes place the identification of the group with the leader and a personality cult is carefully nourished. Fundamentalist leaders have an amazing capacity to inspire confidence in their followers, especially in a crisis, even when the odds are overwhelmingly against them. Khomeini's remarkable ability to win the confidence of his people and inspire them both in the revolt against the Shah and in the war against Saddam Hussein of Iraq has become history now.

The fundamentalist leaders are, as a rule, authoritarian leaders. The leader makes himself absolute and indispensable in the group. Hence the fate of the followers is completely in the hands of the leader. Any attempt to snatch power away from him is vigorously resisted and sometimes ruthlessly crushed. Various sorts of strategies are employed to keep the concentration of power in his own hands. Accordingly, individual members are assigned only a peripheral role within the group; power always remains centralised with the leader. Fundamentalist leaders want

56. cf. Thomas S. Szasz, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

57. Carl Jung, *The Practice of Psychotherapy*. in *The Collected Works*. Sir Herbert Read (Ed.), Vol. 16. London: Routledge. 1954.

58. cf. E.F. O'Doherty, *Religion and Psychology*. New York: Alba. 1978. pp. 33 ff.; William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. London: Collins-Fountain. 1960.

to maintain status quo. Therefore, neither new thinking nor questioning authority is allowed. Intercommunication within the group is kept at a minimum. A sort of 'dependency syndrome', a situation in which the followers have to depend on the leader for anything and everything, is created. As the leader is the source of the group's ideology, all new ideas and policies must come from him.

The fundamentalist leader manipulates situations and people in order to maintain his power. Most of the fundamentalist leaders are men of their own making. They claim they are sent by God with a special mission, and believe they are executing God's will. The televangelists for instance, call themselves 'charismatics', i.e., those who have received the charism or special gift from God. In their fight against evil and secularism the fundamentalist leaders are relentless and uncompromising. Like the followers themselves, it is likely that at least some of the leaders have traits of a pathological personality⁵⁹ and suffer from feelings of inferiority and insecurity, or they may have megalomaniacal or paranoid feelings.

59. cf. Erik H. Erikson, *Young Man Luther*. New York : W.W. Norton. 1958.