



# Promotio Iustitiae

Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat (SJES), General Curia of the Society of Jesus, Rome, Italy

## **Fundamentalism: Role of Religions for Reconciliation**

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**Fundamentalism: Understanding and Response**

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## Editorial

**Xavier Jeyaraj, SJ**

**T**he last three General Congregations have raised an alarm over the rise of ‘aggressive fundamentalism’ (GC 34, D2, #12) and “increased level of conflict and polarization... motivated and justified by distorted religious convictions” (GC36, D1, #28). GC 35 emphasises, “Faith in God is increasingly being used by some to divide people and communities, to create polarities and tensions which tear at the very fabric of common social life” (D3, #22). “Lack of moral and spiritual basis”, as GC 34 explains, “results [in] conflicting ideologies of hatreds which provoke nationalistic, racial, economic and sexual violence”, multiplies “the abuses that breed resentment and conflict”, and tries to “homogenize cultures” (GC 35). “Society then falls prey to the powerful and the manipulative, the demagogue and the liar; it becomes the centre of social and moral corruption.” (GC 34, D2, #12).

In almost every religion, a few self-styled ‘true-believers’ [fundamentalists], claim to protect beliefs from erosion and contamination. Unchecked fundamentalism always creates strife, incited by fanatics; leading to clashes and riots often resulting in violence, which sometimes ends in war. Fundamentalism thrives wherever there is stark poverty, simply because these “revivalist” [fundamentalist] movements promise benefits and upliftment [which God will provide to true believers], where there is no real hope. Only the leaders of such movements benefit. Vested interests keep religious militancy burning in order to pursue their political and economic interests. In Syria, Iraq, Turkey, South Sudan, Afghanistan, DRC, Israel-Palestine religious wars are active and in India, Pakistan, Philippines, Myanmar etc., fundamentalism is fuelling armed conflicts in the name of religion.

Additionally, in recent years right-wing fanaticism has grown in a very big way in the so called first world countries, especially in Europe and the United States. Far right political parties have made major inroads in divisive elections throughout the West. It is not that they never won the elections earlier, but success of this magnitude across Europe and United States has not happened ever since World War II. This is quite alarming for everyone who believes in democracy, unity and diversity.

The right-wing campaigns throughout the world are falsely run on two key claims: a) upliftment of the poor and the middle class suffering from the crippling economy; and b) stopping of all outsiders: - migrants and other ethnic or religious minorities - which according to the propaganda take away jobs and identities. To do this, the right-wing groups have very cleverly used the general discontentment over economic insecurity, loss of trust in public institutions and corruptions that have engulfed the entire political and economic systems.

Through blatant demagoguery they have managed to arouse the emotional side of identity based on nationalism, insider-outsider syndrome and religion to achieve power and control. Nationalism and 'populism' are the newly ascendant fascistic political forces to be reckoned with.

Meanwhile 'traditional religions' and religious persons often face a serious threat from the modern day belief systems promoted by new technologies, market economy, globalization, exclusivism, individualism etc., and being basically non-violent find themselves mute spectators of chaos caused by the nexus between religious fanatics and modern-day right-wing belief systems.

In this context, the last three GCs have invited us a) to *acknowledge* our past intolerant attitudes and injustices towards others and face in an unprejudiced manner the legitimate animosity and hurt feelings of others; b) to *explore* the reasons for rising fundamentalisms, ethnic-religious-political conflicts and violence; c) to *listen* carefully and engage in dialogue, that contributes towards peace and reconciliation with other religious and spiritual traditions; d) to *build bridges* linking individuals and communities of good will on local and global levels and e) to *introspect* regularly on our own motives and guard against falling into the trap of blind fanaticism.

The present issue of *Promotio Iustitiae* on **Fundamentalism: Role of Religions for Reconciliation** looks at this critically from three standpoints:

- From a theoretical perspective looking at the links between fundamentalism, democracy and globalisation
- From organized religions perspective in different countries, looking at religious tolerance/intolerance and harmony/disharmony and
- From traditional / indigenous religions perspective looking at the challenges we face while working among them.

The articles not only present a disturbing panorama in the hands of religious fanatics, they also highlight and motivate us to become involved in working towards building a harmonious community based on dialogue with religions and cultures. They also invite us to reflect and introspect our own attitudes to other religions and cultures, while remaining true to the eternal message of love and compassion in the Gospels.

*Original in English*



## Is There Such a Thing as Radical Secularism?

**Jean-Marie Faux, SJ**

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“ **A**n overwhelming majority of Europeans who went to fight on the side of Islamic State were recruited in the most hyper-secular state of the continent, namely France”. Thus begins an article in the review *Middle East Eye* (French edition). And it goes on, “*Secular* fundamentalism is the kind we talk about the least, to the extent that those espousing secularism deny that it exists”<sup>1</sup>.

And not without reason: is not secularism, after all, defined as the principle that guarantees freedom of thought and religion; as “not an *opinion*, but the principle that guarantees freedom of thought and religion; not a *conviction*, but the principle that authorizes all of them, subject to respect for public order?”<sup>2</sup>

If France is “the most hyper-secular state of the continent” (secularism is part of the Constitution) it is not the only one. The secularity of the state is asserted in various forms in other countries of the world, especially in countries of a Catholic tradition: Belgium, Italy, Quebec (Canada)... where it is the outcome of a historic process of emancipation. With the ‘opening to the world’ affirmed by the Second Vatican Council, and experienced mainly by Catholics, secularism no longer seemed problematic. If, today, it is championed afresh in a polemical way, this is clearly in the context of the presence and visibility of Islam.

This link is clear in France. An article in the magazine *Atlantico* asks the question: “Is the infernal duo, radical secularism and Islamic communitarianism, in the process of shattering the equilibrium in place... since 1905?”<sup>3</sup> In Belgium, a section of the secular world is campaigning today for the inclusion of secularism in the Constitution. However, as Carlo Crespo, President of the Movement against Racism, Anti-Semitism, and Xenophobia writes, “No one can seriously pretend to be unaware that most of those who invoke the need to

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<sup>1</sup> Werleman, C.J. (13 April 2015). *What is secular fundamentalism?* Middle East Eye. <http://www.middleeasteye.net/node/41245>.

<sup>2</sup> *What is Secularism?* Presentation of the French government on its internet site.

<sup>3</sup> Chevrier, Guylain. (30 Oct. 2017). *Le duo infernal laïcité radicale/communautarisme islamique est-il en voie de faire voler en éclat l'équilibre fragile trouvé sur la place de la religion et du christianisme en France depuis 1905?* Atlantico éditions. <http://www.atlantico.fr/decryptage/duo-infernal-laicite-radical-communautarisme-islamiste-est-en-voie-faire-voler-en-eclat-equilibre-fragile-trouve-place-religion-3209646.html>.

reaffirm the separation of church and state are no longer defying a religious institution, but are rather regarding with scorn a minority of believers”<sup>4</sup>

What is at issue here is the visibility of Islam, the freedom granted, or not, to Muslims to express their religious affiliation in particular places or specific contexts, or in the public space in general. It concerns particularly, but not exclusively, the wearing of the veil<sup>5</sup>. It is in the evaluation of what should be forbidden that what can be called radical secularism is to be found.

## Some Examples

Since the “Creil affair” in 1989, the wearing of the veil in schools has been an issue in France. Despite a contrary opinion of the Stasi Commission, a law was passed in 2004 “prohibiting the wearing of any conspicuous religious sign in public schools, colleges and high schools”. The ban applies to students, teachers, and all ancillary staff. Now a controversy has arisen about the mothers who are sometimes invited to accompany a school trip. They, too, are asked to take off their scarves. The same prohibition is found in certain institutions of formalized education in Belgium. Is this not secular radicalism? As the French MEP Catherine Moureaux writes: “Nothing can justify the fundamental rights of these citizens being reduced in the name of a questionable conception of neutrality”<sup>6</sup>

Another issue that generated a lot of discussion in France last summer was the ban on “burkinis” by many municipalities. For Muslim women, this is a suitable item of clothing that allows them to swim and go to the beaches. Can it be seriously proposed that the presence of women clothed in this way is an offence against public order? Yet, despite an opinion of the Council of State, several municipalities have banned them this summer.

While the issue of the wearing of the veil is, without question, the area where secular belief is most likely to be radicalized, it also concerns other behaviours. We will give only one example. The registrar of the city of Brussels refuses to proceed to the marriage ceremony when the future (Muslim) wife refuses to shake his hand. He boasted recently of having refused to solemnize eight marriages, arguing: “I am told that it is for a religious reason. I answer that in the city hall there is no religion. It is a secular venue.”

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<sup>4</sup> Carte Blanche (open letter). (3 February 2016). *Le Soir*.

<sup>5</sup> We will return to this phrase “the wearing of the veil” because it dominates the social debate. And yet it is subject to critique both from without and within, because a semantic shift seems to occur between two terms in the Qur’an: the “hijab”, meaning either veiling or principle of separation; and the “khimar” or headscarf. The use of the term “hijab” in the context of dress serves the purpose of Muslims of a radical or rigorous tendency, whereas other Muslims prefer the term “scarf”.

Considered from the outside, the term “veil” seems to crystalize certain fears more than “scarf”, and is therefore preferred by various currents of thought hostile to Islam. On this subject see the article by the Moroccan feminist Asma Lamrabet: <http://www.asma-lamrabet.com/articles/le-voile-dit-islamique-une-relecture-des-concepts/>

<sup>6</sup> Moureaux, Catherine. (26 October 2016). *Pour une laïcité, espace de liberté et non mur d’intolérance*. Carte blanche (open letter).

What is at issue in these prohibitions is the rejection of a difference where one person considers something to be a legitimate (and for her compulsory) expression of religion, and which the other 'secular' person considers to be a violation of the neutrality of a public space and thus of the secularity of the state.

In order to come to a judgement about the validity of the reaction of the 'secular' registrar (and therefore of his possible 'radicalism'), we will refer to the declarations of Human Rights, which affirm the freedom to manifest one's religion. Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes the freedom to change his religion or belief, and, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance". The European Convention of Human Rights, in its article 9.1, repeats, almost literally, the same affirmation, but in a second section (Article 9.2) it adds reservations: "Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society, in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others".

Two preliminary remarks should be made: Firstly, from the perspective of these fundamental texts, it is the freedom to manifest one's religion in public that is the rule, and it is the restrictions that must be justified. Secondly, these restrictions must be provided by law.

The restrictions are considered necessary in five instances: when the behaviours concerned are supposed to be harmful to public security, to the protection of public order, to health or morals, or to the protection of the rights and freedoms of others. It should be noted that "laïcité" or the neutrality of the state is not mentioned. It can be accepted, however, that it is closely linked with and even indispensable for the fulfilment in the concrete of these conditions.

We can now return to the cases mentioned above, which seem to us to be open to consideration as radical secularism. First, let us consider the issues that revolve around the wearing of the headscarf or Islamic veil. The prohibition of the full burqa can be considered legitimate in the name of security and public order. But the ban on burkinis on the beaches? In what way would this garment endanger public order or health?

The ban on the veil can be justified in public education for students, teachers and staff alike: at issue here is the neutrality of a public service, a neutrality necessary for the protection of the rights and freedoms of all. But would these really be endangered, and public order or ethics threatened, if some veiled mothers were allowed to accompany their children on a school trip?

And as for the refusal of the registrar to marry a person who, for a motive, – as much cultural as religious for that matter – refuses to shake his hand, one would happily share the opinion of Patrick Charlier, director of UNIA: "When Mr Courtois refuses to celebrate a marriage, he



refuses to perform an act that falls within his functions: what he asks for in fact is to be able to take advantage of a reasonable accommodation because of his convictions”<sup>7</sup>.

It has to be acknowledged that the presence and visibility of Islam in our Western societies have aroused the sensitivities of the secular world: this to the extent that the question could be posed: “Is the infernal duo - radical secularism/Islamist communitarianism - in the process of shattering the fragile equilibrium that exists in regard to the place of religion in the Republic?”<sup>8</sup>. In any country where such a question arises, as in France, the answer depends on the openness of citizens and the wisdom of those in charge, at every level. Our societies are, in fact, multicultural and multi-religious. All citizens must be able to exercise their rights, and among these rights, the right to manifest their religion. The exercise of this right does not need justification. It is the limits placed on it that must be justified. And it is clear that the evaluation of what these limits are is not self-apparent. Their determination, states the European Declaration of Human Rights, must be based on serious grounds (public security, protection of public order, health or morality, protection of the rights and freedoms of others) and be provided for by law. *Be provided for by law*. This clarification in itself disqualifies arbitrary decisions that are taken by individuals – employers, traders – or by institutions – educational institutions, associations of all kinds. Whatever reasons are given, these decisions conflict with the right to manifest one’s religion and can be considered racist.

At the end of the day, we are referred back to the law, therefore to the state and its foundation in citizen engagement. Radical secularists try to have laws enacted that make certain manifestations of religion impossible, at least in certain contexts. In concrete terms it is the visibility of Islam in Western societies that is at issue. And the radicalization of a certain type of Islam has contributed not a little to adding strength to the secular reaction. But the presence of Islam in Western societies cannot be simply boiled down to the spectre of Islamism. Many Muslim men and women have already been integrated for a long time in the life of our societies, and one cannot see what fundamental good is violated if a woman prefers to wear a veil and does not shake the hand of the registrar.

In those societies that have actually become multicultural, where the old duality between Christian believers and people without religion (philosophical secularism) is today complicated by the presence of a significant Muslim community (in an international context where Islam is seen as a burning problem), democratic wisdom imposes a responsibility of understanding and mutual respect. Just like the radicalism of Islam, or the radicalism of some Christians (this also exists), secular radicalism turns its back on this openness. Like all fundamentalism, it “focuses on the singular, in a pluralistic world”<sup>9</sup>.

Fortunately, our societies are not simply fields of confrontation between radicalisms. There is also the reality of ordinary living, of workplaces, of neighbourhoods, and also of reflexion

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<sup>7</sup> See the carte blanche [open letter] of 15 December 2016. <https://unia.be/fr/articles/carte-blanche-a-chacun-sa-loi>. L’UNIA is an independent Belgian public service set up to combat discrimination and to promote equal opportunities.

<sup>8</sup> Chevrier, Guylain. Article cited in note 3.

<sup>9</sup> Werleman, C.J. Article cited in note 1.

in situations where people meet and live together. In the context of this de facto togetherness the contentious issues can only be solved through the interplay of democratic negotiation.

*Original in French*  
*Translation Bill Toner, SJ*



## Fundamentalism: Understanding and Response

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### The Context

In its etymological sense, the term essentially means returning to the fundamentals. There are many kinds of fundamentalisms: economic fundamentalism, sometimes called market fundamentalism, where the economic fundamentals of market laws of supply and demand, of profit and loss rule supreme; political fundamentalisms, where the 'fundamentals' of an ideology or system are privileged to the point of refusing any compromise or adaptation;.... Once 'fundamentals' are decontextualized from other moderating and humanising considerations become disembodied and dehumanised. This allows them to be absolutized, and uncritically and dogmatically affirmed. Such fundamentals are then easily distorted, losing their essential meaning and relevance.

Reasoning from such 'fundamentals' leads to a loss or distortion of meaning. Reason may seem to prevail while what is reasonable is lost! Fundamentalism is often seen as not rational. However, fundamentalists argue very rationally from within their framework of understanding, reminiscent of Chesterton's paradox: "A madman is someone who has lost everything but his reason!"

However, all communication is symbolic and meaningful only in context. Hence there can be: no 'text' without 'context', whether written, oral texts, or action communications as equivalent to a text message.

### Defensive Origins

A religious tradition or community taking to religious fundamentalism in the search for its origins, its fundamentals, is essentially a defensive reaction. When attacked from the outside they become more so. Unsurprisingly, given the situation of Muslims in India and elsewhere, any attempt from the outside at pushing reform is often perceived as an attack and only results in greater defensiveness. The same thing is likely to happen with Christians, and with Hindus when they are on the defensive. Thus the fundamentalist Christian response of the crusades against Islam in the middle ages was surely a defensive reaction to the Muslim intrusions into Europe. But today in a given society generally, a dominant majority community should have less reason to be on the defensive than a marginalised minority one. This is the anomaly of Hindu fundamentalists in India.

As a defensive reaction fundamentalism is the response of individuals and communities to rapid and radical change in society, where religious traditions and beliefs are being undermined and/or challenged. It originates in insecurity, uncertainty and self-doubt. Beginning with individuals, it gets aggregated to the group and the community beyond. It is desperate attempt to recover lost selves, lost worlds. To unravel this we need to sort out the various dimensions of such a reaction.

## **Levels of Analysis**

At the socio-psychological level, Sudhir Kakar remarks that religious fundamentalism holds up a crumbling personality the way a scaffolding holds up a collapsing building! (Kakar 1993: 52) Fundamentalism represents a quest for reassurance, a defence mechanism against uncertainty and insecurity, precipitated by rapid and radical social change. Often this is accompanied by a whole set of negative emotions, fear, anxiety self-righteousness ... that finally coalesce into an unfocused aggressive reaction. Fundamentalism seems also arises from fear of the chaos in individual morality today. But this is more the situation in the West than the East, which faces other kinds of moral challenges today, compounded by such fundamentalism.

Not surprisingly a fundamentalist reaction generally goes with an 'authoritarian personality', (Adorno 1969) that needs hierarchy and order. No wonder interdicts and fatwas are accepted with such finality and obeyed. The same can be said about caste, which Ambedkar characterised as graded inequality: giving everyone someone to respect and someone to despise! Is it any wonder that Hindu fundamentalism is so caste ridden?

At a theological level fundamentalism involves a framework that decontextualises faith-content. However, just as there is no text without context, there is no communication without interpretation. This applies even to divine revelation made to humans. Even communication to oneself must be an interpretation to oneself, for even self-reflection and self-talk happens in a language.

The letter of the law can have no meaning without a communication of its spirit. If the text is made its own interpretation, then arbitrariness is inevitable; one's pre-judgements will inevitably impinge on what one reads into the text. Now in a multicultural world, cultural contextualisation cannot be avoided. This is anathema to the fundamentalist, whose fundamentals are not transcultural and cannot travel across cultures without being contextualised in situ, i.e., inculturated into various cultures and sub-cultures.

Yet once we accept that our world is plural- indeed, we cannot even imagine it to be otherwise - then, dialogue becomes imperative, not just within a tradition, but even more so across traditions. Otherwise religious movements coming in contact - as they inevitably must in our increasingly interdependent world - will only result in a 'clash of ignorance', not a 'dialogue of faith'.

At the social level, as a religious movement going back to its origins, fundamentalism is more conservative than progressive. Further, not all religious fundamentalists are radicals who

want to change the world, and some even violently. Many are quietists who withdraw from the world and spiritualise their lives in other-worldly ways.

An uncritical emphasis on authority and dogma may result in obedience and conformity but cannot make for the inner freedom so basic to an authentic religious faith. Rather it could make it impervious to other worldviews, and amount to a rejection of plurality, negating open and equal dialogue.

At an intellectual level, fundamentalism is premised on a static understanding of reality. That is returning to fundamentals, to origins, is still considered to be relevant for our present time. But human reality is not static; it changes with history. The human understanding of this changing reality in the history of human thought undergoes paradigm shifts that represent radical changes in our understanding. Religious understandings cannot be unaffected by all this, as Newman's development of doctrine convincingly explained. Many theologies can prevail at a given time expressing different perspectives within one faith: some representing sub-traditions within the main one, others carryovers from the past, some already initiating new ones ... All these are various attempts to adjust to the changing world around us.

Newman, in his *Grammar of Ascent* rightly points out that those who are so eager to convince others of their faith are precisely the ones who repress the doubt in themselves, a doubt perhaps suppressed into their unconscious, which they may be too afraid to admit even to themselves! Too easily do such persons privilege absolutised formulae in a mistaken attempt at overcoming such doubt. The leap of faith demands an act of trust, it does not bring the illusory security of certainty.

At the experiential/dialogical level, fundamentalists generally claim to privilege emotive experience over intellectual articulation. However, once fundamentals are put beyond any critique, then the articulation of such fundamentals becomes absolutised, and experience is straight-jacketed within it, and inevitably devalued and dismissed. Authentic experience leads to true faith, while absolutising articulation brings a false security. For faith as Pannenberg emphasises is essentially about trust; it is certainly not about security:

"Only through trust can we attain a relationship with the unknown upon which we are dependent.

In the act of trusting. A person places himself, at least in a certain respect, at the mercy of that in which he places trust." (Pannenberg 1970: 29)

Thus faith leads to belief and not to knowledge. We *believe* in God, we do not *know* God. The act of faith results in a different kind of certainty, another sort of security, not based on oneself but rather founded on an experience and fidelity of God, the Utterly other, the object to whom our faith is directed, and the subject who first inspires this faith in us! Here there is only the certainty of trust, of surrender, confidence, hope, which characterise the believer; not the security of control, of certainty, which seems to be the overarching quest of the fundamentalist, coping with underlying anxieties. On the contrary a sharing, a searching together in trust, is basis of any authentic dialogue, especially a dialogue of faith, whether at the level of life, action, experience or articulation.

## Sutras on Faith and Reason

Such a dialogue must be premised, not on a dialectic, but on a dialogue between faith and reason. If both faith and reason seek truth, they cannot contradict each other.

These sutras have been elaborated elsewhere. (Heredia 2001) In the context of fundamentalism, they are meant to ground both intra- and inter-religious dialogue, the first as a precondition for the second. Hence our query:

*What does being 'reasonable' mean to faith, and again what does being 'faithful' to reason require?*

And so now our first sutra:

- *Faith and reason are complementary not contradictory ways of seeking the truth.*

Faith as giving one's assent to a truth rests on the trustworthiness of the testifier, and not on the content of the belief. Hence our second sutra:

- *What we believe depends on whom we trust.*

In accepting the validity of a methodology we must also acknowledge its limitations. And so our third sutra:

- *A rational methodology transgressing its inherent limitations can never yield 'rightly reasoned' knowledge.*

Premised on 'pre-judgements' and 'pre-sumptions', "unconscious ideologies" impact our reasoning and options. Consequently our fourth sutra:

- *Where we position ourselves influences how we reason.*

We need to distinguish *faith as content*, that is, belief, and *faith as act*, that is fidelity. Hence our fifth sutra:

- *Whether or not we believe depends on our self-understanding.*

Faith is a "constitutive element of human existence". (Raimon Panikkar 1971) It must make the believer more human, or else it cannot be 'good faith'. And so our sixth sutra:

- *To believe is human, hence what we believe must make us more human not less!*

When compulsive rather than free, faith is blind, expressing dependency not trust. Hence our sutra seven:

- *Faith that is 'blind' is never truly humanising; faith that is not humanising, is to that extent 'bad faith'.*

An objective positivist *experimental* methodology focusing on cause and effect is inadequate to the discourse of faith. This demands a self-reflexive, subjective *experiential* methodology, neither arbitrary nor irrational, but focusing on 'meaning' and 'meaningfulness'. Hence our eighth sutra:

- *Only a self-reflexive, experiential methodology is meaningful to the discourse of faith; a rationalist, empirical one is alien to it.*

The content of belief (*fides quae*) may vary across various cultural and religious traditions. But the act of faith (*fides qua*), trust, has a common human basis. Hence our ninth sutra:

- *The act of faith, because it is constitutively human, will necessarily have a commonality across varying cultures and traditions.*

Finally our tenth and last sutra:

- *An inclusive humanism must embrace both 'meaningful faith', as well as 'sensitised reason'.*

For it is only this complementarity between faith and reason, which can bring a healing wholeness to the "broken totality" of our modern world, in Iris Murdoch's unforgettable phrase.

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*Original in English*



## The “Paradox of Democracy and Capitalism”

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### Introduction

The democracy manifesto signals that time has come to open ourselves to the many ways in which the demos, that is, the people, organize themselves around the world to take charge of their own destiny. It is becoming hard to make predictions in a period like ours when all the ideological and political mechanisms that governed the behaviour of the various actors seem to be fading away. Political struggles that traditionally had been conducted in the context of political states, whose legitimacy was not questioned (the legitimacy of a government could be questioned, but not that of the state).<sup>1</sup> Political parties a few great institutions like national associations the media and the “political class” – constituted the basic structure of the system within which political movements, social struggles, and ideological currents expressed themselves. But now we find that almost everywhere in the world these institutions have to one degree or another lost a good part, if not all, of their legitimacy.

The significant question that we should be alert to then is; in the course of 2011 uprisings so far, what is the relationship between globalization and democracy? Indeed democracy is primarily an artefact. But like other human artefacts, it too needs care, continuous attention, ingenuity and passion.<sup>2</sup> The current conversation on democracy has never suffered from dearth of ambition. This means that other ways of engaging with democratic experiences are possible. It is not only possible but also necessary. To all those who see democracy as a shared journey of conversation, it provides an occasion to reflect on what it means.

This article treats the idea of democracy as form of government that is experienced globally and has become an aspiration that is shared across yet it’s paradoxical. This aspiration takes different forms. For instance, the idea of popular self-rule has multiple applications depending on which people are being talked about, what understanding of self is being

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<sup>1</sup> Amin, Samir. (2001). “Imperialism and globalization”: Monthly Review  
<https://monthlyreview.org/2001/06/01/imperialism-and-globalization/>

<sup>2</sup> Mohapatra, Bishnu N. (7<sup>th</sup> May 2011). “Introducing the Democracy Manifesto and a global conversation”. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/bishnu-n-mohapatra/introducing-democracy-manifesto-and-global-conversation#manifesto>. Accessed 10 June 2018.



invoked and what is accepted as self-rule.<sup>3</sup> “The people” could mean all the citizens of a national state, the citizens at a region or locality, or the planet’s entire population. The self could be seen in terms of the individual citizen or in terms of a social community. Self-rule could be interpreted as voice, consultation, consent or consensus in any authoritative and binding decision-making process.<sup>4</sup>

With democracy come globalisation and its neo-liberal ideology of freeing up markets that are driven by profit with less government control. However good it sounds, the ideology of neo-liberalism is opposed by many. Liberalisation was supposed to enhance integration and utilize comparative advantages says Stiglitz.<sup>5</sup> But that simply is not the case. Should “democracy” (shorthand for modern management of political life) and “the market” (shorthand for capitalist management of economic activity) be viewed as convergent or divergent?

People no longer believe in governments anymore. In their place “movements” of various kinds have emerged; movements centred on the demands of the greens, of women, for social justice, and of groups asserting their identity as ethnic or religious communities. This new political reality is highly unstable. It would be worth discussing concretely the relation between these demands and movements and the critique of society (that is, of really existing capitalism) and globalized neoliberal management. Some of these movements join – or could join – in the conscious rejection of the society projected by the dominant powers. The dominant powers are able to manipulate and support some of the movements, openly or covertly; others they resolutely combat – that is the rule in this new and unsettled political spaces.<sup>6</sup>

Questions that this article poses are; how will a dialectical synthesis, beyond capitalism, make it possible to reconcile the rights of the individual and those of the collectivity? How will this possible reconciliation give more transparency to individual life and the life of society? These are questions that I am not attempting to answer here, but definitely present themselves as a challenge to the bourgeois concept of democracy and its limits. Therefore, this article seeks to treat in part the link between democracy, globalization, capitalism and emergency of fundamentalism. Importantly though is the basic understanding of the concepts.

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<sup>3</sup> The ideal of 'rule by the people' has increasingly meant domination by one ethnic/religious group over others, followed by resistance, civil war and ethnic cleansing. This was the past of many Northern countries and it is the present of many Southern ones. It is essentially a modern problem, generated by the global diffusion of the modern ideal of 'rule by the people' in which 'the people' means the ethnos as well as the demos.

<sup>4</sup> Mohapatra, Bishnu N. (2011). “Introducing the Democracy Manifesto and a global conversation”, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/bishnu-n-mohapatra/introducing-democracy-manifesto-and-global-conversation#manifesto>, Accessed on 10 June 2018

<sup>5</sup> Stiglitz, Joseph. (2003). “Globalization and its Discontents”. He argues that development economics is not about statistics, rather about lives and jobs never forget people at the end of policies that are formulated. Success should not be defined by how fast international banks can invest but by how much people have to eat and how much better it makes their lives.

<sup>6</sup> Amin, Samir. (2001). “Imperialism and Globalisation” in Monthly Review Independent Socialist Magazine. <https://monthlyreview.org/2001/06/01/imperialism-and-globalization/> Accessed 12th June 2018.

## Concepts Explained

The concept democracy is in a modern sense the very definition of modernity – if, as I suggest, we understand by modernity the adoption of the principle that human beings individually and collectively are responsible for their history. Before the formulation of that concept, people had to free themselves from the alienations characteristic of the forms of power that preceded capitalism, whether they were the alienations of religion or whether they took the form of “traditions” conceived as permanent trans-historical facts.<sup>7</sup>

The expressions of modernity, and of the necessity for democracy that it implies, date from the Age of Enlightenment.<sup>8</sup> But the modernity in question is synonymous with capitalism, and the democracy that it has produced is limited like the rest, like capitalism itself. Neither modernity nor democracy has reached the end of its potential development.

Aspects that were of the 60s such as the surrounding economic and political instabilities in the South caused by poverty are still here with us and increasingly internationalized. The refugee challenge and migration(s) that existed are still issues of concern. And most are shaping the emerging debates by the northerners. There is the new terminology of “re-problematisation” of security with such pressing trends. Security threats to the North are no longer seen solely in terms of traditional interstate conflict to be approached through the politics of alliance.

Globalisation, that is the steady rise in trans-border flows of goods, services, capital, symbols and cultural products that we have seen over the past three decades or so, has gone hand in hand with an equally steady expansion of democratic ideas around the world.<sup>9</sup> The notion that people ought to rule themselves and through their representatives - and not through some self-appointed masters - has percolated and stuck. While the central idea of democracy as self-rule, in its broad sense is the same everywhere, the specific manifestations of it vary from region to region and country to country.

By globalisation the idea of democracy has spread and helped liberate people from many a dictatorial yoke. But globalisation also embodies the danger that a ‘one-size fits all’ model of democracy imposed from abroad and from above does not work. As Manuel Castells<sup>10</sup> has eloquently demonstrated, we live in the information society. The information society is based on networks, new less hierarchical way of structuring organizations, and one in which the

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<sup>7</sup> Amin, Samir. (June 1, 2001). “Imperialism and Globalization” in *Monthly Review an Independent Socialist magazine*. Samir Amin was the director of the African Office (in Dakar, Senegal) of the Third World Forum, an international non-governmental association for research and debate. He is the author of numerous books and articles including *Specters’ of Capitalism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> The origin of modernity is traced back to enlightenment. It was for the first time that the enlightenment thinkers put society and social relations under intense scrutiny. These thinkers were concerned with the attainment of human and social perfectibility.

<sup>9</sup> Stiglitz, Joseph. (2003). *Globalisation and its Discontents*, p 7-8.

<sup>10</sup> The Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells created one of the most ambitious macro theories of our time, which endeavours to explain and interpret power, economy, and social life in a world transformed by globalization and informatisation.

new currency of the realm is information and the ability to handle it. This has meant an upsurge of efforts to categorize, classify and rank countries around the world according to a variety of 'democracy indexes', which purport to tell us how democratic any given country is. And this is not a mere academic exercise. Real-life consequences flow from it.

With new networks the global economy is now characterized by almost instantaneous flow and exchange of information, capital, and cultural communication. The information flow orders and condition both consumption and production. The networks and the traffic they carry are largely outside national regulation. Our dependence on the new modes of informational flow gives to those in a position to control them, enormous power to control us. The political arena has since tilted into new media and most are not politically answerable.<sup>11</sup> According to Castells, these networks, which could not exist on a large scale without the medium provided by new information technologies, are the emerging organizational form of our world, and are playing a fundamental role in ensuring the restructuring processes of engagement.<sup>12</sup>

The new conflicts are about identities, status and values of various groups. These are what is defining the social spaces. For instance Keller opines that globalisation is conflictual, contradictory, and open to resistance, to democratic intervention and transformation and that it is not just a monolithic juggernaut of progress or domination. This thought is advanced further by distinguishing between "globalisation from below" and the "globalisation from above" of "corporate capitalism" and the capitalist state<sup>13</sup>, a distinction that should help us to get a better sense of how globalisation does or does not promote democratization.<sup>14</sup>

"Globalisation from below" refers to ways in which marginalized individuals and social movements resist globalisation and/or use its institutions and instruments to further democratisation and social justice. While on one level, globalisation significantly increases the supremacy of big corporations and big government, it can also give power to groups and individuals that were previously left out of the democratic dialogue and terrain of political struggle. Such potentially positive effects of globalisation has seen increased access to education for individuals excluded from entry to culture and knowledge and the possibility of oppositional individuals and groups to participate in global culture and politics by gaining access to global communication and media networks and able to circulate local struggles and oppositional ideas through these media. The role of new technologies in social movements, political struggle, and everyday life forces has forced social movements to reconsider their

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<sup>11</sup> Castells, Manuel. (2010). "The Rise of the Network Society", *The Information Age Economy, Society, and Culture*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

<sup>12</sup> Anttiroiko, Ari-Veikko. (2015). Networks in Manuel Castells, "Theory of the network Society"; University of Tampere. Online at <http://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/65617/> MPRA Paper No. 65617, posted 16. July 2015 04:48 UTC.

<sup>13</sup> As the world economies fall, we are witnessing, increased corruption, dictatorship, the rich living like princes while everyone else suffers. The elites are raping all places that are good. As such no one should question the emergency of fundamentalism

<sup>14</sup> Kellner, Douglas. Theorizing Globalization. <https://pages.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/papers/theoryglob.htm>

political spaces, goals and democratic thoughts in order to appraise themselves on how new technologies can offer varying democratic dispensation.<sup>15</sup>

The term 'globalisation' is discussed here as one aspect that adds to the extension of social relations globally. But what kind of process is this? Most people view it as moving us into a single global society. They are focusing on the capital economy. Capitalism, they say, is everywhere breaking through the boundaries of states and localities to create a global economy and therefore a global society. Some focus more on a revolution in the technology of communications or on global consumer markets. They argue we are living in a global 'networked society', an 'Internet society' or a 'McWorld'. There are also cultural and political versions, of a "transnational civil society" and of a 'new world order' as put forward by Francis Fukuyama (1992).<sup>16</sup> These views see globalisation as essentially integrating the world.

According to Manann globalisation contains far worse than what is mentioned above. But to understand it we must utter a word that has always been central to globalisation, but which has become unfashionable – imperialism.<sup>17</sup> According to Chomsky, with the Soviet deterrent in decline the Cold War victors are freer to exercise their will under the cloak of good intentions but in pursuit of interests that have a very familiar ring outside the realm of enlightenment.<sup>18</sup>

In fact we should be alive to a world that is stratified and hierarchical. The existing drive of the imperial power of Westernization is reason for resistance. For example the resistance to perceived northern globalisation and civilisation is seen as reactionary, violent and primitive, whereas the culture and political structures of the north and actions are declared as being rational and generally benign.<sup>19</sup> The increasing global system interconnectedness has magnified the threat of internationalization of instability. This has partly been a cause to the flow of refugees, disruption of commercial activities and helping support the spread of related terrorist and criminal networks.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Kellner, Douglas. (1999b). "Globalization From Below? Toward a Radical Democratic Technopolitics," *Angelaki* 4:2: 101-113.

<sup>16</sup> Fukuyama, Francis. (1992). *The End of History and the Last Man*. To understand what Francis Fukuyama means when he says that history has come to an end, one must first understand two things about Fukuyama. First, when Fukuyama says that history is at an end, he means history in the Hegelian or dialectic sense; that is, history as a clash of ideologies. Second, and far more importantly, Fukuyama is a Straussian. Straussians believe that material prosperity, in itself, means little. They would have us believe that Western-style democracies can successfully generate the wealth necessary to satisfy man's material cravings, but can do nothing to satisfy man's craving for things deeper and more profound.

<sup>17</sup> 'World systems' theorists come closest to this analysis. Arrighi and Silver (1999), for example, see order in the world system as conferred by 'hegemonic Powers' (in the 19th century Britain, now the US). But I find this too simple a view. The US is certainly a military hegemon. However, its ability to impose world order is rather limited.

<sup>18</sup> Chomsky, Noam. (1999). *The new Military Humanism: Lessons from Kosovo*. London, Pluto Press. P.11.

<sup>19</sup> Mann, Michael. (2001). "Globalisation as Violence".  
<http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/soc/faculty/mann/globasviol%5B1%5D.pdf>.

<sup>20</sup> Duffield, Mark. (2001). *Global Governance and the New Wars*. London: Zed Books. P 34

For some, globalisation and the march of international capitalism are seen as forces for oppression, exploitation and injustice. The rage that drives terrorists to commit their crime is in part a response to the idea of control. At the very least, it is suggested, terrorism thrives on poverty – and international capitalism thrives on poverty too. Michael Mann, in his article “Globalisation a cause to violence”, argues that globalisation is not singular but multiple; it integrates, it exploits, it disintegrates; it generates peace, regulate conflict, and war alike.<sup>21</sup> Revisiting Samuel Huntington’s “*The Clash of Civilizations*” (1996)<sup>22</sup> he narrates that the North is viewed as embodying rationality, progress, the future; while the South clinging to 'tradition' or nurtures unreason. These may be extreme positions but the minority that holds them is not tiny by any means.

Arising out of globalisation is the revolutionary social movement. This movement holds beliefs of freedom, equality, and democracy. This revolutionary movement focuses on the strength of the movement as a whole and the individual as being small in relation to the movement as a whole. They view the individual as free and able to participate in the movement in a positive contributory manner.

## **Tearing the Fences?**

The revolutionary calls for autonomy and democracy at every level. They want to see the neo-liberalism and capitalism gone. "Enclosure" is seen as one of the most powerful concepts in capitalism; and the revolution protesters and fundamentalist see tearing down the fences as a form of resistance to enclosure.<sup>23</sup> Those who tear down fences are part of the largest globally interconnected social movement of our time; they are the globalisation of resistance.

The voice against globalisation appears to be emanating from poorer nations and disenfranchised citizens from the North who genuinely feel are being overrun purely for economic gain. Many of the protesters are tired of the unchecked power of capitalist organisations; rather, they want power to oppose their situation. The protesters are against what Amartya Sen calls “unfreedoms”.<sup>24</sup> They believe that the world’s population has simply

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<sup>21</sup> Mann, Michael. (2001). “Globalisation as Violence”

<sup>22</sup> Huntington, Samuel. (1996). *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Orders*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

<sup>23</sup> See, Alvaro, Sevilla-Buitrago. (2015): in “Capitalist Formations of Enclosure: Space and the Extinction of the Commons”. According to his thoughts, enclosure is understood as one of capitalism’s “universal territorial equivalents”, a polymorphous technique with variegated expressions in time but also with a consistent logic that uses the spatial erosion of the commons to subsume non-commodified, self-managed social spaces. In response to the ever-changing nature of commoning, successive regimes of enclosure reshape the morphologies of deprivation and their articulation to other state and market apparatuses in order to meet shifting strategies of capital accumulation and social reproduction. *Antipode* Vol. 00 No. 0 2015 ISSN 0066-4812, pp 1-22 doi: 10.1111/anti.12143 © 2015 The Author. *Antipode* © 2015 Antipode Foundation Ltd.

<sup>24</sup> According to Amartya Sen, Freedom is both constitutive of development and instrumental to it: instrumental freedoms include political freedom, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency, and security, which are all different but inter-connected. “Un-freedoms” – barriers that could exist in economic, social or political realms of society. Thus poverty, malnutrition, poor sanitation, tyranny, poor economic opportunities, social deprivations, poor public facilities,

become a commodity, and capitalism is what has created this oppression. People are growing weary of being ordered around, whether by their oppressors or their self-appointed liberators. The poor, indigenous, and working class people simply want to govern themselves. They do not want huge corporations making daily decisions for them. They do not want the same corporations making decisions for their government. In fact one of the main concerns of the protestors and fundamentalist is the erosion of democratic power that accompanies globalisation.<sup>25</sup>

In some of the developed economies, support for further trade liberalisation is uncertain; in some countries, voters are downright hostile to it. The institutions that in most people's eyes represent the global economy – the IMF, the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation – are reviled far more widely than they are admired. Meanwhile, governments are accused of bowing down to business and the wealthy elites. Private capital is moving across the planet unchecked bleeding democracy of content putting “profits before people.”<sup>26</sup>

Multinational businesses, for their part, with their enlightened mission statements, progressive strategies and their pledges of “corporate social responsibility” implicitly say they have a case to answer: capitalism without responsibility is bad. That sounds all right; the trouble is, when they start talking about how they will no longer put profits first, people think they are lying. If, as these defenders of economies without borders lead one to conclude, global capitalism is a cause of democratic paralysis and a cloak for old-fashioned corporate venality. With advocates like these on either side of the globalisation debate – dissembling

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intolerance, communalisation, ethnic centrality, repressive state apparatuses, lack of education, absence of health care, lack of security, corruption can all be termed un-freedoms. See Amartya Sen: *Development as Freedom*. Oxford University Press 1999.

<sup>25</sup> For instance, though European Powers are ceding some of their powers to quasi-federal Euro institutions, this model is not spreading elsewhere. Governments everywhere have the same cabinet officers, sponsor the same tripartite education system, and develop the same central banks, the same regulatory agencies, the same national parks. They claim that there is no fascism, no socialism, no powerful monarchies, no confederal Empires. They all claim to be democratic nation-states and they all seek capitalist economic growth, which is to the contrary of the wishes of citizens.

<sup>26</sup> Read the (WTO) meeting in December 1999- Seattle, the USA. .As a December 1 abcnews.com story titled "Networked Protests" put it: disparate groups from the Direct Action Network to various environmental and human rights groups organized rallies and protests online, allowing for a global reach that would have been unthinkable just five years ago. As early as March, activists were hitting the news groups and list-serves -- strings of e-mail messages people use as a kind of long-term chat -- to organize protests and rallies. In addition, while the organizers demanded that the protesters agree not to engage in violent action, there was one web site that urged WTO protesters to help tie up the WTO's Web servers, and another group produced an anti-WTO web site that replicated the look of the official site (see RTMark's Web-site, <http://gatt.org/>; the same group had produced a replica of George W. Bush's site with satirical and critical material, winning the wrath of the Bush campaign). For compelling accounts of the anti-WTO demonstrations in Seattle and an acute analysis of the issues involved, see Paul Hawken, "What Really Happened at the Battle of Seattle," (<http://www.purefood.org/Corp/PaulHawken.cfm>) and Naomi Klein, "Were the DC and Seattle Protests Unfocused, or Are Critics Missing the Point?" ([www.shell.ihug.co.nz/~stu/fair](http://www.shell.ihug.co.nz/~stu/fair))

governments and businesses in their favour, angry and uncompromising protesters against – it is natural that the general public stands firmly in support of neither.

Critics of globalisation argue that it prevents the cultivation of enlightenment ideals, while capitalism prevents people from making their own decisions. In the end governments are making the economic and social decisions for many. Most people simply do not have the liberty or freedom to choose their own path. Workers keep working and are unable to dream of a different world for them and their children.

Given the new freedom of movement following the end of Cold War, social change can no longer be left to the hoped-for synergies of modernity and markets; effective transformation should be a policy aim. Such radical social change processes however cannot be imposed. It should be recognised that one might be able to make someone say or do something they do not believe in; alternatively one cannot, however, get someone to think what they do not accept. Therefore, social change has to be anchored on a wide range of consensual processes that encourages ownership and participation.

To conclude I paraphrase Foucault who says; wherever there is globalisation-from-above, globalisation as the imposition of capitalist logic, there can be resistance and struggle? The possibilities of globalisation-from-below result from transnational alliances between groups fighting for better wages and working conditions, social and political justice, environmental protection, and more freedom worldwide.<sup>27</sup> A renewed emphasis on local and grassroots movements have put dominant economic forces on the defensive and often the broadcasting media or the internet have called attention to oppressive and destructive corporate policies at the local level, putting national and even transnational pressure upon major corporations. The proliferating media and the internet is making it possible a greater circulation of struggles and the possibilities of new alliances and solidarities that connect resistant forces who oppose capitalist and corporate-state elite forms of globalisation from above.

*Original in English*

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<sup>27</sup> Foucault's conception of capitalism and its rationality is the understanding of the double character of freedom. This is very central to Foucault's understanding of capitalist rationality. The originality of Foucault's analysis lies in his realisation that capitalism manages individuals and populations (primarily) through freedom and not (primarily) through repression. Freedom is the condition that makes possible the correlation between what Foucault terms as the accumulation of men and the accumulation of capital. A political order which accumulates individuals and populations in a certain manner according to Foucault, he calls this the regime of the accumulation of men. Foucault understands capitalism to mean an economic system that is geared towards the accumulation of wealth. Foucault calls this the regime of the accumulation of capital.



## The Debate in Islam between Fundamentalism and Tolerance

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### Islam in Expansion and in Crisis

**T**he current rapid growth of Islam in the world can blind us to the enormous challenges it has faced in recent decades. In 1970 there were 570 million Muslims in the world, by 2050 it is predicted that there will be some 2760 million<sup>1</sup>.

This rapid growth, more than any other religion, along with the “godsend” of petrol in the Gulf Countries which allows the financing of the fundamentalist Wahhabi movement, would make you forget that Islam is suffering a deep internal crisis that revolves around a series of interrelated questions: How do we implement Islamic Law in a modern and above all plural context? What does it mean to belong to Islam? How should Islam relate to non-Muslims? In which circumstances is violence legitimate or even obligatory?

The debates between the various branches of Islam tend to revolve around these questions. Without a doubt, the vast majority of the violence that engulfs Islam has no religious basis or cause. Much of it stems from social, economic and geopolitical issues, in which the West has been the main actor or an accomplice. The colonial history of the Centuries XIX-XX, the US involvement in Afghanistan and the invasion of Iraq are notable, well-known examples.

### The Presence of Conflict in Early Islam

One cannot deny that violence has accompanied Islam since its very beginnings and that the Quran and the Sunnah (the record of the life and decisions of the Prophet Muhammed) have been marked by this original conflict. Islamic fundamentalism tends to seek equivalent enemies to the ones faced by the Prophet or the first generation. We know that Muhammad’s first revelation is essentially religious, centred in pure monotheism and warning of the punishment of hell, in the same consciousness and in continuity with previous monotheist revelations. Soon his revelation is rejected, and he must flee to the city of Medina where, according to the record, not only is he welcomed but appointed as a judge to mediate between the city’s various tribes. However, he then becomes the leader of the city who has his leadership is rejected by the Jewish tribes. The struggle against them is the origin of the many anti-Jewish texts in the Quran. The traditional interpretation is that the Jews mentioned in

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<sup>1</sup> According to Pew Research Centre



these texts specifically refer to the groups who rejected the Prophet, but didn't encompass the many Jewish communities within the emerging Islamic empire. Nevertheless, when the Palestinian Question arose, these "dead" texts were given new life and were utilised to confirm the wickedness and bad faith of the Jewish community. These texts are projected on today's Jews as if the Quran called for renewed war against them.

Muhammad probably established himself within a Judeo-Nazarene tradition that accepted the centrality of the concept of Jewish Law and recognised Jesus as the Messiah. Central to understanding the Quran is the fact that there already existed an audience which denounced Rabbinic Judaism for rejecting Jesus and condemned the deifying Christologies of the Byzantines, Monophysites, and Nestorians. However, the Prophet probably added an eschatological urgency to this movement, not only aimed at personal conversion but at the conquest of Jerusalem to await the coming of Jesus. We know that Judaism in the Century VII allied itself to the Persian Empire to retake Jerusalem which it lost in the Century I. That expedition was short-lived, but the dream to return to Jerusalem must have lived on, as the Prophet, at the end of his life, organised two military campaigns: one towards the Holy City and another North, towards Syria. The eighth and ninth surahs (chapters) of the Quran, according to the record, were revealed to call for combat in those two occasions. Again, the fundamentalists today project these texts on new enemies and call for war against all non-Muslims using these same Quranic words removed from their context.

The violent episodes continued after the Prophet's death. Many tribes of Arabia abandoned the new religion, and the first caliph, Abu Bakr, didn't rest until they were submitted to his will. Then there was the dispute over who should be the Prophet's legitimate successor. Omar was assassinated, so too the third caliph (Uthman), the fourth (Ali) and his sons (Hasan and Hussein). During these years the civil war left a deep scar in Islam which lasts until today. The present conflict between the Sunnis and Shiites stems from many issues but the memory of that conflict, celebrated annually through the bloody flagellations during the Shiite festival of Ashura, never ceases to stoke the flames. One particular variant of old Shiism even denounces the Sunni compilation of the Quran as a distortion, as if the very text had been altered or changed in from its original interpretation. The historical conflicts have polarised communities, giving birth to a mutual distrust which has provoked new conflicts and in turn deepened hostilities. In this manner, memories are burdened with grievances and conflicts which each side projects onto the other.

## **A Memory Burdened by Grievance**

The same can be said about the history of the Mediterranean. Historical conflicts stand like walls between individuals in our times, and grievances are projected on individuals as if a specific follower of a faith were a representative and therefore responsible for the acts of all other believers. In this way, modern Islamic fundamentalism sees the West as the continuation of the medieval Crusades, Eastern Europe reacts against Islam from its fear of the ancient Turks, and Spain imagines immigration as a new Muslim conquest.

Each failed encounter, each negative experience of the other, is elevated to become a definitive confirmation of the negative prejudices that one holds against the other and unconsciously

seeks to confirm. Undoubtedly, memory protects humans from falling into the same trap twice, but it also prevents the possibility of establishing new relationships with the other.

## **The Fundamentalist Fallacy of Returning to the Origins**

Since the end of the Century XIX, Islam as a civilisation has sunk into a depression due to the disappearance of their empire which dominated half of the world. The dream of reliving that golden age is stamped into the collective Islamic subconsciousness. The traumas and badly received defeats are susceptible to being transformed into violence. Moreover, Islamic education teaches you to feel “proud to be a Muslim”<sup>2</sup>. Of course, this isn’t necessarily bad, but glorifying pride combined with the feeling of defeat can be explosive. In fact, since the end of the Century XIX, Islam has tried to lift itself out of its situation. The Egyptian thinker Muhammad Abduh articulates this. He said: “In order to return to dominate the world it’s necessary to return to primitive Islam”. Islamic reformism understood this primitive Islam as an “enlightened”, “rational” and “scientific” Islam. It also viewed Western science as a beneficiary of medieval Islam by way of the mutual contact during the Crusades in the East, and through Andalusian culture in the West<sup>3</sup>.

Salafism, a branch of Islam that advocates the literal imitation of the religious practices of the first Muslim communities, grew from the same instinct. Although Salafism refers to *salaf*, ancestors, it is basically an Islamic equivalent to the American Protestant “fundamentalists” at the beginning of the Century XX who, confronted with the fear of straying from their roots, decided to anchor themselves to the Christian “fundamentals”, that is to say, the Bible read in a de-contextualised manner. Salafism does this too. Moreover, “prohibiting innovation” (*bida’á*), legally affirmed in a generic but unanimous way in the Sunni tradition, is taken in its strictest sense by Salafism and applied to every detail of the Prophet’s life. Its reasoning appears to have grounds from the moment Islam believes Muhammad received the final Law from God. If Muhammad’s was indeed the final Law, then it appears to be unchangeable. A proposal to update the law to reflect modern society which needs a different law to Arabic society in the Century VII implies that Muhammad is not the last prophet, as new legislation is required for new times. This is the big argument that Salafism uses to convince many Muslims. But it’s clear that Salafism is built on a fallacy: we can’t know all the details of Muhammad’s life, indeed many of the stories about him are probably from a later period. Furthermore, what Salafism considers Islamic law descended from Heaven (and therefore obligatory) is nothing more than the repetition of an interpretation of the Quran made around the Century XIII-XIV. Questions such as stoning, the headscarf or polygamy which are so clearly affirmed by Islamic law are thrown into doubt by an alternative reading of the Quran. This forces us to denounce Salafism as being unable to distinguish the text from its legal interpretation. The text, without a doubt, cannot be changed according to Islam, but there’s nothing preventing revision, so long as the interpretation that has dominated Islamic history is one which is appropriate for today. This is the point of departure for Islamic reformism.

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<sup>2</sup> It is expressed in this way, for example, in the teaching curriculum of Islam in public schools in Spain.

<sup>3</sup> See Muhammad Abduh’s work titled “Risalat al-Tawhid”.

## Current Debates on Violence

Since the attacks on the Twin Towers in New York (2001) the world turned its gaze towards Islam to ask whether it was intrinsically violent. There is an ingenuous response (or intentionally misleading) that consist in simply saying: “Islam is peace, and terrorism has nothing to do with Islam”. As they say, “attack is the best defence”, so sometimes this is followed by: “terrorism is a creation of the United States and Israel to divide the Islamic world”. Without contesting whatsoever the West’s culpability for the growth of the phenomenon of modern terrorism, this response avoids looking at the problem from all angles. It is one thing to say that terrorism has nothing to do with Islam, and quite another to say that it is a malevolent and unacceptable interpretation of Islamic teachings. The latter allows the elaboration of a theological and interpretive counterargument.

Islam began to build something along these lines with a series of official declarations, kickstarted by the Declaration of Aman in 2004<sup>4</sup>. The main Islamic religious leaders gathered to condemn the mutual “excommunication” between Sunnis and Shiites. Without a doubt, they had seen that the repeated Salafi teaching that Shiism is Zoroastrianism and not Islam contributed to anti-Shiite terrorism. They also discussed “legitimate violence”. They condemned offensive war and all terrorism except in the case of the army against Israeli occupation, and they recalled that Islamic law stipulates that fighting should be moderated. In fact, the majority of Quranic verses used by terrorists to call for fighting have an accompanying part, constantly omitted by terrorists, which rules that if the enemy ceases fighting then hostilities must be brought to an end.

Both traditional and modern Islam continue to affirm the “obligation to defend Islam by violent means if under attack”. Clearly Islam formulates this principle with legitimate defence in mind, but also clear is that this is the main avenue used by terrorist groups to claim legitimacy. It is enough then to prove that Islam is under attack from the West to give the green light to attacks. Moreover, while Islam explicitly prohibits the killing of innocents – and therefore prohibits killing women, elderly people and children – it also displays an acceptance for the “collateral” deaths produced in the raids during the Prophet’s first military campaigns. Terrorist groups use this to justify their indiscriminate bombings.

Other documents, such as the Declaration of Marrakesh<sup>5</sup> (2016), have sought to condemn violence against Christians, and have called for tolerance based on the Charter of Medina that the Prophet drew up with Jews and Polytheists. But there is still a long way to go before tolerance gives way to religious freedom and the recognition of the full citizenship of all people, be they Muslims, Christians, Jews or Atheists.

*Original in Spanish  
Translation Nils Sundermann*

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<sup>4</sup> <http://ammanmessage.com/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.marrakeshdeclaration.org/>



## Islamic Fundamentalism in Africa: Rethinking Living Together in Harmony

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**R**eligious fundamentalism has seen a revival in the wake of politico-religious violence, in this case Islamic, which has shaken the world and particularly Africa in recent decades. Fundamentalism, in its literal interpretation, hearkens back to the “foundations”, the “bedrock”, the “source” and, before all else, it calls to mind an attachment to the values, principles, texts and way of life existing at the birth of a political, religious or cultural doctrine. It is a seductive approach as it emphasises the devotion to a way of life, a belief or a movement. Its goal is to preserve the values, the foundations, and the identity of a society or religion. Fundamentalism isn’t necessarily linked with violence. It is about making an effort to remain faithful to cultural, religious or political roots. However, fundamentalist expression is often marked by violence and accompanied by puritanism which rejects the plural pursuit of meaning. It protests even tentative renewal or contextualisation of the fundamentals which are endowed with a sacred, unalterable character. Any point of view that strays from this so-called sacred “faithfulness” constitutes a sacrilege to be eradicated. Such an attitude entails the blind adherence to the initial practices even if they contravene social laws.

Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and other religions have all had experiences of this devotion to the fundamentals. During the Lutheran revolution, people were called on to return to the foundations, to the Bible, and to move away from clerical interpretations: *sola fide, sola gratia, sola scriptura*. Christian fundamentalism demonstrated its violence and antagonism through iconoclasm, the destruction of religious images and statues. It promoted a literal interpretation of the Bible and called its followers to abandon everything that did not respect this interpretation. “Organised around the myth of the enemy, the puritan strategy was an offensive one. Through often warlike language, the other was decried as an ‘enemy’ or an ‘adversary’, the ultimate antagonist who must be met head on to achieve victory”<sup>1</sup>

Today, in Africa, fundamentalism bears the mark of radical Islam and often surfaces in contexts of political and economic instability. Here we will explore this manifestation of

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<sup>1</sup> Rolland, Jean-Luc. (2018). Une Nation Ecrite de la Main Meme de Dieu : Genèse et actualité du puritanisme américain. *Etudes*, N° 71, p.71.

Islamic fundamentalism, the African context where it comes into play, and the need to rethink living together harmoniously beyond religious differences.

## **Violence and the Propagation of Radical Faith: Islamic Fundamentalism in Africa**

Islam came to Africa through commerce and conquest. It had a peaceful relationship with African peoples for a long time. In Sudan and in Senegal for example, Islam “was characterised by its conciliatory, tolerant, and syncretic attitude”<sup>2</sup>. In Benin, Muslims practiced their religion without disturbing the socio-religious balance. Islam has generally been a tolerant religion in Africa and has accommodated itself to the customs of the indigenous populations. However, an increasing number of events are leading to its transformation.

A new form of Islam has appeared in West Africa which is at the centre of religious and inter-community conflicts, in particular in Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, the Ivory Coast, and Senegal; and it is spreading across the region. This branch of Islam promotes a politico-religious message and feeds the desire to spread the radical Islamic faith to the entire population. In the same vein, in Nigeria, Boko Haram demands the establishment of Sharia law in the states under its control. It makes use of violence and terror attacks to achieve its aims and wreaks terror across northern Nigeria, Cameroon, and Chad. It provoked global outrage on the 14th April 2014, when it carried off 276 schoolgirls from Chibok Secondary School. Still today, many of these girls have not returned to their families. Some of them were forced to adopt the Muslim faith. In East Africa, Al Shabab pursues the same objective of radical Islamist expansion, organised through attacks in Kenya as reprisals for Kenyan military presence in Somalia. These actions show a new face of African Islam which “becomes less African and more Islamist and Arabic, losing its conviviality and tolerance”<sup>3</sup>. This transformation of African Islam occurs in a context marked by three principal factors: the complex of religious superiority, political instability in African states, and mass poverty.

## **The Complex of Religious Superiority and Political Instability: The Context for Islamic Fundamentalist Expansion**

The propagation of Muslim fundamentalism is underpinned by a religious superiority complex and a condescendence towards other religions: the Muslim faith is considered “the completion of the monotheist beliefs” and fundamentalists seek to impose it on everyone. This complex of religious superiority manifests itself in public spaces “through audio proselytism, a source of conflict between neighbours”<sup>4</sup> and by the mainstreaming of wearing the headscarf. In Benin for example, wearing the headscarf was a marginal activity a few years ago; now it is on the rise. It’s no longer strange to see girls, sometimes of a very young age, wearing

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<sup>2</sup> Mamadou, Adrien Sawadogo. (2017). *Quelques Fondamentaux pour comprendre l’Islam en Afrique. Montée de l’Islam Radical et Violent en Afrique*, p. 24

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p.26

<sup>4</sup> Barbier, J.C. & Dorier-Apprill, E. (2002). p.227

headscarves covering everything but their eyes. Meanwhile there's strong opposition to the distinctive symbols of other religions.

Political instability and the inability of African states to guarantee the security of their borders also contribute to the spread of Islamic fundamentalism. Borders tend to be porous enabling rebel groups to move uncontrolled between territories. Boko Haram resists state control by navigating the borders between Nigeria, Cameroon and Niger. The same happens with Al Shabab in Kenya, Somalia and Ethiopia. Moreover, national militaries are weak and poorly equipped to face the rebel groups that invade African territories. The politico-religious factions that evade state border controls are sometimes better armed than the national security forces who can't even mount a resistance to their fire-power. UN presence in Mali, the Ivory Coast, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Central African Republic is testament to the inability of the African states to guarantee the security of their populations. This situation provides fertile soil for politico-religious movements to flourish. In Chad, where the government has built up its army, the rebels and fundamentalist groups have deserted the country. The opposite is the case in the Central African Republic where the regular army doesn't have adequate means to defend the national territory. Rebel groups multiply, are heavily armed and terrorise the defenceless, peaceful civilian populations. Christian communities are regularly targeted and priests are assassinated in cold blood by rebel groups claiming to be of Islamic faith. Very recently, on the night of the 29th June 2018, the vicar general of the Diocese of Bambari, Abbot Firmin Gbagboua, was killed by an armed gang. This didn't draw any response from the international forces whose duty it is to maintain order and security. The question remains unanswered as to who is providing weapons to the rebels when the national army is so greatly under-resourced.

Religious fundamentalism also exploits the precarious economic situation of vulnerable populations. Fundamentalist propaganda associates itself with the fight against corruption and poverty. In Nigeria for example, corruption has provoked social frustration which Boko Haram exploits to justify its activities<sup>5</sup>. The accumulation of wealth by a small minority, the increase in youth unemployment and the inability of states to provide economic opportunities predisposes young people to the message of struggle against social injustice, whatever the ideology espousing it may be. In Mali, jihadists used economic measures to rally support among local populations. They "abolished all of the taxes and charges imposed by the government officials on poor people"<sup>6</sup>.

## **Towards Living Together in Harmony**

The violence and conflict perpetrated by Islamic fundamentalist movements have severe consequences for local populations. The zones of violence and combat are often left in ruins. Poor families in particular who don't have the possibility to escape the conflict imposed on

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<sup>5</sup> Ujah. (2017). Boko Haram : A Moderne Crisis in Nigeria, Montée l'Islamisme Radical et Violent en Afrique, p.299

<sup>6</sup> Ibrahim, Yahaya Ibrahim & Zapata, Mollie. (2018). Régions en danger: Prévention d'atrocités de masse au Mali, p. 11

them are traumatised by the massacre of their members. Other families are displaced, going into exile and seeking refuge in foreign lands. The migration of local populations allows the rebels to establish themselves and advance radical Islam. The resulting political instability facilitates the uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources to the detriment of local populations. Mining resources often cause the emergence of fundamentalist rebel groups and armed conflict.

Faced with the atrocities and human suffering brought about by fundamentalist groups, we must consider the question of living together and social peace. Should states not rebuild the organs and institutions that promote the proper management of the country and include the participation of concerned populations? African States must assume their responsibility for achieving and guaranteeing the common good. "By nature, the direct aim of politics is to ensure the common good"<sup>7</sup>. Achieving the common good invites political actors and citizens to put aside their social and political particularities. By putting in place institutions, state structures, and spaces for the dialogue, these social particularities can better contribute to the common good. To this end, the African States will need to make use of military means to guarantee the security of their populations and control individual, religious or sectarian violence, whatever the source may be.

## Conclusion

Africa has not been left unscathed by the violence created by Islamic fundamentalism. An Islam that was otherwise tolerant towards local African communities and their practices has experienced a transformation due to the propaganda of politico-religious fundamentalist ideologies which jeopardise social harmony and the peaceful coexistence of religions. Religious and inter-community conflicts provoked by fundamentalist movements multiply across the continent and cause human suffering that destabilises African States. The resulting political instability facilitates the uncontrolled exploitation of the countries' natural resources. These resources are sometimes the very reason for the emergence of conflict and fundamentalist groups.

Faced with the human suffering caused by armed fundamentalist groups, we must urgently rethink how we live together in society, so as to prioritise the common good and facilitate tolerance and the peaceful coexistence of particular cultural and religious perspectives. Religions can contribute through education "There is no doubt that the building of a just social order is part of the competence of the political sphere. Yet one of the tasks of the Church in Africa consists in forming upright consciences receptive to the demands of justice, so as to produce men and women willing and able to build this just social order by their responsible conduct"<sup>8</sup>.

*Original in French  
Translation Elizabeth Frolet*

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<sup>7</sup> Freund, J. (1965). *L'essence de la politique*. Paris, Sirey, p. 756

<sup>8</sup> Benedict XVI (2011). Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus*, n° 22



## Religious Fundamentalism in Islam: Indonesia as the Starting Point of the Case

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Indonesia is enriched with diversity in terms of ethnicity, culture, religion, custom, language, etc. *'Bhinneka Tunggal Ika'* or 'Unity in Diversity' becomes a national motto for Indonesia. For this, the present President Joko Widodo once said that Indonesia is blessed to have a long history of plurality; Indonesia is home for plurality, "Our plurality is our strength!"<sup>1</sup>

Based on the data in 2016, Indonesia is known for having a young population; its total average age would be 28.6 years. According to a survey as quoted by *the Jakarta Post*, Indonesian youths ranked the highest on emotional well-being with 40 percent of them having a good overall emotional well-being by not thinking about their problems too much, and not feeling anxious, bullied, unloved or lonely. Yet they are deeply pessimistic about the future of the world; and this feeling is said to come from certain worries, some of which are extremism and terrorism, as well as conflicts and war.<sup>2</sup>

One will not be able to negate the fact that the history of Indonesia is not free from any conflict and extremism. During the period of the last 25 years, we have noticed several tragedies that hurt the hearts of the believers. What took place in Moluccas (1998-2000) and Poso (1998-2001) are some of the examples. Entering into the third millennium, Indonesians witnessed several damages and victims due to certain major terrorist violences, such as in Jakarta during the Christmas Eve (2000) and in Bali (2002 and 2005). In addition to the places of worship, some hotels and public spaces also became the target of the bombing explosions, like in JW Marriott Hotel (2003 and 2009) and the Ritz Carlton in Jakarta (2009).

A number of armed and seemingly well-trained militant groups has also emerged. The growing militancy of *the hardliners in Indonesia* has created social and political as well as religious turbulences in the country. It has in fact created unhealthy atmosphere for minority groups. Some Christians in a city called Bogor, West Java, for example, have not been allowed to pray in their church building since 2010. Officials claimed both churches, the Indonesian

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-01-09/indonesian-president-joko-widodo-calls-for-unity/8170434>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.thejakartapost.com/youth/2017/02/13/indonesian-youths-among-happiest-in-the-world-survey.html?fb\\_comment\\_id=1338046236255684\\_1339595866100721](http://www.thejakartapost.com/youth/2017/02/13/indonesian-youths-among-happiest-in-the-world-survey.html?fb_comment_id=1338046236255684_1339595866100721)



Christian Church of Yasmin and the Batak Protestant Christian Church of Filadelfia, lacked proper permits, though the Indonesian Supreme Court has ruled otherwise.<sup>3</sup> The victimisation of Ahmadi Muslims (2011) and Shiite Muslims (2010-2011) are the other examples that can be mentioned here. Indonesians seem to be ready to live in coexistence with others from different culture or ethnicity, but have difficulty to associate with others from different religious background. Although coming from the same community of believers, some think therefore that their religious doctrines are more 'pure' or 'orthodox' than their brethren's.

The complexity of the reality related to fundamentalism, radicalism, extremism and terrorism is indeed undeniable. There are certainly many interests involved in it, including the political and social-economical causes. To elaborate the point that not all disturbances took place in relation to religion, perhaps we can take an illustration that comes from the case related to Basri, a person who now serves as the leader of a hardline group labelled as Mujahidin of East Indonesia. In the interview with *Tempo* magazine, the current National Police Chief of Indonesia expressed his impression as follows:

Basri is more courageous...; he is a ludicrous person. He does not understand religion. If he is asked about verses, he will not be able [to answer]. He is a drunker. Basri takes revenge because many members of his family were killed in the conflict of Poso (Central Celebes). The moment he cuts off the head of his victim, it is not because of *jihad*, but on account of revenge.<sup>4</sup>

An elegant statement was articulated by a Deputy of Communication and Information of the Indonesian State Intelligence Agency, on June 3, 2017. Speaking about terrorism, he tried to understand it as a result of a void in the head, a void in the heart and a void in the stomach.<sup>5</sup> One can say that a void in the head takes place because of the limits of critical thinking in understanding the conceptual discourses. It mostly results from a lack of education. In responding to the challenges of the times, one tends to see them in a black-white framework, without being aware of the importance of developing a culture of openness and building a critical attitude, including for example towards the omnipresent media content.

A void in the heart can take place due to the fact that one is incapable of dealing with various differences that are found outside of oneself. Anything that is different from what he or she holds is regarded as something unacceptable and thus must be insupportable. There is no space open for any different view; his or her heart is totally closed off to other people. The supporters of religious extremism tend to disregard those who do not go along the same line with them in a merciless way.

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<sup>3</sup> [www.pri.org/stories/2015-05-11/indonesian-christians-pray-protest-after-government-shuts-down-churches](http://www.pri.org/stories/2015-05-11/indonesian-christians-pray-protest-after-government-shuts-down-churches)

<sup>4</sup> *Tempo*, July 31, 2016, p. 40. Mujahidin of East Indonesia is an Indonesian hard liners group that gives a support to ISIS.

<sup>5</sup> <http://internasional.kompas.com/read/2017/03/17/09243231/melawan.terorisme.dengan.reformulasi.pemahaman.islam>.

A void in the stomach is undoubtedly related to social-economical circumstances. It is not difficult to figure out that one who has no job, for example, will be easily provoked to make attacks just for some amount of money. In the midst of various difficulties and frustration, one tends to accept blindly any promise that seems to bring him or her to a better situation; even if it has to be rewarded with death. Economic poverty and social gaps are indeed a fertile field *where* violence and extremism flourish. The poverty rate of Indonesia itself, according to the Ministry of National Development Planning by March 2017, on the basis of the poverty line at \$1.90 a day, is about 10.64 percent; thus it is around 27.77 million of the population.<sup>6</sup>

The challenges are inseparable from what is called globalisation, which is a phenomenon that covers all aspects of human life. Globalization brings various cultures and traditions into a closer contact in such a manner that it can turn into relativisation, as a process of consciousness in which one comes to the recognition that the perspective he or she takes for granted is now considered as only one among many options. In a confrontation with other traditions that often appear very different and perhaps antagonistic, relativisation will then produce a feeling of insecurity, along with derivative feelings, such as perplexity, disorientation, distrust, anxiety, frustration. It has been largely responsible for what has come to be called 'fundamentalism'.<sup>7</sup>

Religious fundamentalism is that which comes into existence because the adherents of a religious community have to go through a struggle in the midst of the surrounding cultures or traditions to rescue their religious identity. This phenomenon poses serious difficulties. It is said that a passionate concern to return to the foundations of each religion combined with a reaction to the onslaught of modern secular culture has given great impetus to the growth of fundamentalist movements. The history of oppression of one religion by another dominant one has produced animosities and prejudices which add fuel to such movements. It is found in all religions. Thus we hear about Gush Emunim (the Block of Faithful) within the context of Judaism, or ISIS in Islam, or Sinhala-Buddhist in Buddhism or *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS) in Hinduism. Catholicism cannot escape from the connection to religious fundamentalism either. Pope Francis clearly says, "Fundamentalism is a sickness that is (found) in all religions. We Catholics have some - and not some, many - who believe in the absolute truth and go ahead dirtying the other with calumny, with disinformation, and doing evil. They do evil."<sup>8</sup>

For those supporting movements related to religious fundamentalism, history is perceived to have gone off track and an effort must be made to make history right again. The movements reflect a desire to go back to 'truth', and thus can be understood as a defence against error and compromise. On this point, one can remember what Ostow calls as 'apocalyptic thinking', in the sense that 'the world as we know it will be destroyed, but a remnant of humanity will be saved to repopulate the world as a new era of perfection, happiness, and immortality is

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.bps.go.id/Brs/view/id/1379>

<sup>7</sup> Robertson, Roland. "Globalization and the Future of 'Traditional Religion'", p. 60.

<sup>8</sup> [www.catholicerald.co.uk/news/2015/11/30/pope-francis-says-he-is-not-losing-any-sleep-over-vatican-leaks-trial/](http://www.catholicerald.co.uk/news/2015/11/30/pope-francis-says-he-is-not-losing-any-sleep-over-vatican-leaks-trial/)

begun'.<sup>9</sup> Ostow's argument is largely compatible with Hunter's opinion, "Making history right again is, at heart, a matter of redefining the direction and meaning of history... Making history right again requires the methodical mobilization of a wide range of resources... The fundamentalist challenge very often incorporates the violence of military or para-military coercion, largely because of the special place given to the concept and reality of war in the fundamentalist cosmology."<sup>10</sup>

Within the various manifestations of religious fundamentalism, sacred texts are considered as the source from which religious authorities and moral norms are deduced. It can be so extreme that a strict and literal adherence to the sacred texts is then professed. The struggle to formulate a proper approach to the sacred texts reveals a problem of reconciling the divine and human realms. Before God who is so ultimate and great, one cannot make claim that he or she will be able to truly know about His Divine Reality.<sup>11</sup> This idea somehow resonates again in Nayed's line of reasoning.<sup>12</sup> According to him, one who makes a judgment in the name of God, on the basis of His Words as attested in the sacred texts, will actually indicate that he or she wants to stop being responsible for his or her action; he or she has washed his or her hands and thus wants to absolve himself or herself of the future blame.<sup>13</sup>

How should we respond? Not few of our apostolates and missions come across directly or indirectly with Islam. The lack of knowledge or ignorance about Islam can slow down the dynamics of our apostolates to row into the deep in the attempt to become firmly and locally rooted in service of people.

*At the level of Local Churches:* We would like to see a shift in the way the Society of Jesus thinks of its engagement with Muslims. Jesuits with an expertise in Islam are called to share their knowledge with other Jesuits, along with the Church more broadly, who, in their turn, can engage more widely with Muslims through their work as educators, pastors, intellectuals, social workers etc. A mode of collaboration needs to be built between the Jesuits and other religious orders that have a concern on interreligious dialogue in general and Christian-Muslim relations in particular.

*At the level of Jesuit conferences:* A mode of collaboration between two conferences of the Society of Jesus in the South Asia, South-East Asia and Pacific region (JCAP and JCSA) has been introduced; and it can be followed up further. An attention must be certainly paid for preparing young Jesuits who will give their commitment both in an academic level and in a pastoral level, for an apostolate of interreligious dialogue in general and Christian-Muslim relations in particular. A decree in the 34<sup>th</sup> General Congregation reminds us that 'each assistance is encouraged to prepare Jesuits who are able to become experts in the fourth aspect

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<sup>9</sup> Ostow, Mortimer. (1990). "The Fundamentalist Phenomenon: A Psychological Perspective", in Cohen, Norman J. (ed.), *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon: A View from Within, A Response from Without*, Michigan, Eerdmans Pub. Co., pp. 104 and 124.

<sup>10</sup> Hunter, James D. (1990). "Fundamentalism in Its Global Contours", in Cohen, Norman J. (ed.), *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon: A View from Within; A Response from Without*, p. 63-64.

<sup>11</sup> Khodr, Georges. (1996). "The Greatness and Humility of God", in *Dialogue*, No. 226, pp. 1-10.

<sup>12</sup> Nayed, A. (1996). "The Usurpation of God's Greatness", in *Dialogue*, No. 226, pp. 11-15.

<sup>13</sup> Nayed, A. (1996). "The Usurpation of God's Greatness", in *Dialogue*, No. 226, p. 10.

of interreligious dialogue (i.e. dialogue of theological exchange). The experience of Jesuits who have approached Muslims with preparation, knowledge and respect has often shown that a fruitful dialogue is indeed possible'.

The rich diversity of higher education is expected to open a possibility to run a centre or/and a department for Interreligious Studies. The centre/department can offer a class session or an extension course related to the main religions, of course including Islam and Christian-Muslim relations, for the students, the staff members of the university, the stakeholders, the lay-partners and the relevant publics. The centre/department can organize a periodical seminar or conference or research dealing with interreligious dialogue in general, and Christian-Muslim relations in particular. In addition, the centre/department can invite periodically the scholars or religious figures coming from the Islamic background. In this respect, lecturer exchange can be certainly set up. A team of the Jesuits with an expertise in Islam can be also invited to give some short class sessions on Islam, for the scholastics in a house of theology, including the one in the provinces or regions where Islam seems irrelevant or insignificant. All Jesuit scholastics should be managed during their formation periods to undergo the basic knowledge on Islam and Muslims.

*At the level of Jesuit provinces:* More efforts need to be made for setting up a commission in a pastoral or social apostolate in such a manner that the commission opens space for the involvement of non-Christians, including Muslims. Networking with institutions, NGOs, social movements that deal with reconciliation within humanity and creation is undoubtedly very important. In this regard, we should take into consideration the various strategies made by the governments in dealing with political, social, economic, cultural, and particularly religious affairs.

*Original in English*



## Tolerance and Intolerance in Hinduism

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*“Belief in co-existence is not the outcome of expediency or of weakness. It is the only way to rid the world of exclusiveness, intolerance and misunderstanding. There are no more closed societies. The new order we seek is not either national or continental. It is neither eastern nor western. It is universal.” (Radhakrishnan 1967, 23)*

**H**induism is one of the most tolerant religions in the world. However, followers of Hindutva political ideology, who seek to misuse Hinduism to construct political ideology of nationalism, are most intolerant. This paradox is not unique to Hinduism alone. Islam is religion of peace, but some of those who claim to be followers of Islam and have a political objective of establishing Islamic caliphate are most violent. Extremist sections amongst Christians too preach hatred against other religions even though the message of Jesus Christ is to spread love and compassion around the world.

Religion has a wide and strong influence among people since millenniums. The right wing that wants to mobilize citizens in support of its exclusivist policies propounding hegemony on grounds of race, ethnicity or religion, misuse religion to justify its appeal. The aggression in Iraq was justified by President Bush calling it ‘crusade’. Islamic State (IS) invokes the vocabulary of *jihad*. Hindutva nationalists use Hinduism to construct ‘nationalist’ political ideology which aims to relegate Muslim and Christian ‘outsiders’ as second class citizens. Hindu nationalists call upon Hindus to wage a war with its ‘outsiders’ (Golwalkar 1939).

If one perceives religion as faith and spirituality; as relation between her and her creator; as a source of universal moral values that are essential for peaceful co-existence with others; as guidance for a happy life; as a source of knowledge that helps her make sense and purpose of her life and the universe; as an inspiration to pursue quest for truth; then religion inspires and teaches humankind to be loving, compassionate, inclusive, devout, reasonable and tolerant. However, if one turns to religion for a sense of pride in one’s traditions, customs, community; as a source of rituals, sacred symbols; as means to achieve exclusive salvation; as an ideology of superiority of race, ethnicity, nation or any other collective; as source of laws, political ideas and ideology of state; the same religion becomes source of intolerance and conflicts. Hindu religion has been used by both sections.

## Historical background of Hinduism

Hinduism is said to be one of world's oldest religion evolved over 5 millenniums. It is more of a way of life as Supreme Court of India observed in its judgment and there is mind boggling diversity. The traditions, customs, beliefs, objects of worship and ways of worship, theology and philosophical texts are so diverse that it can hardly be recognized as one religion. In order to just illustrate this point, let me give an example – a subaltern community in south India worships Ravan, who is considered a demon in north India and who was sleighed by Lord Ram, revered as one of the incarnation of God! Goddess Durga, worshipped by Hindus, sleighed Mhaisasur considered a demon. However, Mhaisasur is worshipped by another subaltern Hindu community. Worshippers of Lord Ram, Goddess Durga, Ravan and Mhaisur are all Hindus and live together in peace.

'Hindu' was more of a geographical reference and not religious, until the British colonized the nation and carried out first census in the year 1871. Hindu was reference to the people who inhabited the region on south and east bank of river Sindhu by Persian. They pronounced 'Sindhu' as 'Hindu'. In the 1871 census, the British were not sure what should be the religion of those who were neither Muslims, Christians, Jain, Buddhists, Sikhs, Parsis, Bahais and Jews. As that vast population did not have one prophet, one sacred text, and followed diverse beliefs, ways of worship, doctrines, festivals, traditions and culture. The British decided to call their religion as 'Hinduism'.

It is believed that Hindus worship 330 million Gods and Goddesses! This reflects the diversity of worship, beliefs, cultures, festivals and religious traditions. There isn't one sacred text followed by all Hindus. Some follow Vedas – there are four Vedas *Rigved*, *Atharvaved*, *Yajurved* and *Samved* – which are considered as divinely revealed texts by some whereas others consider it only divinely inspired texts. There are 108 Upanishads which are also considered sacred texts of Hinduism. Then there are *Shrutis* (texts which were heard, memorized and orally transmitted). *Shrutis* include the four Vedas and other eternal unquestionable truths arrived at by great sages. *Smritis* are memorised texts that may change over times. There is also *Purana* literature. Gita is another sacred text. However, to be Hindus, you need not follow all the texts or may not follow any one. The *Charvaka* and *Ajivika* philosophical schools are materialist and rationalists. There were rich debates in ancient times between varying theological schools. Amartya Sen calls Indians argumentative for this reason.

## Tolerance in Hinduism

Adi Shankara, an early 8th century Indian philosopher and theologian consolidated, unified and established main currents of thoughts in Hinduism. He propounded the doctrine of *Advait Vendanta* (non-dualism). The *Atman* (soul; self) is part of, and no different from the formless universal spirit called *Brahman* which is without attributes. Every individual has to strive for *moksha* or liberation of *Atman* from the cycle of births and rebirths and for merger into the *Brahman*. The purpose of life is self realisation and oneness of self and the universal spirit. *Brahman* is the truth and everything we see around us may be *maya* or illusion.

Knowledge of Brahman springs only from inquiry into the teachings of the Upanishads. The *Charvakas* believed neither in *Atman* or soul, nor in Brahman.

There is no collective salvation; each person has to work for her own *moksha*. *Moksha* is achieved by good *karma yog* (work, discharging one's duties), *bhakti yog* (devotion to God), and *Jnan yog* (pursuit of knowledge). As *moksha* is achieved through one's own efforts, and one's own path, beliefs and practices of other individuals hardly matter. A devout Hindu is bound to be tolerant. Dr. Radhakrishnan (1967, 53) said, "*Whatever faith we adopt should be reconcilable with the spirit of science and the ethics of humanism. It should help the growth of the individual and not warp it. It should be in conformity with the growing demands of moral conscience and it should be universalist in spirit.*"

One of the doctrines from *Rigved* which impress upon the seeker of truth to be tolerant is: "*Ekam sat; vipra bahudha vadanti*". This doctrine means truth is one; the learned sages describe it in many ways. The doctrine tells us that Absolute Truth can be perceived differently. Humans have limited capacity to understand the Absolute Truth. Through meditation, experiential knowledge and other forms of *jnana yog*, the wise sages realize different dimension of the same Absolute Truth. One's understanding of Absolute Truth may be different from that of another, but it need not be a superior truth. However truth has to be distinguished from falsehoods driven by selfishness, injustice and violence.

Maha Upanishad states: "*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*". The phrase means entire earth is just one family. Not only all human beings on earth, but all living things are but one family. All *Atmans* (selves; souls) are manifestation of same *Brahman*. Therefore one has to work for welfare of all. Dr. Radhakrishnan (1967, 9) said, "*We need a faith which demands loyalty to the whole of mankind, and not to this or that fraction of it, a faith to which the secular and emancipated mind might cling even in the face of disaster.*"

It is because of this spirit of tolerance in Hinduism that preachers of various religions, including Christianity, Islam were welcome. Zoroastrians who were persecuted in Persia were given refuge in India in 8<sup>th</sup> century. Muslims and Christians from West Asia were welcomed as traders and allowed to set up their religious establishments and even preach and convert. India today is home to second largest Muslim population after Indonesia. Hinduism enriched and benefited from a meaningful dialogue with Islam and Christianity. Indian cultural diversity is composite in nature influenced by Islamic and Christian culture and fine arts, including in architecture, music, paintings, dance, poetry, food habits and religious traditions. There are many syncretic shrines where followers of more than one religion worship. In St. Michael's Church in Mumbai, every Wednesday Hindus outnumber Christian in attending sermons. Mother Mary's feast in Mumbai known among local population as *math maulichya mela* is more popular among Hindus than Christians. The Sufi dargah too are frequented by large number of Hindus.

## **Swami Vivekananda**

Hinduism inspired many freedom fighters to fight for the freedom of India from British Colonial rule. Among them are Lokmanya Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi and many others. Swami

Vivekananda awakened the spirit of nationalism as well as Hindu spirituality. Swami is one of Hindu religious leaders who set up Ramakrishna Mission for service of humanity. He espoused that all sects of Hinduism, and indeed all religions, are different paths to the same goal. Learning from Christian missionaries, Swami felt that addressing the problem of poverty was most important engagement any religion must address. In his address to the World Parliament of Religions in 1893, the Swami (Vivekananda n.d.) said,

“I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true. I am proud to belong to a nation which has sheltered the persecuted and the refugees of all religions and all nations of the earth... I will quote to you, brethren, a few lines from a hymn ... : “*As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee.*” ... Sectarianism, bigotry, and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth. They have filled the earth with violence, drenched it often and often with human blood, destroyed civilization and sent whole nations to despair. Had it not been for these horrible demons, human society would be far more advanced than it is now.

But their time is come. And I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honour of this convention may be the death-knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or with the pen, and of all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal. ”

## **Intolerance in Hinduism**

While we documented the spirit of tolerance in Hinduism above, there is growing trend of intolerance. The diversity within Hinduism resulted in sectarian conflicts, among others, between *Vaishnavites* (worshippers of Lord Vishnu) and *Shaivites* (worshippers of Lord Shiva) in ancient times. The rigid caste system within Hinduism is an oppressive and inhuman structure that oppresses the Shudra caste and untouchables. According to *Rigved*, the society is structured into four hierarchical layers with Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishya and Shudras. These hierarchically placed groups with Brahmins at the top and Shudras at the bottom are also called *varnas*. The *varnas* are further sub-divided into castes and sub-castes with strict practice of endogamy. One’s rights and duties are strictly decided by birth according to the caste one is born in. Those belonging to the Brahmin castes have only privileges and rights without corresponding duty. Brahmins monopolize knowledge and are the sole arbitrators of truth. The Kshatriyas were warriors and had to defend the kingdom. *Vaishyas* were traders. The Shudras had only labouring duties to perform without any rights and serve all three upper castes. They had to till the land, wash clothes, they were barbers, carpenters, potters, etc. and were duty bound to render services.

Those considered untouchables had to perform duties which were considered impure. They were treated outside the social order of *varnas*. Among the duties they were compelled to perform included manual scavenging, disposing of carcass of dead animals, extracting skin of



dead animals and sweeping the streets. The Shudras and untouchables were debarred from education. If they spoke Sanskrit language, their tongues were to be cut off, if they heard Sanskrit and Vedas, molten lead was to be poured in their ears and if they read Vedas, their eyes was to be gouged out. The untouchables had to live outside the village, tie brooms behind them to sweep their steps, wear spittoon in their neck so that they do not spit on pathways and could be identified from far. Even their shadows should not touch the upper caste. They could not enter the precincts of temple to worship God. Caste system developed the notion purity and pollution and made those from the upper caste very intolerant. The oppressive caste system was imposed accompanied by extreme violence. Condition of untouchables was worse than slaves (Ambedkar 1989, 9), (Ambedkar 1990). According to Ambedkar, caste system was rooted in Hinduism.

The upper castes 'tolerated' the outsider immigrants belonging to other religions and even aggressors so long as they did not disturb this caste based hierarchical social order. The immigrants were to be treated, like the untouchables, outside the caste based social order and could occupy their own ghettos. When there were 33 million Gods and Goddesses, another Allah or Yehova would not matter.

Muslims and Christians were considered as '*mlechhas*' - impure and polluted meat consumers just like the untouchables. Conflicts with Muslims and Christians would arise if they converted the untouchables and the Shudra castes to their religion and the conversion would result in educating and restoring sense of dignity in them which could lead them to resist performing 'their' caste based services.

The Shudras and untouchables, now called backward castes and Dalits respectively, enjoy not only right to equality under the Indian Constitution, but are also beneficiaries of affirmative action and inclusive policies, including reservation in educational institutions and government jobs. Nevertheless, atrocities against them continue. Due to lack of space, we are not recounting the instances of such atrocities.

## **Growing Communal Polarisation**

During colonial period the British encouraged rivalry between two major religious communities in India - Hindus and Muslims for their fair share in power under their divide and rule policy. Communal mobilization for larger share in power invoked selective and distorted historical memories and demonized the rival community. Although movement for independence of the country was dominated by secular ideology, India achieved freedom at the cost of partition of the country along religious lines. A section of Hindu upper caste opposed secularism and secular nationalism as that would negate their caste based privileges and grant equal right to all citizens irrespective of their caste. They defined nationalism on the basis of Hindu religion and named their nationalism as Hindu Nationalism and called for treating religious minorities, particularly, Christian and Muslim minorities as enemies of Hindu nation. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, one of India's most distinguished scholars of comparative religion and philosophy once wrote, "*When nationalism becomes itself a religion, and the religious leaders exalt the interests of the nation above those of humanity, religion itself becomes*

*effete. Instead of transcending national limits, religion becomes subordinated to the development of national personality the fulfilment of the national mission."* (Radhakrishnan 1967, 45)

The country has for the first time elected right wing Hindu nationalist with majority in Parliament. Hindu nationalists were always intolerant of minorities of 'foreign origin'. There is increasing violence against minorities. Churches, priests and nuns are being physically attacked on false allegation of conversion. Stringent anti-conversion legislations in various provinces are being misused to victimize Christians and their religious leaders. In Goa, a small province with about 25% Christian population, 200 crosses were desecrated in month of May in 2017.

Similarly, Muslims are being attacked accusing them to be loyal to neighbouring Pakistan, being anti-national and terrorist. Number of religious riots are on increase targeting Muslims. Muslims are falsely accused of slaughtering cows (which is a revered animal for a section of upper caste Hindus) and lynched on the streets. 22 Muslims have been lynched to death from 2010 to June 2017 and 97% of the lynching incidents have happened after the right wing Hindu nationalist government was elected (Abraham and Rao 2017).

## **Reconciliation**

We need to invoke our tradition of tolerance. Hinduism has had great saints that taught us that essence of religion is in love. Kabir a revered saint says, "*Pothi padh padh jag mua pandit haya na koi; dhai aakhar prem ka padhe so pandit hoye*" (one does not become wise reading scriptures; one who knows love is the wise one). Saint Tukaram said one who embraces the poor, needy, oppressed and marginalized is the real saint. Gujarati Saint Narsinh Mehta said that true religious person is one who empathises with the sufferings of others and helps them but does not treat help as an act of obligation. India has many spiritual resources. We need to educate our people on those religious values of tolerance.

Our freedom fighters always lauded the virtue of 'unity in diversity'. Preamble of our Constitution seeks to build a plural India where everybody enjoys freedom of thought, expression and to profess, practice and propagate religion of her choice. Would like to end this essay with Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore's words, "Where mind is without fear... into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake".

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## Religious Fundamentalism, Tolerance and the Buddha

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In the 6<sup>th</sup> Century BC Northern India, there were many philosophers, religious thinkers and speculators who were busy in grappling with issues like God, Soul, World, Origins, Eternity, Sin, Suffering, and Liberation and so on. Among them, there were different groups of thinkers who had marked differences with regard to their understanding and interpretations of the issues connected with human-origin, existence destiny etc. But the most interesting, yet confusing and the intriguing aspect of the whole situation was that each philosopher or thinker declared that he alone had the absolute truth about reality and the others were misleading people with falsehood. Here we have an example of the presence of fundamentalist attitudes among the religious thinkers of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. As a consequence, (as we experience even today among different religious groups in the modern world) often there were discussions, debates, disputes and at times conflicts among these different groups of thinkers and philosophers. There were competitions among them to attract and gather more followers than the others.

These are the circumstances into which Prince Gautama Siddhartha (who would later become the Buddha), was born. In a family that believed in and practiced the rites and rituals of the Brahminical traditions of the time. He lived a very luxurious, and care-free life in his three palaces built for the three different seasons of the year. But shock and suffering overtook his life when he discovered that sickness, old age and death are part and parcels of human existence. He felt shattered with mental agony when he realized that he too would have to go through sickness, old age and death in this suffering-laden human existence. He wondered and questioned whether a life free of sickness, old age and death was possible?

At this juncture, after seeing a recluse walking with a peaceful face, Gautama Siddhartha understood in his heart that a suffering-free life was possible and felt that life as a recluse might help him to find the truth and the way to obtain a life of peace and tranquillity, free of all forms of sufferings. He began to believe in the capacity of human beings to liberate themselves through diligent spiritual efforts. Therefore, he took upon himself the responsibility of finding the truths dealing with suffering and liberation of human beings.<sup>1</sup> The rites, rituals, sacrifices, and beliefs of his family-religion did not offer him satisfying answers to his questions. Hence, he renounced all the pleasures, wealth, power and glory of

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<sup>1</sup> *Attā hi attano nātho, ko hi nātho paro siyā attanāi va sudantena nātham labhati dullabham.* Dh.p.no.160

his royal life and robed himself as a recluse and wandered about to find the solutions to human sufferings and sorrows.

Prince Siddhartha was not willing to blindly follow the religious beliefs and practices of his family and society. He questioned the potentials and the capacities of his traditional religion to liberate people from their sufferings. So he became critical of his own religion. He wanted to find out its truthfulness, effectiveness, and fruitfulness in liberating people from their sufferings. So it is clear that Prince Siddhartha did not have any fundamentalist attitude towards his traditional religion. But he had an open and searching mind to evaluate his own childhood religion and to find out the true path that led people to liberation, peace, tranquillity and inter-personal and communitarian harmony.

## Gautama Siddhartha's Search and Spiritual Journey

Like an ascetic he wandered about to find the true path to liberation. He looked for teachers who would guide him to find the true path to liberation. He practiced under famous spiritual leaders of his time namely, Ālāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputtato arrive at the truth. He mastered very soon the knowledge attained by these two spiritual leaders and became equal to them by acquiring all their spiritual skills. Looking at how quickly he mastered the spiritual skills and the wisdom that they had obtained after years of meditation and spiritual practices, both the spiritual Gurus, Ālāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta appreciated him and requested him to lead their disciples in their Monasteries sharing equal authority with them. The offer of leadership from such great spiritual Gurus brought him power, glory and honour. But to the searching Siddhartha, mere attainment of temporary Concentration and Tranquillity (spiritual skills) that he learnt from his teachers, Ālāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta did not satisfy him fully.<sup>2</sup>

Since the spiritual wisdom he gained from these two great spiritual Gurus did not bring the answers he was looking for, he left their company and proceeded further with determination to find the truth that would liberate him from all his sufferings. Then he took up the practice of *attakilamathānuyogaan* extreme form of self-mortification. Six years of life spent in self-mortification with severe austere practices made him physically very weak, even to the point of death, but did not lead him to the answers that he was looking for to solve the problem of human suffering.<sup>3</sup>

Having realized the futility of austere practices in realizing the truth, Prince Siddhartha gave up extreme form of self-mortification and followed a middle path in his spiritual search to

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<sup>2</sup> *Tassa mayhaṃ bhikkhave etad-ahosi: Nāyaṃ dhammo nibbidāya na virāgāya na nirodhāya na upasamāya na abhiññāya na sambodhāya na nibbānāya samvattati, yāvad-eva ākiñcaññāyataanūpapattiyā ti. So kho ahaṃ bhikkhave taṃ dhammaṃ analaṅkaritvā tasmā dhammā nibbijjāpakkamiṃ.* M.I. p.165 ( Using these words of dissatisfaction with the attainments that he gained from Ālāro Kālāmo and Uddako Rāmaputto, the Buddha left them and went ahead in search of the path that leads to Nibbāna, by himself. )

<sup>3</sup> *Na kho panāhaṃ imāya kaṭukāya dukkarakārikāya adhigacchāmi uttariṃ manussadhammā alamariya nānadassanavisesaṃ, siyā nu kho añño maggo bodhāyāti.* M.I p. 246

arrive at the truth. Here we notice that Siddhartha gave up fundamentalist belief in the efficacy of extreme form of self-mortification. Finally after intense meditation, Prince Siddhartha became the Buddha, having received enlightenment and discovering the truth. He finally purified himself totally of the mental defilements of CRAVING, HATRED and the DELUSION that oneself is a self-sufficient eternal being. After freeing himself of the sufferings caused by the mental impurities of craving, hatred and the delusions of-I, MINE and ME (which are nothing but offshoots of our (Ego or Pride) the Buddha became very peaceful, tranquil, joyful as well as wise.

The Buddha after discovering a new and true path to liberation did not want to preach his path to gather many disciples and gain much popularity as many religious leaders of his time were doing. On the contrary he was hesitated to preach his new path to people, thinking it would be very hard for them to understand and practice. Later, on account of a request from a divine being, urging him, that through his teaching there would be many human beings who would get liberated, the Buddha began to teach his new path.<sup>4</sup> Thus we see that the only reason for which the Buddha preached and propagated his new path was to liberate people from their sufferings and ignorance. His intention in preaching the path he discovered was to impart wisdom to people so that they can avoid evil; do good and grow in the purity and peacefulness of their hearts.<sup>5</sup> And while preaching, he did not waste his time on mere speculations and traditional belief systems but declared, that he proclaimed about just two things: 'SUFFERING AND THE CESSATION OF SUFFERING' as expressed in the following utterance of him, "Bhikkhus, both formerly and now what I teach is suffering and the cessation of suffering."<sup>6</sup>

Further he never imposed his teaching on any one with fundamentalist attitude. On the contrary the Buddha advised his disciples even to examine and investigate himself (the Buddha) to get convinced of the true value of his teaching. Further when a group of people called Kalamas in Buddha's time, asked the Buddha as to how to judge a teaching to be true or false, the Buddha answered, "O Kalamas, do not be led by reports, or traditions or hearsay. Be not led by the authority of religious texts, nor by mere logic or inference... nor by the idea: 'this is our teacher'. But O Kalamas, when you know for yourselves that certain things are unwholesome and wrong and bad, then give them up.... And when you know for yourselves that certain things are wholesome and good, then accept them and follow them."<sup>7</sup> From these words of the Buddha, we understand that that the Buddha upheld human beings' freedom of thought and their capacity to judge what is good and what is bad in life. So he was against blind faith but advised his disciples to personally experience, experiment, reason out, verify and to get convinced before accepting any view, faith or teaching.

Further, the Buddha compared his path to a raft which is used to cross over a sea or a river and then left free after crossing over the waterbody. After giving example of a raft, in his own

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<sup>4</sup> MT. (2009). p. 261

<sup>5</sup> Dh.p. no.183

<sup>6</sup> *Pubbe cāhaṃ bhikkhave etarahi ca dukkhañ- cīeva paññāpemi dukkhassa ca nirodhaṃ.* M.I. p.140

<sup>7</sup> A (Colombo, 1929). p. 115.

words the Buddha said: "In this manner, O Bhikkhus, I have taught a doctrine similar to a raft-it is for crossing over and not for carrying (lit. getting hold of)."<sup>8</sup>

This shows that the Buddha did not have a tinge of fundamentalism or attachment towards his own teaching.

## **His Views towards Other Religions**

The Buddha taught that one may say regarding his personal faith: 'This is my faith'. But if one were to say: 'My faith alone is true and all other faiths are false', then he would not be speaking the truth.<sup>9</sup> Further the Buddha said: "To be attached to one thing (certain view or faith) and to look down upon other things (views or faiths) as inferior---this wise men call a fetter."<sup>10</sup> These words of the Buddha show how much reverence and respect the Buddha had towards others' religions or faiths.

Here there is a classical life-event which brings out the respect, reverence and religious tolerance that the Buddha had towards other religions and the followers of them. Upali, a certain well-known and rich lay disciple and benefactor of Lord Mahavira, the founder of Jainism went to argue with the Buddha to defeat him. But during the course of the argument, Upali found himself defeated and was greatly impressed by the wisdom of the Buddha. So immediately, Upali wanted to become a lay disciple of the Buddha. But the Buddha advised him not to be in a hurry but to reconsider it since he was a well-known disciple and benefactor of another great teacher of that time. Nevertheless, Upali kept requesting again and again that he be accepted by the Buddha as his lay disciple. Then the Buddha accepted him but requested him to continue to respect and support his old religious teachers as he used to.<sup>11</sup> This event shows how the Buddha did not want any competition or defaming of other religious groups but always sought for understanding, respect, peace, concord and harmony between religions.

## **Religious Tolerance in Buddhist History**

Following the foot-steps of the Buddha, his disciples too followed the values of compassion, forgiveness, concord and harmony with other religious traditions. One very good example of the practice of inter-religious understanding, tolerance, harmony and co-existence in Buddhist history was the life and rule of the great Buddhist Emperor Asoka of 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. He honoured and supported all other religions in his vast empire. In one of his Edicts carved on rock, he declared:

One should not honour only one's own religion and condemn the religion of others, but one should honour others' religions for this or that reason. So doing, one helps one's own religion to grow and renders service to the religions of others too. In acting otherwise one digs the

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<sup>8</sup> MT. (2009). p. 352-353

<sup>9</sup> MT. (2009). p. 780

<sup>10</sup> Sn (PTS). p.151(v.798)

<sup>11</sup> MT. (2009). p. 484-485

grave of one's own religion and also does harm to other religions. Whoever honours his own religion and condemns other religions ... injures his own religion gravely. So concord is good. Let all listen, and be willing to listen to the doctrines of others.<sup>12</sup>

## **Inter-religious Violence and its Solution**

Though Buddhist history is filled with many peace-promoting values and events, however unfortunately in modern times, in some countries (like Myanmar, Sri Lanka etc.), some followers of Buddhism are resorting to violence towards people of other religions. Here we should not forget the fact that people with fundamentalist attitudes who cause conflicts and violence are present not only among the Buddhists but they are present in all the religions too. No religion in the world preaches hatred and violence towards followers of other religions. But when the followers of religions do not practice the noble teachings of their own religions but in reality follow their own selfish and arrogant inclinations then conflicts and violence erupt among people of different faiths.

Whether in India or Sri Lanka or Myanmar why do people belonging to a majority religion persecute and oppress people of minority religions forgetting the noble teachings of their own religions? There are many reasons for these inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflicts and violence, starting from economic to political, cultural, social and religious reasons and so on. The inter-religious and inter-ethnic conflicts and violence in each country has its own specificity and historical context. So violence in each country has to be studied with sensitivity, impartiality and empathy.

But as a person engaged with studies in spirituality and religions, according to me the main reason for inter-religious (as well as inter-ethnic) conflicts is due to the lack of psycho-spiritual growth and maturity of the persons involved in the inter-religious violence. When a person or a group of persons belonging to any religion look for happiness, security and fulfilment in earthly possessions like wealth, power, prestige and sovereignty they feel threatened and insecure by the growth and wellbeing of people from other (minority) religions or ethnicity. They fear that in the long run, the people of minority (other) religions or ethnicity will overpower them and snatch away all the glory of their culture and religion along with power, prestige and dominion. They become frightened that their future would become very uncertain and insecure with the rise of the others (minorities) who are different from them; who are strangers to them and whom they think they cannot trust.

And therefore, they think that these people (minorities) who are strangers to us; whom we cannot trust have to be kept under check; they should not become prominent in any way. And so they think that to keep these minorities under check, we have to frighten them and threaten them through violence, persecution and other means so that they remain low, insecure and secondary unable to grow or develop further. Keeping this mind-set they (followers of majority religions who are insecure) cause divisions, conflicts and violence against those whom they dislike and distrust, especially the growing minorities about whom they are afraid

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<sup>12</sup> Rock Edict, XII



of. Meanwhile some followers of the minority groups (who do not follow the noble and human values of their own religion) too take up arms and violence to counter the violence of the people from the majority religions. These fighters from the minority groups are generally termed as 'terrorists' by the majority group. And violence and counter-violence continues. This is what has happened and still is happening in India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and in the middle-east. So at present world peace and harmony is at stake! Is there a solution to end this inter-religious and inter-ethnic violence? What is the way out? Is there a model before us?

There is no need to become hopeless and frustrated! Indeed we have had a shining light in the wilderness of anger and violence in the person of Venerable Maha Ghosananda of Cambodia in the recent history. When the whole of Cambodia was sinking in the darkness of divisions, distrusts, anger, violence, revenge and hopelessness, as a true spiritual son of the Buddha, Venerable Maha Ghosananda, a Buddhist monk marched courageously in the streets of Cambodia with the message of compassion, forgiveness, and love and built trust between different warring groups there. He went around preaching the words of the Buddha that hatred doesn't extinguish hatred but love and compassion does it effectively.<sup>13</sup> Through his tireless PEACE-WALKS, he built understanding, forgiveness, friendship, hope and trust between groups which were antagonistic towards one another. Thus he shaped up modern day Cambodia into a peaceful nation through the reconciliation-promoting activities of the organization called, **Inter-religious Mission for Peace in Cambodia** that he founded in 1980 with a few Christian friends there.<sup>14</sup>

Yes, by joining hands with his friends from different religions in Cambodia and by promoting Inter-religious dialogue, understanding, trust and harmony he turned a hostile country to a peaceful country. Hence this (Inter-religious Dialogue for Peace and Harmony) is a well-proven way to bring peace and harmony in countries where inter-religious and inter-ethnic divisions, conflicts and bloodshed are destroying human society today. Therefore it is high time that in the world today, wherever inter-religious conflicts and violence are taking place, people from all faiths must come together and promote inter-religious dialogue, understanding, trust and co-operation so that PEACE, HARMONY and CONCORD may grow for the betterment of the entire humanity and the Universe.

## Conclusion

From the life and the spiritual journey and discovery of the Buddha about 2500 years ago, and from the peace-promoting lives of his followers in history, the values, principles and morals that we can learn and practice even today for world peace and harmony are:

1. To have a searching and questioning mind towards the problems and sufferings that we face in our human existence.
2. Not to follow any faith or religious practices blindly (as fundamentalist do) just because we are born into it. But it is always necessary to critically question the religious

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<sup>13</sup> Dhp.no.5

<sup>14</sup> SBS. (1992). p.20

practices we follow to find out whether they are relevant and effective to solve our day to day and perennial sufferings and problems. And we have to be honest, courageous and creative enough to discard irrelevant and meaningless religious practices of our own religions that are harmful to us first before we criticise and correct others' faiths and their practices.

3. Religious and spiritual attainments are not to be used for earthly power, authority and glory but they are to be used for our growth in inner peace and to promote communitarian harmony and unity.
4. Purification of oneself and attainment of Personal Spiritual Integrity is a must for one to provide credible religious leadership. Authenticity, Truthfulness and Compassionate Wisdom lead people to liberation and peace.
5. The main purpose and goal of religious pursuits ought to be to help people free themselves from their sufferings and the causes for their sufferings and to promote individual as well as communitarian peace and harmony. Using religions to divide people and to cause conflicts and wars is misuse of religions and it leads to the destruction of the dignity, honour and the greatness of religions.
6. We earn respect and honour for our own religions by honouring and respecting other religions.
7. To promote Peace, Harmony, Concord, Unity, Truth, Wisdom, Happiness and Co-operation in the world, Inter-religious dialogue, understanding, friendship, trust and collaboration is a must.
8. The Buddha always lived and meditated being close to Nature, and so by being close to Nature and caring for Mother Earth, and by growing in inner freedom in harmony with all beings, we too can attain Individual, Universal and Cosmic Liberation in the fullness of time.

In a way of paying tribute to one of our modern-day **PEACE-MAKERS**, and to remind us with his ever-valuable exemplary life, I end this article with the words of Venerable **Maha Ghosananda**, who true to his name was a GREAT PROCLAIMER OF JOY, HOPE AND PEACE in his life time.

The suffering of Cambodia has been deep.  
From this suffering comes Great Compassion  
Great Compassion makes a Peaceful Heart.  
A Peaceful Heart makes a Peaceful Person.  
A Peaceful Person makes a Peaceful Family.  
A Peaceful Family makes a Peaceful Community.  
A Peaceful Community makes a Peaceful Nation.  
A Peaceful Nation makes a Peaceful World.  
May all beings live in Happiness and Peace.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> SBS. (1992). 28

### **Abbreviations:**

- A** - Aṅguttara Nikāya  
**Dhp** - Dhammapada (Translated by Ācārya Buddhārakkhita)  
**M** - Majjhima Nikāya  
**M.I.** - Majjhima Nikāya, Part I  
**MT** - A Translation of Majjhima Nikāya by Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodh  
**PTS** - Pali Text Society, London  
**SBS** - Step by Step, Maha Ghosananda  
**Sn** - Suttanipata (PTS Edition).

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*Original in English*



## **Religious Intolerance/Tolerance, Harmony/Discord in Latin American Indigenous Religions from a Historical-Theological Perspective**

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### **Intolerance/Discord in Latin American Indigenous Religions**

**F**undamentalism is not a widespread issue in religious/spiritual groups in Latin America. However, this phenomenon does exist in most of these religions/spiritualities, albeit in small groups and in some cases in specific regions, for example in the Mapuche nation in Chile and Argentina, in some regions of Bolivia and Peru between the Quechua and Aymara peoples, and among the Maya peoples of Guatemala.

When we look in closer detail at the contexts where religious intolerance or fundamentalism exist in Indigenous religions, we find that these tendencies take root in communities that have been scarred by their social and historical contexts. Another causal factor is the presence of extractivist mega-projects which threaten and harm their lands. We can venture that the severity of religious intolerance and fundamentalism is directly related to the level of brutality inflicted on communities by colonialism and neo-colonialism, racism and the presence of mega-projects that seize lands and destroy the popular cultural dynamics and cosmovision. This all points to a large debt of justice owed to these communities by their countries, nation states, societies and by institutions like the Church.

In many Latin American regions inhabited by Indigenous people we encounter another widespread type of religious fundamentalism, one which does not grow from traditional ancestral religions: here we are dealing with religious fundamentalism incited by Christian religious sects, Evangelicals and Pentecostals, who meddle in the life of these communities and destroy their cultures. They breed a type of violence within the community that destroys the social fabric and suspiciously results in benefitting political projects aimed at domination and the appropriation of natural resources on the community's lands.

Religious intolerance and fundamentalism does not originate, then, in the religious or spiritual traditions of these peoples and cultures, let alone could we speak of these actions being inspired by an image of God. We must see these tendencies as the fruit of a reaction between the historical and socio-economic context which threatens communities' identity and destroys their cosmovision.

## **Tolerance/Harmony as a component of the Indigenous Religions in Latin America**

In Indigenous religions in Latin America we find the seeds and values of a profound and authentic religious sensibility. We also find spiritualities with a profoundly respectful relationship with Creation. Among the essential elements of these religions/spiritualities, there is a deep desire to achieve harmony between nature, the human being and divinity. In various Indigenous languages and cultures in Latin America there are expressions that reflect this desire for “buen vivir” – good living or good life – a simple way of life in harmony with all things, divinity and community. This way of life places particular importance on the spiritual dimension, cultivation and consumption of healthy food, and a simple life in contact with nature and caring for its integrity.

We can see the drive of the Spirit in the various social and political movements that endeavour to strengthen the culture and identity of these communities. Its work appears in two aspects: the affirmation of their identity in the context of capitalist globalisation, and the struggle for - and simultaneous expression of - the life story of their people. An example of this is the new interest among many young Indigenous people in recovering their religion, their roots, their language. Young people who had lost their mother tongue and whose parents had abandoned traditional religious practices are seeking to rediscover them (the most notable example is the *machis* – young shamans – in the Mapuche community).

### **Challenges for Today’s Mission**

The Indigenous and Afro-Latin American religions oblige us to engage in a serious historical study and to be open to humbly recognise the mistakes of the past, thereby deepening our understanding of the wounds that often provoke the attitude of rejection towards the Church and the State. Having a broad historical, anthropological and social understanding of this theme will allow us to begin a serious dialogue through which we can overcome fundamentalisms and open new pathways towards reconciliation based in justice.

Deep research and study of these aspects will allow us to progress educational programs in our centres of study and in other areas of society. These will support this necessary reconciliation by producing a full recognition of the wealth and contribution of the Indigenous and Afro-Latin American cultures and religions to our nations.

Without a doubt, this theme renews the challenge to train ourselves for interreligious relationships and dialogue in general. The case of Latin America challenges us to focus our gaze on religions originating in our continent, rather than on the large religions. This requires us to be different both in our disposition and in our way of being: respectful of the local processes and the diversity of identities.

*Original in Spanish  
Translation Nils Sundermann*



## Views on Fundamentalism from African Traditional Religions

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### Opening Remarks

For some reasons, it may look awkward and perhaps not fitting to speak of fundamentalism in *sensu stricto* with regard to African traditional religions (ATR).

First of all, some may contend that African religions are not strictly speaking “religions” and wish to know what qualifies African tradition as such or the adjective “traditional” when it comes to African religions<sup>1</sup>. I leave that discussion aside in this short paper. Nevertheless, I agree with Francis Cardinal Arinze, former president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, that African traditional religions should be viewed as being fundamentally “the religious and cultural context from which most Christians in Africa come, and in which many of them still live to a great extent”<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, I understand African traditional religions as being that which sustains and carries Africans, on the continent or in the Diaspora, and that which Africans dearly carry within them, and is what determines their way of being in the world and their rapports to all that which is and that which is not, i.e., beings, things and words. Simply put, African traditional religions are various routes of life, numerous manners of walking or different modalities of being, in this fast changing world. They are this matrix or womb that nourishes and preserves life from the beginning to its end. They are this basic humus from which every seed germinates.

Secondly, many scholars agree with Henry Murson in defining religious fundamentalism as primarily “a type of militantly conservative religious movement characterized by the advocacy of strict conformity to sacred texts”<sup>3</sup>. However, this definition requires some

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<sup>1</sup> There is an extensive literature on this discussion elsewhere in appropriate fora and documents. For the time being, see for instance “Pastoral Attention to Traditional Religions: Letter of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue to the Presidents of Episcopal Conferences in Asia, the Americas and Oceania (Rome, 21 November 1993), n° 2.

<sup>2</sup> “Pastoral Attention to African Traditional Religion: Letter from the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue to the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences of Africa and of Madagascar” (Rome, 25 March, 1988), n° 1.

<sup>3</sup> Munson, Henry. (December 06, 2016). “Fundamentalism: Religious movement” in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/fundamentalism>, Accessed on September 03, 2018.

clarifications in relation to African traditional religions. (1) Strictly speaking, many African traditional religions do not have a body of sacred texts. (2) The transition from the original Christian setting, where the term “fundamentalism” was used, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in American Protestantism to describe other religious contexts that are not Christian and western, requires some methodological, epistemological, and hermeneutical adjustments. (3) The majority of Africa is almost “evenly” divided between Muslims and Christians. In such a context, adherents of African traditional and other religions are generally “silent minorities” scattered throughout the continent, to such extent that they seem almost politically powerless, sociologically non-“significant” and statistically “vague”<sup>4</sup>. (4) Yet, adherents of African traditional religions in some regions may display features of militantly conservative religious movements characterized by the advocacy of strict conformity to what they deem sacred and fundamental. (5) But, at the same time, these fundamentalist features are challenging to grasp, to measure, and to interpret along the lines of hermeneutical framework used for major world religions. (6) Therefore, the study of fundamentalism in such a setting requires a great amount of discernment and subtlety of complex thinking among followers of religions, sages and thinkers in order to make the African world a firm and viable place to everyone for humanity’s sake, which is eventually for God’s sake too. Such complex thinking is badly needed nowadays given that our present time is also marked by an insane bombastic usage of God’s name and religion in most areas of life; and by a mix-up, fusion and confusion in areas of religion, culture and politics.

## **Brief presentation of characteristics of fundamentalism in the eye of a fundamentalist**

Taking the foregoing remarks and others into consideration, one may see with an expert eye, *mutatis mutandis*, that some of the features that characterize fundamentalism, with regard to other religions such as Judaism, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam, are also present with reference to African Traditional Religions.

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<sup>4</sup> Pew Research Center’s Forum on religion and public life in 2010, published in December 2012, allocated 6% (i.e. 400 million people) of the world total population to “folk religions”, in which are included African traditional religions, Chinese folk religion, Native American religions, and Australian aboriginal religions. 90% of these religious populations reside in the Asia-Pacific region, whereas 7% are in sub-Saharan Africa, and the 3% in Latin America and the Caribbean. The population of followers of African traditional religions in sub-Saharan Africa makes up 7%, which represents 3% of the total population of sub-Saharan Africa; and none of them makes up a majority of the population in any sub-Saharan African country, though the adherents of ATRs can reach up to more than 15% of the population in some countries like South Sudan, Togo, Benin, and Burkina Faso. However, by 2050, the population of followers of African traditional religions among adherents of “folk religions” in the world is expected to increase to 14%, that which lives in America and the Caribbean to increase to more than 3%, while that in the Asia-Pacific region to decrease to about 82%. But, in the whole, between 2010 and 2050, the world population of followers of “folk religions” is expected to increase to about 450 million people. See <http://www.pewforum.org/global-religious-landscape.aspx>

For instance, fundamentalism is portrayed as an attitude that feels security with tradition (i.e. that which has been laid and handed down by founders, ancestors, forbearers), made up of ancient texts, practices, rituals, doctrines, laws, etc. For fundamentalists truth is unchanged and accepts no compromises; things in life are clearly divided into two parts (e.g. false or true, righteous or wicked, just or criminal, “black or white” so to speak and the past is always and everywhere true, normative, and legitimizing. Therefore, fundamentalists reject innovations, that which is unseen, unheard and never done. They reject translations, interpretations, adaptations, as the Italian saying goes that *traduttore traditore* (“translator, traitor”), that is, the one who translates betrays the accuracy, the beauty, or the inner meaning of the original. From this perspective, what their adversaries label as “fundamentalism”, “conservatism” or “traditionalism”, is actually from the fundamentalist’s viewpoint an attempt at reforming the practice and expression of faith. They call for believers to be coherent in words and deeds with their own basic faith; a return to the purity, sacredness and the power of origin (*archeocracy*); a return call to the way or to where everything started and to the original and unique point – the sacred crossroads – from where the maker of all scattered to the four winds everything s/he had done. Thus, fundamentalism is in fact a prophetic passion and action that a few people or even a single person deems that s/he is right to carry on, in the name of what s/he calls God, in order to save the nation of believers, lest the entire nation falls down and disappears.

## **Grappling with fundamentalism in African Traditional Religions**

### **Historico-political and anthropological back-ground**

Any religious and cultural fundamentalism in action in Africa particularly from the 8<sup>th</sup> century in the Sahelo-Saharan region, up the Nile Valley to the Sudan and on the eastern coast and on Indian ocean islands; and from the 15<sup>th</sup> century up to now in the Guinea Gulf and along the western coast and in the inner lands in central and southern Africa, be it carried on mainly by followers of African ancestral religions, Christians, Muslims, need to be examined in the light of anthropological pauperization process and various traumatic experiences that Africans and their societies within and without the mother continent, especially Blacks, have suffered. These traumatizing and anthropological annihilating events, structures and processes are singularly trans-saharan, trans-Indian and trans-Atlantic slave trades and long-lasting enslavement and discrimination based on the colour of skin in Africa and in the Diaspora communities (Americas, Europe, and Asia); alienating experiences (forced arabization and westernization enterprises); colonialism, neo-colonialism, and globalization.

In addition to that, one has to take into account the situation of post-colonial and modern rogue and unstable states; the failure and frustrating illusions of models of development and progress advocated by world financial institutions (World Bank and International Monetary Funds); outcome of satellite states and their tele-remote control during the Cold War; the collusion between state and churches and mosques so as to perceive how revelation of “alien” God or “deity of others” came along with domination of African populations historically and



sociologically speaking<sup>5</sup>; the incoherency or sort of institutional hypocrisy and blindness of the ministers of God in front of situations of large-scale exploitation in the name of God and civilization; the inability of churches, temples and also of mosques to engage with concrete situation of believers and boldly present it to the Almighty.

These events, structures and processes have considerably traumatized generations of peoples; they dried up and uprooted roots of humanity in Blacks and Africans; and so they terribly affected and destabilized the whole African social architecture and human chemistry. Things have dramatically fallen apart and entire societies and individuals are in deep crisis: state building failure, dissolution of family structure, delinquency of moral values, lost of self-esteem and pride, etc. Human beings feel lost and insecure amid this fast changing world, and seized in the grip of a foreign deity who seemingly and allegedly does not love them, almost “since the beginning of the world”!<sup>6</sup>

### **Manifestations of “fundamentalist” attitudes**

From within the foregoing perspective, those willing to save their nation, to preserve their culture and safeguard their pride and integrity, that is, followers of African Traditional religions display “fundamentalist” attitudes. I would like to point out briefly only three areas where this fundamentalism can be seen: identity construction, social architecture and policy; and family.

Since adherents of African Traditional Religions see religions of foreign origin as a threat to or as being an invasion and pollution of their identity or culture moulded very much out of their ancestral religion, they would vehemently combat these religions and demonize them in the eyes of their fellows. This situation especially occurred in the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century and the

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<sup>5</sup> In the context of various land reforms that colonialists, singularly the British Empire, implemented in colonial Africa, particularly in southern and western Africa in 19<sup>th</sup> century, those who criticise the collusion between evangelisation and colonial enterprise narrate this short story which goes as follows: When the white man came to us in Africa, he had the Bible and we had the land. He told us to close our eyes in order to pray. So we closed our eyes and we prayed devotedly. In the end, we said “amen” and we opened our eyes; and, at our great surprise, we saw that the white man got the land and we Africans the Bible! Another version of the story speaks of the “hoe” instead of the land. But they mean the same thing: the spread of foreign religions in Africa was a great diversion or evangelization, especially in the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, tended to reveal itself in the long run as being an anthropological pauperization process, and a tactic intended to have control over African most precious resources, namely the land.

<sup>6</sup> From this perspective, one may understand the reason why some Africans, especially Blacks, contested the “face” of the God brought by slave traders and western colonialists, and they sought therefore for a black god, that is to say, a god who has assumed also their “sun burnt face”, their cultural diverse manifestations, their religious ancestral ways and their social identity; a god who can accompany them in their journey through valleys of tears and blood, who can laugh and dance with them in time of feast and gladness; a god who can breathe a moment with them on mountain top; a god who can encourage them to be better and release the best of them from themselves, etc. In other words, they yearn for the ministers of God to side with portions of humanity that suffer and to combat for these portions and for the entire God’s people in order that they also enjoy abundant life, starting here on earth, and that the riches of God’s creation flourish for the benefit of all.

beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Most notably in 19<sup>th</sup> century Madagascar under Queen Ranavalona I and 19<sup>th</sup> century Uganda under King Mukasa.

Christianity is singularly seen as an instrument and outgrowth of western hegemony. Therefore, believers of African Traditional Religions view African Christians as being lost sheep, traitors, and agents of foreign imperialistic policies. Believers of African Traditional Religions cast themselves into the role of redeemers or healers, i.e., which consists of bringing back their lost fellows Africans to the ancestral and unique flock or to the right way. For that in some cases they use violent means and disparaging attitudes to realize their mission. According to them, Africa will be saved only if her children rediscover the ancestral way. Here is an example of such a statement from the followers of the South African prophet Isaiah Shembe (1870-1935), who founded the African Independent Church called "IBandla lamaNazaretha". The example is the song "Shembe is the way", composed by the late south-African reggae musician, Lucky Dube (1964-2007) in his last album entitled "respect" released in 2006. It recaptures in its own words and music the experience of those who felt alienated by non-african religions and therefore they have tried to create a religion or a religious tradition that would meet their experience of God or of the sacred. The song goes as follows:

*Soloist*

It wasn't the valley of death, I was walking in  
It was the valley of confusion for many years  
Different religions, different beliefs  
Undermining my culture  
Looking down upon my tradition  
Making fun of my language  
Telling my children, they have no God  
Finally I can tell them about.  
Shembe is the way.

*Chorus*

Oh Shembe, thank you, for showing us the way.  
Shembe nobunazaretha.  
Oh Shembe, thank you, for healing my people.  
Shembe nobunazaretha.  
Oh Shembe, thank you, for showing us the way  
Shembe nobunazaretha.  
Finally I can tell the world  
that Shembe [is the way.]  
Finally I can tell them what I know  
Shembe is the way.

*Soloist*

I hear them shouting "Amen",  
At the top of the mountain.  
I hear them shouting "Uyingcwele"  
At the top of the mountain.  
No one will undermine my religion  
No one will undermine my culture anymore,  
'Cause God sent him from above, to be with the people.  
Bring them back to what is their own  
Take them back to the ways of our forefathers.  
Finally I can tell generations and generations:  
Shembe is the way.

*Chorus*

Oh Shembe, thank you for healing my people.  
Shembe nobunazaretha.  
Oh Shembe, thank you for showing us the way.  
Shembe nobunazaretha.  
You are looking at me  
I'm looking at you  
But we both know that Shembe is the way.

It turns out from this song and the preceding paragraph that according to believers of African traditional religions, it is highly impossible and incompatible to be genuinely Christian and authentically African. Note that this resentment is not so intense towards Islam, unless it becomes so fanatical, irrationally ideological, fundamentalist, ugly violent and arrogant as is now happening in Somalia, Nigeria, and Mali, against African idiosyncratic and genuine ways of Islam.

Within African societies, when it comes to traditional core values, regarding wedding and family, land and property, power sharing, death and succession, some adherents of African Traditional Religions are uncompromising. Either the ancestral way should be kept faithfully or the rebel has to be excommunicated or crushed to the ground. It is here that bitter major conflicts arise and clashes can flare up, along the lines of tribe or ethnicity and generate into "murderous identities" (Amin Maalouf) and complex wars.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, I wish to stress that in faith and religions matter we have to take God's issues and religions seriously. Therefore, we need to rediscover religion as an important social and political factor that needs to be reasonably tended and accompanied by the entire society, mostly by religious, social, and political leaders. We also need to recapture the imagination and aspirations of people, especially the "wretch of the earth" (Frantz Fanon) and those who feel insecure and have been oppressed for too long, so as to build a secure, peaceful and better world for all.

Furthermore, we have to undergo a serious change of mind regarding religions, cultures, and world-views. This implies that we have to depart slowly but with courage from egocentrism to embrace the challenge of interculturality, multi-culturality, cosmopolitanism, and eventually “polycentrism”. Thus, our education and formation systems have to enable us to carefully listen to the prompting of the spirit of “God of surprises” (G. W. Hughes) at work in ways known to him in our cultures and this fast changing world, and be aware of the snares of ideologies and politics within religions and faiths. In other words we need to contextualize the Gospel within the cultures in which we work without deviating from Gospel values. We need to leave our ivory towers live with the people, eat as they do, speak their dialects, never interfere with non religious traditions while introducing them to the message of Christ.

We need to be convinced that a deeper evangelization process has to be continued at a deeper cultural level in order to reach the hearts of people and introduce them to the radical newness of the Gospel, even to the point of converting the irrationality and unawareness within us.

*Original in English*



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