



## PERSPECTIVES

### Why end fundamentalism?

**Yehuda Bauer**

*Professor Emeritus of Holocaust Studies*

*Hebrew University*

*Academic Advisor*

*International Institute for Holocaust Research*

*Yad Vashem*

*Jerusalem, Israel*

*bauer1926@yahoo.com*

In December 1948, the United Nations adopted the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. A number of genocides have since taken place, and one is now happening in Darfur. During the last century, many millions of civilians and unarmed prisoners of war were murdered by governments and/or political parties or their agents. Many people will agree that this is one of the major challenges humanity has to face today, although the views on what exactly constitutes genocide are varied and contradictory. Most of us, however, will agree that genocide is the annihilation of groups as such. When the term “genocide” was coined—by a refugee Polish-Jewish lawyer named Raphael Lemkin, in New York, probably in 1943—it was based on the realization that Jews and Poles were then being murdered by National Socialist Germany. The annihilation of the Poles was partial, as the Germans wanted to use them as slave labor; the murder of the Jews was total—every person they defined as being Jewish and whoever they could find—and that is reflected in the Convention, which talks about the intent to annihilate an ethnic,

national, racial, or religious group, partially or totally. Many would add political groups to this list.

But people will ask, if you want to deal in 2007 with genocide, why start with the Holocaust, and not with Rwanda, Cambodia, Darfur, and so on? Was the genocide of the Jews, which we call the Holocaust, in some ways different from the other tragedies? Was it not parallel? In my view, it was both. I used to call the Holocaust “unique,” but a number of years ago I abandoned the term “uniqueness” to describe the genocide of the Jews, and have been using instead—in fact, I coined—a very cumbersome word, “unprecedentedness.” Why is “uniqueness” inappropriate? Mainly for two reasons. First, “uniqueness” might imply that the Holocaust is a one-time event that cannot be repeated, thus there is hardly any point in dealing with it as there is no danger of its recurrence. However, that implication is untrue: the genocide of the Jews was engineered and executed by humans for human reasons, and anything done by humans can be repeated—not in exactly the same way, to be sure, but in very similar ways. Second, it might also imply that it was decreed by some God, or god, or Satan, i.e., a transcendental force; in which case, Hitler and the perpetrators generally would have been the executors of a Divine or Satanic will and, therefore, could not be held responsible as they were not free actors. That indeed is the position of Jewish ultra-orthodox thinkers, and some Christian ones, too. Yet these thinkers do not accept the idea of lack of responsibility of the perpetrators and argue, rather illogically I would think, that there is free will and humans can choose between good and evil, although on the other hand they say that nothing can happen without the Almighty’s will. The argument, then, that the Holocaust was “unique” because it was caused by some transcendental power leads to absurdity.

I would argue that, obviously, the Holocaust was a genocide, and that therefore it not only can, but must, be compared with other genocidal events of a similar nature or quality. The main parallel between it and other genocides lies in the suffering of the victims, which is always the same, as there are no gradations of suffering, and there are no better murders or better tortures or better rapes, etc., than others. The suffering of the victims is always the same, and from that point of view there is no difference between Jews, Poles, Roma (“Gypsies”), Russians, Darfurians, Tutsi, or anyone else.

I would suggest that the other main parallel is that perpetrators of genocides or mass atrocities will always use the best means at their

disposal to realize their project: in the genocide of the Armenians in World War I—which is still being denied by official Turkey—the Ottoman Turks used railways, machine guns, specially recruited murder units, a fairly efficient bureaucracy, which had been developed with the help of French, German, and Austrian advisers; and a mass army. In World War II the Germans used railways, special units, modern weaponry, an excellent bureaucracy, brilliant propaganda, and a very powerful army. They used gas because they had it; the Ottomans did not because they did not have it.

I would argue further that I do not know of any elements in genocides other than the Holocaust that are not repeated in yet other genocides, but that there are elements in the genocide of the Jews that are without a precedent in human history, as far as I know. It is clear, however, that the Holocaust was a precedent, and that these elements can be repeated and, in one case (as will follow), have already been repeated. What are these elements?

First, the totality: there is no precedent, it would seem, to a state-organized mass murder of members of a targeted group, in which every single person identified as a member of that group (i.e., identified as a Jew) by the perpetrator—not self-defined—was sought out, registered, marked, dispossessed, humiliated, terrorized, concentrated, transported, and killed. Every single person defined as a Jew was caught, without a single exception. So-called half-Jews were left alive when they were considered not Jewish. The moment someone was thought of as being Jewish, he or she was subjected to the above process.

Second, the universality: there is no precedent, it would seem, to a universally conceived genocide. Thus, the Ottomans did not bother about the Armenians in Jerusalem because that was not Turkish ethnic territory. Hutu Power wanted to “cleanse” Rwanda of Tutsis, but there were apparently no plans to kill all Tutsis everywhere (after the genocide there were Hutu attempts to kill Tutsi-related groups in Eastern Congo but not, for instance, in Burundi or Uganda). On the other hand, the National Socialist regime in Germany intended to deal with the Jews everywhere “the way we deal with them here in Germany,” as Hitler told the Mufti of Jerusalem, Hajj Amin el-Husseini, on November 28, 1941, to quote just one clear statement (there were more). This genocidal universalism developed in stages, of course, and had, as stated above, no known precedent.

Third, the ideology was based not on any pragmatic, economic, political, military, or other consideration, but on what Marxists would

call pure superstructure. The Armenian genocide was the answer to political defeat in the Balkans, and was the result of the dream of a new Turkic empire stretching from the Dardanelles to Kazakhstan, replacing the old, collapsing one; and there was the fear of a Russian invasion supported by Armenians that would destroy the Turkish state altogether. There was also the intent to replace Armenian merchants in the main cities with Turks. These are political, military, and economic considerations. Take any other genocide and you will find such pragmatic bases, on which of course ideologies were then built as rationalizations. There were no such pragmatic elements with the Nazis. German Jews did not control German economy—*pace* various Marxist writers. Only one major industrial establishment, the AEG, the major German electrical company, was owned by a Jewish family, the Rathenaus (Walther Rathenau was murdered by German right-wing extremists), and there was one Jew among some one hundred members of the boards of the five major German banks. Jews were mostly middle class, lower middle class, members of free professions, and craftsmen; the rich ones owned a few major consumer stores. But Jews were not an organized group in any meaningful sense; their countrywide organization, the Reichsvertretung, was founded in September 1933, nine months after the Nazi accession to power, as a result of Nazi pressure—not before. There had, in fact, never been an organized German Jewry before the Nazis. They had no territory, and had no political, never mind military, power or presence. There was only one Jewish individual, that same Walther Rathenau, who held a ministerial position in Germany after World War I (and, of course, none before that), before he was murdered.

The reasons for their persecution bore no relation to reality—they were of the nature of nightmares: the imagined international Jewish conspiracy to control the world (a mirror-image of the Nazi desire to do so), the supposed corruption of German blood and society and culture by the Jews (when in fact the Jews, who were loyal German citizens, contributed as individuals very considerably to German culture), the blood libel (the accusation that Jews killed non-Jewish children to bake their *matzos* [Passover bread]), and so on. I know no other case in past history in which mass murder was committed for no apparent pragmatic reason at all. Some historians seem to think that the Jews were murdered to get their property. But that is demonstrably wrong: in many cases they were murdered after they had been deprived of their property, and the fit among them could have been used for slave labor. The looting was done in the process that led to the murder, not the other way round.

The nonpragmatic nature of the genocide can be shown in literally hundreds of cases. Thus, Lodz, the second largest city in prewar Poland, had the last ghetto on former Polish territory because its workshops, run basically as slave labor places, produced some 9 percent of the Wehrmacht's requirements for clothing and boots, etc. In early 1944, the local Nazi bureaucrats were opposed to the liquidation of the ghetto, partly because of the usefulness of the ghetto for the German Army and also because they had enriched themselves at the expense of the Jews. Besides, if the ghetto was annihilated they might have to serve in the army—not a very inviting prospect. But the ghetto was annihilated at Himmler's orders, orders explicitly arguing against any economic pragmatism. The ideology held sway, and no economic arguments were admitted. Is that capitalistic? Cost-effective? Rational? There is no known precedent for a genocide committed because of nightmarish fantasies.

Fourth, the racist Nazi ideology was something utterly revolutionary. Communism, originally (before it became the rationalization for Russian imperialism), wanted to replace one social class by another—something we have known from past history, e.g., the French Revolution. Nations have replaced nations, empires have replaced empires, religions have superseded other religions. But “races”? Never before. And, of course, there are no races. We all are descendants of a group of *Homo sapiens* that roamed East Africa some half a million years ago, give or take a couple of hundred thousands of years. Hitler, Einstein, you and I, come from the same place. The National Socialist revolution was, I would argue, the only really revolutionary attempt in the twentieth century, bar none, and it was of course without any precedent. A new hierarchy was to rule the world, of the Nordic peoples of the Aryan race and presumably their Japanese allies (who are not exactly Nordic Aryans, which created some ideological problems), with everyone else underneath that, and no Jews, because they would all have been killed by then. In a distorted way, this was a quasi-religious view: there was a God, a Messiah, namely the Führer, and a holy people or race, and there was a Satan. The Satanic Jew was taken from a de-christianized Christian antisemitism. And, naturally, Satan had to be fought, defeated, and killed. Any precedents for that in human history? I would suggest, no.

Finally, the Jews: their culture provides one of the background elements to the emergence of what is wrongly termed “Western Civilization.” The Nazis rebelled against that, against the Enlightenment, as well as against Christianity (which is Jewish, they argued; they were

right on that one). But the legacy of the French Revolution rests on Athens, Rome, and Jerusalem (aesthetics, literature, law and order, and the ethics of the prophets); Romans and Athenians today speak other languages, pray to other gods, and write literature that has no direct connection to the sources. But the Jews were still here, they spoke the same language; and their traditions, though developed and changed over time, whether they were or are religious (a minority) or not (a majority), are direct, continuous cultural (not necessarily biological) descendants of the original ones. Their literature is indecipherable without relating it to their ancient texts. A violent, brutal, exterminatory attack on the legacy of the French Revolution involved, almost necessarily and certainly logically, an attack on the only surviving remnant of the original sources from which Western Civilization developed. The ethics of the prophets stood in stark contradiction to the ideas behind the Nazi revolution—basically, an ideology that said that the stronger “races,” or peoples, had not only the right but the duty to rule the world and do away with the weaker ones, even to annihilate them.

The Holocaust, then, was unprecedented, a fact of tremendous importance to anyone who wants to fight the self-destructive tendencies in human society. It also means that it was a precedent, and indeed, in Rwanda, the first point—totality of annihilation—was intended: all Rwandan Tutsis were to be killed. I suspect that the most important Hutu power ideologue, Ferdinand Nahimana, now in jail, may have heard something about the Nazi annihilation of the Jews when he studied philosophy and history in Europe. I cannot prove it, but it might be worth investigating.

The Jewish specificity and the universal implications of the Holocaust are two sides of the same coin. Every genocide is specific, so that specificity—in the case of the Holocaust, the Jewish specificity—becomes a universal trait. This universal characteristic has to be set in a context: we are the only predatory mammals that kill each other in large numbers, in mass atrocities some of which we label genocides because they are the most extreme form of this unfortunately very human behavior. And the most extreme form of genocide, to date, was that of the Jews because of the points mentioned above and perhaps a few others. It is that realization of the unprecedented character of the Holocaust, vague as it is, that has made the Holocaust, in the eyes of an increasing number of humans and their societies (e.g., the United Nations), the paradigmatic genocide because it is the most extreme form of an illness that afflicts humanity.

My conclusion would be that the Holocaust is at the center of any study or consideration of genocide because of its paradigmatic nature; it is also the starting point of any serious attempt at preventing such mass atrocities. When one starts from the extreme case—again, not because the suffering is any different, but because of other factors involved—one must become committed to an effort to stop or prevent ongoing and future genocides because they are manifestations of the same human illness that caused the Holocaust. One has to add that mass murder committed by humans against humans is not inhuman—I wish it were—but, unfortunately, very human indeed. Mass murder is an aspect of humanity that we have to fight, not something external to us. One has to deal with Darfur, Zimbabwe, Eastern Congo, Southern Sudan, Burma, and a number of other places in an increasingly crowded and small world. The only lesson one can draw from the Holocaust is that one has to fight genocide.

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### **Khaleel Mohammed**

*Associate Professor  
Department of Religious Studies  
San Diego State University  
California, USA  
khaleel@mail.sdsu.edu*

Fundamentalism is one of the most opaque terminologies in modern parlance. Against its almost exclusive usage to refer to Islamist activism, many scholars—academic and faith-based—point out that the term is of American Protestant origins, and to seek to apply it to other religious movements throughout the world is to exhibit linguistic imperialism and to deny the contextual peculiarities of those religions.

The argument against wholesale applicability sounds logical enough when one examines the elements of historical Christian fundamentalism. The crucial ideas were based on five tenets: the inaccuracy of the Bible, the deity and virgin birth of Jesus, the substitutionary atonement of Jesus' death, the literal resurrection of Jesus from the dead, and the Second Coming of Jesus (Falwell 1981, 7). The impact of fundamentalist ideology in a public sphere came apparent at the famous "Monkey Trial" in 1925. John Scopes, a biology teacher in Dayton, Tennessee, was on trial for teaching evolution, thus breaking the laws of the state against

teaching Darwinism in public schools. None of the tenets of fundamentalism directly addresses the issue of evolution, and what the trial brought out was that fundamentalist activism encompassed far more than a few creedal declarations. Based on their showing at the trial, and later objections to many developments in society, such as their strenuous objections to the banning of prayer in public schools, fundamentalists are viewed by many as out-of-date zealots. Fundamentalism now generally connotes the most militant fanaticism or retrogressive interpretations of religion.

Many Muslim scholars may argue that the literal Arabic equivalent of “fundamentalism” is *usuliyya*, -an expression that has nothing to do with the declared tenets of the historical Christian phenomenon. *Usuliyya* is a laudatory term denoting adherence to the accepted sources of Islam, and that, while the overwhelming majority of Muslims are therefore fundamentalist, they share little with Christian fundamentalist beliefs. Muslims may rightly point out that in Arabic, the scriptural language of Islam, the equivalent of Christian fundamentalism is termed *tatarruf*, *ghuluw*, or *ta’assub*, more appropriately rendered as “extremism” or “fanaticism.”

These protestations, however, fail to take into consideration certain established truths. Among these is the fact that English has become the predominant language for globally applied terminologies. Whenever a coinage or a word assumes a terminological dimension, its literal meaning often gives way to a more nuanced connotation. Rather than examine the linguistic origin of the term, one has to look at what fundamentalism denotes in modern global discourse. The authors of *Strong Religion* provide a definition that we see as universally applicable: “a discernible pattern of religious militance by which self-styled ‘true believers’ attempt to arrest the erosion of religious identity, fortify the borders of the religious community, and create viable alternatives to secular institutions and behaviors” (Almond, Appleby, and Sivan 2003, 17).

Fundamentalists in any religion are noted for their ability to quote scripture and sacred traditions from memory. Their quest to apply scripture to almost every occurrence in daily life is truly impressive. Yet, for all their proclaimed adherence to scripturality and the “right” interpretation of religion, they can be characterized by “religious illiteracy.” Scott Appleby, author of this coinage, says that “the low level or virtual absence of second-order moral reflection and basic theological knowledge among religious actors- is a structural condition that increases the likelihood of collective violence in crisis situations” (2000, 69). Since



fundamentalists perceive themselves as fighting against the effects of ungodliness, they insist on the recognition of an “other,” the enemy of God and proper religion, or at best, challengers to the core identity of the religion. This “other” is to be suppressed or eliminated, making fundamentalism a fertile field for the sowing of violence. While often extolling God’s love, fundamentalists care little about human dignity and life when dealing with the perceived enemy. In the United States, Christian fundamentalist anti-abortion groups have murdered physicians and nurses. In Israel, Yigal Amir, seeing Yitzhak Rabin as a traitor to the Jewish cause, murdered the Israeli prime minister. In India, proponents of Hindutva have burned and slaughtered Gujrati Muslims. In Israel and Iraq, Muslim suicide bombers destroy themselves to get rid of their opponents.

Jerry Falwell made no secret that he was a fundamentalist—with, as he put it, a big “F” (1981, 219). In 1979, he founded the Moral Majority, and engaged such issues as abortion, gay rights, the banning of prayer in schools and anything that he deemed against his interpretation of Christianity. He showed the power of the Christian right and is credited with bringing the Republican party to power. His invective was so vitriolic that he often had to backtrack, such as when he opined that the atrocities of September 11, 2001, were God’s judgment on a nation that supported gay rights, or when he said that the antichrist was a Jewish man, or when he opined that the Prophet Muhammad was a terrorist. Yet, when he died on May 15, 2007, most of the US newspapers avoided describing him as a fundamentalist.

The careful avoidance of describing Falwell as “fundamentalist” speaks volumes. Americans have seen the movement that was apparently doomed to oblivion reemerge with the potency of a virulently malignant cancer. Under fundamentalist influence, the reproductive freedom of women, gained under the hard-fought *Roe vs. Wade* ruling, is now being eroded in several states. But for the actions of a few Muslim fanatics on September 11, 2001, the United States would not have found itself mired in Iraq and Afghanistan. While “fundamentalists” was a term coined by a group of people to describe themselves, it is today used to disparagingly describe others—manifest proof of the odium associated with the term. Muslim academics are no longer uncomfortable applying the term to Islamist extremism (see An-Na’im 2003, 25-28; Sachedina 2000, 12).

As long as fundamentalism exists, there can be no peace. In the Middle East, Muslims murder Muslims with little discrimination between the innocent and the perceived guilty. Were it not for the apocalyptic

expectations of fundamentalist Christianity, we would not be looking forward to the reappearance of Jesus to exterminate non-Christians (as so horribly recounted in the best-selling “Left Behind” series of Jerry Jenkins and Tim LaHaye, a cofounder of the Moral Majority). Nor would we see the likes of Muqtada al-Sadr in Iraq preaching about the appearance of the Mahdi who, with Jesus, is supposed to exact sanguinary justice by fire and sword.

The people of the United States are noted for fearlessly voicing their opinions. Despite the well-oiled machinery of fundamentalist propaganda, when the *Union Tribune* conducted a poll of Jerry Falwell’s impact on Christianity’s image, 81 percent voted that it was negative (*San Diego Union Tribune*, May 26, 2007, E1). My interaction with my Muslim coreligionists seems to echo a proportional, if not higher, rejection of fundamentalism.

Fundamentalism -in its essence and its application as a label to indicate the perceived and hateful other is retrogressive and destructive; it is the absolute antithesis of anything denoting human progress. In its tyrannical assertion of power, it stands as a hurdle to beneficial human interaction, and is opposed to the modern concept of cultural literacy, wherein equal respect must be accorded to all citizens, regardless of the differences of opinion and religion. One does not have to aim at fulfilling any dream of harmonious coexistence; -there are several other “isms” that will always promote difference. But what is painfully obvious is that fundamentalism, in all of its manifestations, will always oppose a tolerable *modus vivendi*. The cancer has spread so rapidly now that there are entire governments operating on fundamentalist manifestos, with no shortage of armament and fanatics, and the probability of access to nuclear weaponry. Fundamentalism, by whatever name we choose to describe the phenomenon, must be eradicated. We have no choice; to shirk this collective duty is to aid and abet the enemies of human rights and dignity and to court the destruction of the values that humankind has struggled so hard to achieve.

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## Norani Othman

*Professor and Principal Fellow  
Institute of Malaysian and International Studies  
National University of Malaysia  
Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia  
anioth@pkrisc.cc.ukm.my*

Fundamentalism—a much overused term—evokes images of violent, irrational religious militants. Since September 11, 2001, it has been routinely used to refer to Muslim groups and political Islam.

The term “fundamentalism” was first coined as a proud self-description by late nineteenth-century American Protestants to typify their own literalist (or strictly “scripturalist”) interpretation of the Bible. For loyal Catholics it was the word of the Pope that was infallible; for these radical Protestants it was the literal meaning of the sacred text that was inerrant, needing no further interpretation.

Fundamentalism comes in many forms. Whether we face “Islamic fundamentalism,” “Hindu fundamentalism,” or the Jewish or Christian varieties, the term denotes a type of ideological political movement that seeks to appropriate the power of religious doctrines and manipulate related cultural symbols for its own very earthly ends.

Many political and religious movements may be regarded as fundamentalisms, including political movements with religious, ethnic, and nationalist projects and visions. Fundamentalist movements often construct a monolithic vision of a collective identity, rejecting all other views and claiming that theirs alone is the sole true, pristine, authentic, and valid one.

Fundamentalist political projects pose real threats in contemporary societies: to women generally and feminists particularly, and to all who work actively for human, women's, and citizenship rights, and for such concerns as social equality, religious freedom, cultural diversity, inclusive pluralism, and democracy.

Antimodern, antiliberal, and antimulticulturalist, fundamentalists harbor an obsessive intent to return to a religious golden age when, so

they maintain, scripture held sway. But can one ever simply go back to the past, even a “real” past that once was? Moreover, “things are not now what they used to be, and what’s more, they never were”!

Fundamentalisms appeal to people who feel alienated and marginalized by modernization. They stigmatize all whom they deem responsible for “Western secularism” and its reconstruction of society; all who, by displacing religion from the centre of life, are held responsible for the confusion and “moral decay” of contemporary society.

Radical, uncompromising scripturalism, dogmatic purism, and a high degree of intolerance of outsiders or “Others” are key features of religious fundamentalisms. Their exclusionary ideologies are inhospitable to any postmodern, civilizationally diverse but inclusive humanitarianism.

The fundamentalist mind abhors difference. A world dominated by fundamentalisms generates constant pressure to conform to a totalitarian mind-set that brooks no opposition or dissent, debate, or dialogue. Fundamentalisms insist on submission to their own dominant, and generally sacralized, logic; they require total submission to their system and uncritical adherence to its creed. For those committed to the principles of liberal democracy (however flawed) and those sympathetic to ideas of postmodernity (with their mistrust of authoritarianism), the recent rise of hydra-headed new fundamentalisms perhaps signals a new Dark Age of Dogma.

Fundamentalisms may also spawn terrorism. Their self-righteous proponents impose their power and sole authority upon those whom they regard “people of their own kind”—“natural constituencies” that these zealots seek to control, unified communities that they force to abide by their own absolutist worldviews and “essential truths.” Militancy, violence, totalitarian control, and suppression are justified as necessary means to such ends. It is a short step from imposing these sacralized political ideas upon one’s own people to insisting upon safe and sustainable conditions for doing so, which soon entails their imposition on others, even all humankind.

Religious fundamentalisms are distinctive. They lay claim to an “essential or sacred truth” rather than legitimacy via humanly made ideas. They use religion not simply to legitimize but to sacralize their thoroughgoing, and thoroughly mundane, political agendas, with far-reaching emotional, psychological, and cultural consequences. Their power is driven by a double force: by worldly interest turbo-charged by intimations of divine imperatives and sanctions. They accordingly pose new and different challenges to civil society than did the great

twentieth-century political fundamentalisms, communist and fascist totalitarianism.

Pursuing similar projects and agendas, religious fundamentalisms all ultimately have the same dire social consequences. Their single-minded visions and dogma demand close control of women who, as prime objects of moral anxieties, are made to bear the brunt of identity politics. Strict regimentation of sexuality, gender relations, and cultural identity is imposed through regulation of dress, behavior, belief, and lifestyle.

No area of personal and social or public life is spared from fundamentalist control and its totalitarian regulation. Education, school curriculums, textbooks, and teachers' work are minutely dictated, monitored, and supervised. Demagogues enter the public sphere and dominate media space, silencing others and manipulating public opinion. These fundamentalist ideologues may purport to represent a majority, not a minority, point of view. Yet they claim—like the “Moral Majority” in the United States—to represent the moral voice and conscience not of any mere majority but of the collective, of society as a unified totality.

Fundamentalists may be doctrinal antimodernists but they use all modern information and communication technologies, print and electronic media, to pursue their political objectives. They appropriate all available democratic space, and seize upon all features of a modern democratic system or environment to gain political influence and mobilize support, particularly among the disaffected masses—the poor, the marginalized, and the disenfranchised. They claim all available democratic space for freedom of expression and impassioned debate. Yet they often operate surreptitiously. They elude open public accountability and occlude public debate over the usually repressive new legislation and public policies that they promote within that democratic system.

In the era of disruptive neoliberal globalization, their political strategies include providing public welfare and charity. They build support by providing material, financial, or economic assistance, and sometimes even supplant the state by providing such essential resources as a social security safety net. They combine this material “package” with an existentially sustaining “message,” so offering psychological support to their targeted constituencies. Non-state religious fundamentalist actors offering state-type services undermine states that cannot or will not deliver them.

Fundamentalists employ populist propaganda eliciting the mythologized homogenous identity of “historically victimized” groups;

often they invoke religious notions of salvation to mobilize people across class, gender, and caste identities, in a calculated bid for political power or in strategies of state infiltration. Fundamentalists are eclectic in their recourse to a variety of mobilization strategies, propaganda tools, and leadership forms. Though doctrinally inflexible, fundamentalists are strategic pragmatists and tactical opportunists.

They falsify history and demonize “cultural Others” to shore up their ideological dominance and justify their claim that they alone are the true representatives of preferred sacred values and ultimately of Absolute Truth itself.

Religious fundamentalisms are a familiar type. While a number of other fundamentalisms operate in today’s world—in the realms of economic policy, politics, and thought in general—religious fundamentalisms remain most familiar. However varied their forms, all of them are sophisticated in their organizational skills and mobilizing abilities. No longer fringe movements, they have become “mainstream,” and an increasingly powerful influence in many societies. Politically potent fundamentalisms are the vehicle to power of the “true believers” (in something, even anything) in an age of doubt, skepticism, and confusion.

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### **Pradip Ninan Thomas**

*Associate Professor*

*School of Journalism and Communication*

*University of Queensland*

*Brisbane, Australia*

*pradip.thomas@uq.edu.au*

In this piece I will deal with fundamentalism specifically in the context of religion as a social institution. The term can of course be used to describe any tendency that is absolute, for instance, market fundamentalism. One can also argue that the world has co-existed with a variety of fundamentalisms from time immemorial and that the tendency toward fundamentalist thinking is a challenge that each one of us as a member of the human race faces. The conservative, liberal, libertarian, liberation theologian, feminist as well as environmentalist can be accused of being fundamentalist simply because the way in which they demarcate boundaries, solutions, actions, goals, processes often involves a process of “othering.” One can, therefore, argue that

as soon as one begins to endow specific, particularistic norms with a validity and vitality beyond the context in which it was first articulated, beyond its situated context of origin, there is a possibility that it might turn immutable and fundamentalist. In this sense any calibrated marshalling of power and knowledge in support of any universal or for that matter local ideal can lead to the creation of fundamentalism.

Religious fundamentalism is universally decried because it has led, in numerous contexts around the world, to deep conflicts, to fissures and wounds that have scarred the lives of so many thousands of people. The Taliban's repression of women in Afghanistan and the right-wing Hindu's anti-Islamic agenda in India have resulted in violence and death. Similarly Christian fundamentalists in the United States have raised the ante and globalized an absolutist version of Christianity that in many respects is a mirror image of US neoconservative foreign policy post-9/11—either you are for them or against them. Such examples suggest that there is a need to end religious fundamentalism. The potent mix between politics and religion has contributed to global death and destruction and, as such, offers little in terms of values that can be redeemed. Therefore, ending religious fundamentalism is an eminently worthwhile project.

There is another way to approach the subject for, after all, all expressions of fundamentalism are by themselves a response and reaction to deeply felt dissatisfactions with the way in which society is organized, the encroachment of secular values into every sector in society, the perceived death of God in public life, and the erasure of God and religion in the context of the ascendance of scientific "truth." I remember reading an article written by Bhiku Parekh in the aftermath of the public burning of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* in Bradford, England. As against mainstream journalism's condemnation of the medieval mentality of the Muslim community and their anti-Enlightenment stance, Parekh pointed out that there was a need to consider this community's outrage in the context of life lived in Bradford with its ghettos, high unemployment rates, marginalization, and overall bleakness. For such people, surviving on the margins, caught between institutionalized racism and social disarray, their only certainty was in the Koran. And in this context, anyone who dared question the authenticity of their belief or the character of Mohammed was bound to invite a response, even more so if the accused was a lapsed Muslim. I am not suggesting that a *fatwa* was right and proper—merely that the severity of the sentence needs to be seen in the context of the perceived severity of the crime. Granted that

this is slippery road and the reason of faith can be used to silence the liberation theologian as much as a female activist against FGM in Chad, it nevertheless is necessary for us to consider religion as more than just an epi-phenomenon. In the context of global uncertainties, it provides hope—and while the enlightened scholar may scoff at what they consider a phenomenal hoax and rail against the politics of misrecognition that is at the heart of the individual's tryst with religion, they fail to recognize religion's existence as a second skin that envelopes most individuals and that is absolutely critical to their negotiation of life. In this sense, it would seem that in order to "end fundamentalism," religion needs to be reaffirmed for the hope that it represents.

The many realities of religious fundamentalism offer us an opportunity to deal with the deep issues that have acted as a catalyst for the global spread of religious fundamentalism. For instance, in the context of the struggles between Hindus and Muslims in India, the material basis for this struggle needs to be addressed. Hindu merchants and traders acted as the vanguard for the Hindu religious right wing's attacks on Muslims precisely because it was an opportunity for them to muscle in and edge out Muslim traders and businesses coveted by Hindu traders. In the context of Protestant Christianity, the failure of the mainstream church—for example, the ecumenical movement—to engage in an effective pastoral ministry, its inability to cater to the needs of both those caught up in the margins, and heartlands of globalization, and its inability to translate the politics of its rhetoric into a platform for daily life, have condemned it to remain irrelevant to the millions whose lives and hopes often feature as the very *raison d'être* of the ecumenical movement. The existence of religious fundamentalism reminds us that there are issues that need addressing—issues that either have been taken for granted as an evolutionary given and that form the bedrock of "universal" Enlightenment values.

So the question then that we might have to ask is not "Why end fundamentalism" because fundamentalism is just a symptom of a complex of factors that need to be addressed but "How does one end the root causes for fundamentalism?" And, in addition, given that we do need retake religion back from those who believe in separatist futures for the elect and hell for infidels, the question "How does one strengthen responses to fundamentalism?"

Scott Appleby, one of the editors of the five-volume *Fundamentalisms Project* (University of Chicago Press) and director of the J.B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University



of Notre Dame, in his keynote address at the International Conference on Fundamentalism and the Media (2006), focused on the need for peacemakers to use the media to their advantage in their fight against fundamentalism: "In peacebuilding no less than in the cosmic war waged by the fundamentalists, Hermeneutics is all. And for better or worse, in the 21st century, the mass media, especially the electronic media, is *a*, perhaps *the*, paramount interpreter, framer, creator of meaning and mobilizer. Strategic peacebuilders would do well to understand and accept this somewhat inconvenient fact. The fundamentalists did so a century ago."

## REFERENCE

- Appleby, Scott. 2006. "Waging peace through the media: What we can learn from the Fundamentalists." Keynote address at the International Conference on Fundamentalism and the Media Conference, University of Colorado, Boulder, October 10-12, 2006.