Responding to Fundamentalism

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Today people everywhere are living in fear. Violence is in the air. People are protecting themselves in various ways. The search for security is leading to new forms of discrimination. Every one speaks of fundamentalism. In the popular media in most parts of the world it is associated with Islam. It is seen as the source of violence. Violence provokes or justifies violence and it becomes a spiral. At the moment no one seems to know what to do about fundamentalism. I would like to make an effort to understand it and then reflect on what we could do about it beyond merely condemning it and protecting ourselves from it.

Fundamentalism is often associated with religion.[2] As a matter of fact, it is a very complex phenomenon. Looking at it, even cursorily, I see it as an interplay of four elements mutually influencing and strengthening each other. One or another of these elements may be dominant in a given situation. Fundamentalism therefore can take different forms in different places. 1. Fundamentalism begins with being religious. Threatened by modern scientific discoveries or by liberal cultural and political ideologies, some believers hang on to what they consider the fundamentals of their religion. They may organize themselves to defend their belief. They may be perceived as conservative or revivalist. 2. Secondly, a particular group of people, gathered together in the name of religion, ethnicity, caste, language, etc. may think that they share the same economic and political interests which they seek to pursue and defend together. This is more commonly called communalism (at least in South Asia). This may happen when there are wide economic and social disparities in society and a group feels unjustly exploited and/or discriminated against. 3. Thirdly, a communal group may imagine itself as a nation discovering its historical roots. A very powerful force that can weld such a group together is religion. History manifests itself to it as a historical memory of joys, but more specially that of sufferings. Such a group may fight for autonomy or independence or seek domination over other groups. The ideology of nationalism strengthens the group identity. 4. Finally, a group with a strong identity looks on other groups not only as different, but also as inimical to their interests. In a religious setting, the others can be demonized, when one group thinks that God is on

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[2] This seems to be the thesis of Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, *Fundamentalisms Observed. Vol I of The Fundamentalism Project* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991). See an attempt at a definition on p.835.

its side. This can lead to defensive or aggressive violence, particularly when it experiences itself as the victim of deprivation, injustice, and oppression. Indiscriminate violence against the innocent is called terrorism, and it can be fanatical. One or another of these four elements may be predominant at a given moment and in a given place. A good analysis of the situation and any effort to suggest a remedy must focus on all these elements. Rather than explaining these elements in the abstract, we can see them emerge as we tell stories of different situations across the world. For convenience, I shall look at different religious groups.[3] I shall start with Christianity which gave birth to the term 'fundamentalism'.

Christian Fundamentalism

The very term 'fundamentalism' has its origin in Christian circles in the southern United States of America in the 1920s.[4] A group of Protestant Christians were against scientific discoveries or hypotheses like Charles Darwin's evolution of the species because they seemed to contradict the Biblical account of creation. The supposition here is that the Bible is the revealed word of God and has to be literally true. They were happy to hold on to such "fundamentals" of their religion as revealed by God. Their opposition slowly expands from theories of science to atheistic communism and to relativistic liberalism of modern and post-modern times. When political liberals sought to enlarge the framework of moral behaviour to legitimize/ legalize contraception, abortion, homosexual behaviour, euthanasia, etc. the fundamentalist groups vigorously opposed it. In a democratic framework they organized themselves and sought the support of like-minded 'conservatives' from the mainline Churches also. Thus emerged the "Moral Majority" which sought to influence elections. There is no doubt that George Bush (Junior) garnered their support successfully during the presidential elections. Though the "Moral Majority" itself suffered reverses because of the financial and moral scandals of its leaders, the conservatives remain sizable enough to continue influencing elections. Among these fundamentalist groups there have been smaller groups and individuals who have adopted violent means, e.g., attacking abortion clinics and murdering doctors performing abortions.

Violent protests arising out of communalism and discrimination have characterized the conflict in northern Ireland. Minority (Roman Catholic) communalism has responded to majority communalism (Protestants). In a majoritarian 'democracy' violence may be one way in which the oppressed

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[3] For very helpful general surveys, besides the volume referred to in the previous note see Lionel Caplan, ed., *Studies in Religious Fundamentalism* (London: Macmillan, 1987); Karen Armstrong, *The Battle for God. Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (London: Harper Collins, 2000); Tariq Ali, *The Clash of Fundamentalisms.*(London: Verso: 2002). I am using information from these books throughout the paper.

[4] Ibid., pp.1-65.

minority seeks to express itself. When Indonesia was freed from the military control of General Suharto, communal conflicts broke out. The majority Muslims attacked Christian groups, and Christians in turn, on islands where they are a sizable majority, have indulged in defensive/offensive violence. It was not simply inter-religious violence. The Christians whom the Muslims attacked were often ethnically Chinese and controlled the economy. Therefore it was not only a religious, but also an ethnic and economic statement. Christians attacked Muslims because of internal colonization. In the Philippines the Christian majority have resisted the demands of the Muslim minority in the south for freedom, leading to violence. Today, at least some in the 'Christian' or 'post-Christian' Euro-America not only believe in a conflict of civilizations, but also look on Muslims as their principal enemies, demonizing them. Muslims in Europe are expected to become French or Dutch socio-culturally and keep their religion a strictly private affair. Visible signs of religious affiliation are discouraged or forbidden. A post-Christian secular, anti-religious or at least a-religious cultural outlook is forced upon them. I suppose that this also is a form of secular fundamentalism.

One of the problems which we will repeatedly come across in similar situations is the different yardstick with which the violence of the oppressed minority is judged as compared to the violence of the majority which control the state and military apparatus. The minority are easily branded as terrorists. Yet, if terrorism is basically the indiscriminate killing of the innocent, then every violent group, be it majority or minority, who indulges in it, can be called terrorist. Bombs today are not selective, but are weapons of mass destruction. I will come back to this question later.

The Case of Muslims

Muslim fundamentalism has to be understood in a colonial and post-colonial setting. Its dynamics can be explained rather simply and illustrated differently with reference to different countries. Since my aim is not writing its history but promoting an understanding of it, I shall describe simply the dynamics. Towards the end of the 19th century the Ottoman empire was slowly crumbling. The colonial powers were trying to extend their influence in the Middle Eastern countries. They supported local princes against the Ottoman emperors. They got commercial concessions of all kinds in return: permission to build the Suez canal, exploit the oil reserves, etc. They encouraged a small group of local people to get educated in Europe and to acquire a taste for European culture and its values. These people tried to promote this new culture in their own countries. They were made use of by the colonial powers to exploit the people better. After the First World War the colonial powers acquired responsibility for the political control of many of these countries. During this time the religious leaders who were working closely with the local kings and

chiefs felt progressively alienated from them. The poor common people could not care less for the European culture that the elite rich fancied. From the people emerged leaders who wanted to defend their cultural and religious identity and struggle against their exploitation. They were against the colonizers and joined independence movements. The colonizers were the hated other. When these countries became independent after the Second World War the secularized elite came to power and tried to impose modern, secular governments on the countries without preparing the people for them. The gap between the rich and the poor increased. The poor no longer had the colonizers to hate. They began to hate their own secularized and secularizing overlords. The popular leaders gathered and organized the people around their culture and religion, going back to the roots of their identity. There were also movements of religious revival. There were memories of great Muslim empires in the past, which made the experience of the present situation worse. Popular movements that were social and religious, engaging in educational and developmental activities, slowly began acquiring a political colour. They wanted to go back to the traditional socio-political order governed by the Qur'an and Qur'anic law. The secularized leaders saw these movements as a threat to their own power. So they sought to repress them, sometimes violently. Violence gives birth to violence. Small groups of people took to forms of violent revolution. Such revolutions were directed not only against their current local overlords, but also against the Euro-Americans who were their backers. In a globalized world the Euro-Americans were not only guilty of spreading a secularized, godless consumer culture through their media and influence; they also continued to exploit them in various ways, mostly through unjust commercial activities.

For those who wish to have historical references, here are a few names: Hasan al Banna (1906-49) and Sayyid Qutb (1906-66) and the Muslim Brotherhood leading the revolution against Nasser (1918-70) and Anwar Sadat in Egypt; Ayatollah Khomeini (1902-89) and Ali Shariati (1933-77) against Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi in Iran; and Abul Ala Mawdudi (1903-79) from India-Pakistan had a lot of influence all over the Middle East.

The Muslim identity is not so much nationalistic as transnational. The Muslim community – the *Umma* – transcends borders in principle and it stands united against the external enemy. At the same time, it is against Muslim groups within, which are perceived as friends of the foreign enemy. Tensions increasing in recent years between different sects within the community, such as that between Sunnis and Shias, or that surrounding Bohras or Ahmadias are the cases in point. With the radicalization of the Muslim identity, violence is now also directed against the Christian minorities who have always been living among Muslims, and thus belong to the same ethnic groups and share the same national and cultural identities.

In a sense, Muslim violence is an act of self-defense against an external

enemy perceived as oppressive, even though Muslim fundamentalists seek unity and strength in their religious identity. While the movement discovers its roots and justification in religion, it basically starts as anti-colonial and then becomes communalistic/nationalistic. The focus on religion, albeit tending to be defensive and fundamentalistic, becomes violent only when it is suppressed and legitimate means of self-expression denied. This violence is directed both against internal and external enemies. The Qur'an, of course, can be used to justify violence or *jihad*, both defensive and offensive. These fundamentalists do want to build society in terms of the Sharia, or Islamic law, which may reduce non-Muslims to second class status. Yet, I think that politics has more to do with Islamic fundamentalism than religion. That Islam does not separate religion from politics only complicates the situation. Today we hear about Al Qaeda or the Taliban. Are they religious fundamentalists? They are reacting against foreign cultural, economic and military presence, direct and indirect, on their soil. They are also making use of their religious identity to provide motivation and force. We cannot simply focus on the religious aspect and ignore the other dimensions of the phenomena if we wish to counter their influence on and support from the people.

The situation in India is rather different, wherein the Muslim community is a minority. Muslim emperors were ruling large parts of the Indian territory for nearly five centuries. Then the British gained control in the 18th century. As Indians started agitating for their freedom, Muslims (more than 30% of the population) felt that they would be a minority in an independent India. So they proposed the theory of two nations based on religious identity and finally succeeded in getting the country divided into India and Pakistan. India is still left with 135 million Muslims. But the divisive impulse is not healed. Though India gives them minority rights, they have not really merged into the national mainstream, because of their poverty and marginalization. The tension between Hindus and Muslims goes on, nursed also by Hindu fundamentalist groups. Periodic violence erupts leading to ghettoization on the one hand and a spiraling of violence on the other. Today they may be receiving support from the global Muslim community. The violence in India is more socio-political than religious.

In Malaysia, though the Muslims only about 50% of the population they have managed to establish a dominant socio-political status for themselves. Their identity is communalistic and nationalistic. Indonesia, in spite of its Muslim majority, remained a secular country, recognizing five official religions. There is a certain Muslim resurgence now and some violence, but the secular fabric is still surviving. What we note in the case of Islam is the close association between religion and politics or the state. Religion then is an element of political and national identity. Fundamentalist attitudes therefore tend to be at once religious and political. The 'other' who is resisted is not primarily the

'religious other', but the 'secularizing, materialistic economically and politically oppressive other' who includes dominant groups of compatriots. There is no doubt that religion is a unifying and energizing factor. But it is not the primary force as in early Christian fundamentalism.

The Hindu Cultural Fundamentalists

As noted earlier, the Muslim emperors ruled a great part of India for nearly five centuries.[5] They had enemies as well as allies among the Hindu princes. Unlike the early Muslim plunderers and later British colonizers they stayed in India, married Hindu princesses, and dialogued with Hindu (Indian) art, culture and religion. Indian culture, specially music, painting and architecture in the north of India, has been influenced by Islamic practitioners. The British took control of the country in the 19th century. When Indians began their struggle for freedom, Muslims and Hindus had a common cause at first. But Muslims did not relish the idea of being a minority in a freed India. They began to look after their own interests and proposed the theory of 'two nations', Hindu and Muslim. The British may have encouraged the process, following a policy of 'divide and rule'. Thus, the Muslim League was founded in 1906.

Hindus, however, followed their own development. A Hindu renaissance movement, led by people like Raja Ram Mohan Roy tried to reform Hinduism socially. The Arya Samaj, founded by Swami Dayanand Saraswati, attempted to reform Hinduism by going to its Vedic roots. Spiritual leaders like Swami Vivekananda asserted the superior and integrating nature of Hinduism in the area of spirituality. In the early decades of the twentieth century, the Indian National Congress that led the freedom movement sought to include all Indians of whatever religion. But it was obviously dominated by Hindus. Mahatma Gandhi even used his Hindu identity and Hindu symbols to mobilize the masses, though he also promoted ashrams open to all believers.

Side by side with this broad national movement we see emerging a Hindu national movement in the line of Dayanand Saraswati and Swami Vivekananda. Veer Savarkar spelt out its ideology *Hindutva* (Hinduness).[6] It indicates, not primarily a religion, but a people practicing a culture (based on the Vedas and Sanskrit) and belonging to a territory (between the Himalayas in the north and the seas in the south) with millennial roots. They have a common and specific identity rooted in history. India is their 'Father/Motherland'. It is also their 'Holy Land' in which are rooted their religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism,

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[5] On Hindu fundamentalism see Christophe Jaffrelot and Thomas Blom Hansen, eds., *The BJP and the Compulsions of Politics in India* (Delhi: Oxford, 1998); Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); John Zavos, *The Emergence of Hindu Nationalism in India* (Delhi: Oxford, 2000); David Ludden, ed., *Making India Hindu* (Delhi: Oxford, 1996); Gerald James Larson, *India's Agony Over Religion* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995).
[6] Cf. V.D.Savarkar, *Hindutva* (New Delhi: Bharti Sahitya Sadan, 1989. 6th ed.) First published in 1923.

Sikhism) and their rich culture. Muslims and Christians are invaders who do not have the same roots. Most of them are Indian converts, living in India and regarding it as their 'Father/Motherland.' But it is not their 'Holy Land.' Their cultural and religious roots are in Arabia (for Muslims) and Palestine (for Christians). Hindus on the other hand celebrate as their heroes leaders like Shivaji who opposed the Muslim hegemony. Establishing a Hindu state in India is the ultimate goal for the followers of the *Hindutva*. Muslims and Christians as people with foreign roots can privatize their religion, but have to submit to the Hindu cultural hegemony at the social and national level. The Hindu fundamentalists who subscribe to such an ideology of the *Hindutva* were marginalized at the time of independence. They were even ostracized when one of them shot Mahatma Gandhi in January 1948.

When India became independent in 1947 and established itself as a democratic state in 1950, it chose to be secular. Its secularism is not anti-religious. It is equally positive to all religions. It provides for religious freedom. It offers special rights to religious and linguistic minorities to live and develop their particular identity, while the fundamental rights of every one are respected. Minorities were allowed to follow their own civil law for the moment. But the State was expected to evolve a common civil code, applicable to all citizens. This has not happened yet, even after fifty-six years, because minorities are afraid that the majority will impose their own code as the common code. Over the years the followers of the *Hindutva* have gained political ground. They led the coalition government at the centre for five years. They still lead the governments in some states. Here I am focusing only on their ideology.

They speak of Hindu nationalism, asserting that the Indian identity is Hindu, but culturally, not religiously. Of course this cultural identity is closely linked to Hinduism as a religion, though two of them are not identified. They make use of Hindu religious symbols to inspire the crowds. Their recent rallying symbol has been the Ram temple to be built in the alleged birth place of Ram (one of the manifestations or *avatars* of Vishnu) over which a mosque had been built in the 15th century. They make use of Hindu festivals like *Ganesh puja* to make a statement of power against Muslims by noisy processions taken through areas where Muslims live. They gather together groups of *sannyasis* to support their causes. But they seek to include and transcend caste differentiations focusing on religio-cultural unity. They oppose conversion movements and seek to reconvert people who had become Christian or Muslim. In a majoritarian democratic system, the increase in numbers of one group is not merely a demographic fact, but a political one. Hindu-Muslim riots are a regular feature of Indian history from the early 20th century. Recently Hindus have started attacking Christians also. Without condoning such violence and without finding political expression, a certain anti-Muslim and anti-Christian ethos seems to be becoming increasingly common among the educated, middle class

Hindus.

Are these people fundamentalist in a religious sense? No. The founder of the *Hindutva,* Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883-1966) was not a practicing Hindu, nor some of their present leaders. Religious symbols are simply made use of as rallying points for the masses. They call themselves cultural nationalist. But religion is only a small part of that culture. Their culture has no place really for Muslims and Christians. Though they are the majority in India they feel that they are minority globally, compared with Christians and Muslims. They claim to have their roots in India and assert a certain ownership over the country as their 'Holy Land'. Unlike Savarkar, they would not accept that they were also migrants into India, even though they settled there more than 3000 years ago. Here we have a case of socio-cultural fundamentalism that has turned communalistic or political which makes use of religion as a rallying point. It approaches fascism. It does not only ghettoize others but also seeks to control and destroys their economic resources. It promotes hatred as an ideology.

This is very similar to the cultural nationalism of many European countries where it is found difficult today to integrate Muslims and other minorities. Though these nationalists may not be openly violent, discriminations are not absent. They are cultural fundamentalists. Being secularized, they may not use religion as a source of identity and integration. Some are indeed aggressively secular, discouraging or forbidding any public manifestation of religious identity. But a vague religious identity seems to crop up when the Muslims are seen as 'the others'. They cannot deny either that their culture had religious roots.

Buddhist Fundamentalists

Tamil Hindus and Singhalese Buddhists have been engaged in a civil war in Sri Lanka for more than twenty years.[7] The Singhalese majority (about 75%) consider Sri Lanka as their nation. Having captured power through a democratic process they proceeded to discriminate against the minority Tamils in a systematic way in the job market, in higher education, etc. There was also a process of systematic colonization of the Tamil north by settling Singhalese in new government projects of development. Tamil protests led to a conflagration.

Their quest for a Buddhist national identity goes back more than a hundred years. The British colonial power more or less destroyed the socio-religious structures in which the Buddhist monks had been working closely with the kings. The monks were the main educators and animators of the community. The growing gap between the rich elite favoured by the colonizers and the many poor provoked a revival. The leader of this revival was Anagarika Dharmapala

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[7] Cf. Donald K. Swearer, "Fundamentalistic Movements in Theravada Buddhism", in Marty and Appleby, *Fundamentalisms Observed,* pp. 628-690.

who founded *The Mahabodhi Society Journal* in 1891. He not only developed a modern rationalist Buddhism, but also restored national pride in the Buddhist traditions of Sri Lanka. He built up a group of middle-class followers. Profiting by this, S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike swept into power on a nationalist Buddhist ideology in 1956. He was also helped by a revived *Sangha* (assembly) of monks. It is not my intention to go into all the political developments and ramifications. This Buddhist majority has now been in power for 50 years. Tamils are seen as intruders in a Buddhist land. As in the case of Hindus in India the majority Singhalese Buddhists in Sri Lanka feel that they are global minority compared to the Hindu Tamils who are also found in South India, Singapore, Malaysia, etc. These Buddhist monks have been actively and aggressively supporting the war efforts of the government against the Tamils and are one of the obstacles to any peace efforts, tentatively made by the more practical politicians.

In what sense can these Buddhists in Sri Lanka be called fundamentalist? They are certainly not defending Buddhism, but their ethnic, religio-cultural identity, of which religion is only an element. But this religion is linked to their vision of their own 'national' past, as in the case of Hindus in India. It is more a question of imagined national identity than a strictly religious one. Buddhists cannot certainly justify violence in the name of Buddhism. Christians may talk about the 'just war', Muslims may invoke *jihad*. But there is nothing in Buddhism, at least in my eyes, that encourages violence. Therefore the fundamentalism in Sri Lanka cannot be considered religious nor Buddhist in its essence. It is rather ethnic and national, perhaps even fascist. Its real causes are economic and political. Though there may perhaps be a demonization of the Tamil enemy in the context of popular religiosity, religion is only a marker of socio-ethnic identity.

Fundamentalism and Terrorism

Fundamentalism is often associated with terrorism. Terrorism can be briefly described as indiscriminate violence on and the killing of innocent and defenseless people. Fundamentalism need not be violent. It becomes violent only when it is self-defensive. But in a context of a divisive "We-They" situation, when the other is demonized, aggressive violence and hatred can easily be justified in the name of God. People will evoke the *jihad* in Islam which seems to justify aggression in order to spread the Islamic faith. The Hebrew Scriptures are also full of such violence. The Hindu epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are stories of wars of good against evil. But I wonder whether we can show any instances today in the world where violence is perpetrated to help spread religion. Certainly, there are examples of individuals or small groups which engage in violence in the name of God.[8] Yet, these are not the mainstream,

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[8] Cf. Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God. The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2000); Oliver McTernan, *Violence in God's Name* (Maryk-

and they are not supported by the majority of religious practitioners. There is a certain fanaticism or even madness and irrationality behind it. Very often, religious symbols and emotions are merely used to justify or even provoke violence, the real cause of which is primarily economic and/or political. It is 'communalistic'. There is also a habit to identify as terrorism the violent actions of subaltern groups. The justified violence indulged in by the majority or the State is not seen as terrorist. State terrorism is rarely identified as such. It is conveniently covered up by legal legitimations. Armies claiming to counter terrorism end up killing thousands of innocents. And yet they would not be taken to task for provoking further terrorism by their indiscriminate killing.

In India, for instance, there have recently been widespread riots in cities like Mumbai and Coimbatore in which Muslims are targeted. Even the police may join the majority in the name of restoring order. Official enquiries are instituted, but usually there is no real follow up. When the Muslims retaliate by bombings, they are immediately arrested and prosecuted, with many innocents suffering in the process. Such blatantly partial behaviour is only bound to increase the suppressed anger that will break out when an occasion offers itself.

Secular Fundamentalism

What is fundamentalism then? I have the impression that there is a presumption that it is always rooted in religion. I personally think that this is not so. As we have seen, group struggles may be primarily economic, social, political or national. Religion is often taken on board because of its power to knit people together at a deeper, pre-rational level. Its link to the Ultimate may even give it an absolute character. But religion need not always be the main issue.

I also have the impression that fundamentalism is always seen as the contrary of liberalism in economics, politics or religion. One takes for granted today that liberalism is the accepted modern way of perceiving reality and conduct. Anything opposed to it is branded fundamentalist. But people can be conservative or traditional without being fundamentalist.[9] Conservatism can be a legitimate point of view in many circumstances. Liberalism is not always right. It may be wise to avoid hasty value judgments in such ideological areas. There are also double standards and they are sometimes glaring. It is a very good thing if the world could be rid of nuclear weapons. But there seems to be no logic when the Euro-American powers, Russia and China (and India, Pakistan and Israel) have thousands of them, but will deny them to others. There is also the pretension that these are more responsible than the others – after the many wars that have been fought in the 20th century. Their use of

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noll: Orbis Books, 2003).
[9] Cf. Andrew Sullivan, *The Conservative Soul. How We Lost It, How to Get It Back* (New York: Harper Collins, 2006).

chemical weapons has exploded this myth.

Liberalism and secularism also can be made into dogmas and imposed on people fundamentalistically. One example of aggressive and fundamentalistic secularism is that of France which recently forbade the use of all prominent religious symbols in the public sphere. Many European nations expect Muslim minorities to adopt their secular culture and do not tolerate any religious self-expression or manifestation in public. To appear impartial they also impose such a ban on other believers like Christians and Sikhs. Sikh children cannot wear their turbans in French schools. Christians cannot wear a visibly prominent cross, Jews their skull cap. Recently an employee at the London airport was suspended for wearing a prominent cross at work, provoking protest from Christian groups. Is this not secular fundamentalism?

It is now recognized that uncontrolled liberalism leads to widespread inequalities. Liberal capitalism encourages free competition. But free competition between groups that are unequal at the starting point is disastrous. The poor too have rights to the world's goods. While mere re-distribution of wealth may not be the best solution, ways must be found of empowering the poor through affirmative action programmes. Political liberalism is based on individual freedom, with the groups, including the state, being seen as voluntary and contractual. Natural, cultural, ethnic and religious groups are not recognized. It is not without reason that today there is an increasing sensitivity to group rights.[10]

Apart from the religious fundamentalism in the United States of America all other fundamentalisms have arisen in colonial and post-colonial situations as responses to various types of oppressions, exploitations and impositions. We see them arising today also in the post-modern, liberal and secularizing societies of Euro-America. Muslim minorities in many European countries feel discriminated against and deprived and are becoming restive.

So when we are faced with a particular situation we have to look closely to judge whether it is really fundamentalistic, what kind of fundamentalism it is and what are the real causes for its origin and development. Otherwise our responses to it will be misplaced, inadequate or one-sided.

Promoting Justice

How can we respond then to fundamentalism? Rather than trying to address each problem area I shall make four general suggestions here. They are not in any order of importance. One or another of them may be more relevant in a particular situation. But I think that we have to take all of them seriously at the global level.

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[10] Cf. John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); Charles Taylor, *Reconciling the Solitudes* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1993); Amy Gutmann, ed., *Multiculturalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

The real root cause of fundamentalism in many areas is the experience of inequality, discrimination and injustice by the poor and by the minorities. This started during the colonial period and continues now through unfair commercial transactions imposed by the Multinationals and international financial institutions on the poorer nations. This is often done in collaboration with the local rich elite who also control political power. So the conflict is both internal and external. The only solution to this problem is constant sensitivity to the people made poor by unjust economic and socio-political structures, and the continuing promotion of social justice at all levels. The middle class people are particularly sensitive to experienced or perceived inequality, social discrimination and injustice. This is obviously a tall order. Every national government as well as inter-national agencies will have to be concerned about this. When there is a natural disaster like the Tsunami there is a lot of international sympathy and response. But the daily poverty of the people does not seem to excite many.

It is also necessary to take a historical perspective. Many of the richer countries today in Euro-America grew rich through colonialism, impoverishing the poor countries in the process. Exploitation continues even in the post-colonial period at the economic and commercial level. In such a situation we have to look not merely for justice, but also for restitution. Such talk may sound strange to many and impracticable. But we must understand that violence and terrorism are often the 'weapons of the weak' driven to the wall. They are aimed at drawing the world's attention on the poor who are otherwise ignored. It is often the powerless poor who seek mutual support by organizing themselves in terms of ethnicity or religion or language or nationhood. The powerful should negotiate with them, rather than suppressing them. Negotiations must lead to some efforts at doing justice.

The Middle East has been the playing ground of the great powers, often through proxy, for many decades. There are many authoritarian governments supported financially and militarily by richer countries. They will probably solve their problems if they are left alone. Israel will be obliged to recognize and respect the rights of the Palestinians and make peace with them if it is not supported economically and militarily by the West.

Muslims in parts of India are being systematically ghettoized and denied their rightful place in society and polity as citizens. They are poor and underdeveloped as a community as shown in a recent survey. They too will be pacified if they are treated justly in the society.

A Secular Consensual Democracy

The ideal political order is democracy, which is described as government of the people, by the people, for the people. This ideal actually does not exist anywhere. But many countries are striving for it. In the light of our reflection

on fundamentalism I would like to make suggestions to make democracy better. Today we have a universal charter of human rights accepted, at least formally, by most people. But these rights focus on individuals. We have to complete it with the rights of groups based on religion, culture, language, etc. We have to accept that we are living in a pluralist world. Groups should have the right and the freedom to live, promote and preserve their group identities. They have to be recognized, respected and accepted by others. There must be a formal equality between them in the public, political sphere. In the area of religion, this would mean a secular political order that will not be anti-religious or a-religious, but equally positive to all religions. While there should be a strict separation between religion and the state, the state need not deny or discourage religious identities. At the level of civil society the religious groups too should be allowed to participate in discussions concerning national policies and programmes.[11]

In a pluralistic situation there are bound to be majorities and minorities. In most democracies today, what is prevalent is rule by the majority. Where this majority is not really democratic, but communalistic, built around ethnicity or religion, it can be oppressive of the minorities. This is what is happening in Sri Lanka, for example. Actually it happens in most countries. It is better to move towards a democratic system where there are institutional checks and balances that protect the minorities and enable them to play their rightful role in the polity. The Indian Constitution with its special rights for minorities tries to do this. But the ideal would be that the emphasis in policy and decision making at all levels focuses not so much on the majority, but on a large consensus among every one, minorities and majority. Democracy then would not be majoritarian, but consensual. Every group must be represented in some way in bodies that discuss and make decisions. Of course, people may and will differ in economic and political ideologies. But religions should not be divisive. If every one is really interested in the good of the people and there is open dialogue without hidden agenda, then consensus would be easily forthcoming.

In a pluralistic situation dialogue will become a way of life. This will be true also of religions. In modern times, Christians have promoted inter-religious dialogue. But most of them see it as an instrument of mission or as happening at the spiritual level. Dialogue must start at the socio-political level and later can rise to the spiritual and religious level. It should be active then at the level of civil society. People must discuss ideologies in the media, in universities, in discussion groups of concerned citizens, etc.

Most national boundaries were laid out by colonial powers. Modifications and readjustments may be necessary in particular cases. National boundaries may be dictated by geography, culture, history, language, etc. But with increasing

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[11] For further development of these ideas see Michael Amaladoss, *Making Harmony. Living in a Pluralist World.* (Chennai: IDCR, 2003).

migration of people today pluralism of all kinds are present everywhere. While local culture and history have to be respected, people also have to open up to respect and accept the others. On the other hand, history is ongoing and complex. It should not be simplified and homogenized in a narrow way. For example, in India there is a continuing cultural stream (Hindu) that has its origin more than 3000 years ago. But it has been influenced by various other streams, Buddhist, Jain, Sikh and Folk, in the course of history. Islam and Christianity have also contributed to it. Neither the roots, nor the contributions, must be forgotten. Sri Lanka has a Singhalese majority and a Buddhist past. But Tamils have been on the Island for centuries and have influenced the national culture and even the Buddhist religion in many ways. Migrations and invasions and consequent interaction among people are frequent in history and any claim to ethnic, cultural or religious purity is suspect and ideological.

The Reform of Religion

Religion is an element in most instances of fundamentalism. Except in the United States of America, it is used as a source of strength and unity for a group constituted on other grounds like culture, ethnicity, political ideology and aspirations, etc. By radicalizing divisions between groups and sacralizing them, it tends to demonize the other. Violence against the other is then justified, even encouraged, at times in the guise of self-defense. But religions also speak about love, non-violence and peace. Each religion therefore needs to interpret and contextualize its sacred scriptures so that they will not be used to justify violence.

While religion should be respected at its own level, it needs also to be secularized. This means that there should be a strict separation between religious institutions and the socio-political order. This has been happening in Europe where science and economic and political structures slowly acquired their autonomy from the control of religion through hard struggle over many centuries. Hinduism and Buddhism never had that kind of control over the socio-political order. Muslims do not traditionally distinguish between religion and politics. But today where they are a minority they do so - in India, for example. They should move towards doing so even in the states where they are a majority. Turkey has given an example which could be imitated elsewhere. Obviously this cannot be imposed on them by outsiders, especially under cultural, political or military pressure. It will be resisted. Left to themselves they may eventually do so.

The Qur'an can be and has been interpreted by anyone after deep study. It has been completed by the traditions of the Prophet's sayings and doings as codified by later followers – the *Hadith*. Muslims had tolerated in their kingdoms the other people of the Book, namely Jews and Christians. Although the tolerance used to come with a tax, I am sure that under contemporary

circumstances such tolerance can happen without the tax and also include other religions.

The Healing of Memories

In our quest for a world free of fundamentalisms we are not starting from zero. We have had a history of violent conflicts and we are still having them. At some stage we have to make a clear break with the past. We have to think of the future than of the past. We have to look for restorative than retributive justice. We have to explore the way of forgiveness rather than that of vengeance. We have to speak of conflict resolution and reconciliation.[12] Forgiveness presupposes the admission of guilt by the other and the willingness to restore justice. This can be a symbolic, social process rather than involving all the numerous individual cases. The only partially successful example of such a process is the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* of South Africa under the chairmanship of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, though there have been other such commissions elsewhere.[13] What the Commission did was to listen in public to the narration of stories of suffering by the victims and to the admission of guilt by the perpetrators of violence. The bargain was that those who confessed would not be legally pursued and punished. Though it did not bring to book all those who were responsible for the violence, especially the masters and the brains behind the operations, it did have a cathartic effect at a social level and has enabled the community to go forward.

But such commissions have never touched an inter-religious conflict area, except perhaps in East Timor, where the conflict still continues. As compared to economics, politics or social structures, only religions can promote the spirit of forgiveness. But true reconciliation can only be based on justice, though it should be restorative rather than retributive, as already mentioned above in reference to the South African experiment. Archbishop Tutu also warns that justice should not be victors' justice which is focused on revenge. It should be justice with forgiveness. This links to my first suggestion about the need to promote social justice.

Conclusion

Fundamentalism is therefore a complex phenomenon. It is more economic, social and political than religious. Religion is often used to further other ends. It is a pity, of course, that religions let themselves be used in such a way. We can respond to fundamentalism adequately only if we understand its real causes. On the one hand, we have to learn to look at it, not from the point of view of colonizing liberals, but from that of the victims oppressed in many ways. On

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[12] Cf. Raymond G. Helmick and Rodney L. Petersen, eds., *Forgiveness and Reconciliation. Religion, Public Policy and Conflict Resolution* (Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 2001).
[13] Desmond Mpilo Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (New York,: Doubleday, 1999).

the other hand, we have to identify the political power games that seek to use religion as a pawn in their nefarious schemes. People should have the freedom to practice any religion of their choice, not only in private, but also in public socially. At the same time a strict separation must be maintained between religious and state institutions. Economic justice and political freedom must be assured. Historical wrongs should be righted. A healing of memories should take place. Forgiveness and reconciliation must be promoted. Our response to fundamentalism has to be as complex as fundamentalism itself. It remains an unmet challenge.