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Analytical perspectives on religious fundamentalism

Abstract:

The first decade of the twenty-first century will amongst other things be remembered for the renewed interest in religious fundamentalism. In the past fundamentalism was related to a certain strand in the Christian Protestant tradition in the USA, but nowadays the term is used for a resurging complex ideology world-wide. Religious fundamentalism, and even religions themselves, indeed became a focal point of attention. Furthermore, the question arises of how to deal with this phenomenon in a Liberal Democracy, especially in the execution of religious rights. This study investigates contemporary religious fundamentalism and endeavours to identify its features and the reasons for its growing power and destructive influence in a human rights environment.



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1. Introduction

The concept of fundamentalism has been used since 1927 to describe a form of conservative Protestantism that was discernible in Christian circles in the US. Christians holding on to the fundamentals of the Christian faith in the wave of modernist changes used the term to classify themselves in a "liberal" society. Since the event of September 11, 2001 in New York the word 'fundamentalism' appeared anew and generated astonishing interest in contemporary political and human rights debates. It became a potent force in the restructuring of the post-Cold War world order (Huntington, 2002:98). Scholars started to speak about and debate the issue of Islamic fundamentalism as an attitude that developed in Muslim countries and that lies at the root of the modern hostilities towards the West. An intimate link exists between Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism (Milton-Edwards, 2005:92). However, research revealed that Islamic fundamentalism can be recognised alongside the manifestation of Hindu, Christian, and Jewish variations (Milton-Edwards 2005:3). Many religious and political conflicts in Europe can also be ascribed to this resurging religious fundamentalism. Berger (2002:297) is correct in his statement that the concept of fundamentalism is nowadays used to describe just about any militant religious movement with a claim for authority and certitude. Therefore, research is also under way on what researchers call the "psychology of fundamentalism" (Hood, Hill & Williamson, 2005:11).

Bruce (2000:117) describes fundamentalism as: "a rational response of traditionally religious peoples to social, political and economic changes that downgrade and constrain the role of religion in the public world". According to Antoun (2001:xii), fundamentalists can be identified by: "the search for purity in an impure world; 'traditioning' (making the ancient immediately relevant to the contemporary situation); totalism (taking religion out of the worship centre and into many domains; e.g. home, school, bank), activism (confronting establishments, political or religious, by sometimes violent protest); the struggle between good and evil; and the selective modernization and controlled acculturation".

According to Marty & Appleby (1991:835) fundamentalism functions "as a tendency, a habit of mind, found within religious communities and paradigmatically embodied in certain representative individuals and movements, which manifest itself as a strategy, or set of strategies, by which beleaguered believers attempt to preserve their distinctive identity as a people or a group".

Fundamentalism is described

* as an aggressive response to change;
* as the slavish adherence to the absoluteness of certain fundamentals;
* as a religious orientation that views religion as relevant to all important domains of culture and society including politics, the family, the marketplace, education and law;
* as a habit of mind found within religious communities and paradigmatically embodied in certain representative individuals and movements.

Fundamentalism can not be limited to the sphere of the religious. Some scholars draw attention to the viewpoint that fundamentalism should be seen as a sociological trend that appears under certain social conditions. The phenomenon pertains to much more in the fields of religion, politics and culture. One can rightly speak of a new contemporary form of fundamentalism. Furthermore, the question arises whether fundamentalism in Christianity nowadays has the same core characteristics as fundamentalism in Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, African traditional religions or politics. Should we speak of "fundamentalisms" according to the example of Marty & Appleby (1991:vii)? This article focuses on these questions in an effort to describe contemporary religious fundamentalism and to discover the rationale of its way of reasoning.

To answer these questions, and especially the question about the identity of contemporary religious fundamentalism, a thorough analysis of all the aspects of this phenomenon as mentioned in the quoted definitions, is necessary. To achieve this goal, this investigation approaches these questions by discussing the contemporary theological, psychological, political and sociological perspectives on this phenomenon.

2. Theological perspectives

Fundamentalism is not an unknown concept in Christianity. A certain trend of Christianity in the United States has been termed fundamentalist for many years, although Barr (1981:1) concedes in his well-known book on Christian fundamentalism that a clear and simple definition of the concept can not always be given. He uses the term fundamentalism for a "certain basic personal religious and existential attitude". The term carries "the suggestion of narrowness, bigotry, obscurantism and sectarianism". He maintains that fundamentalism was used for Christians who confess the inerrancy of the Bible and:

* with a basic hostility to modern theology and to the methods, results and implications of the modern critical study of the Bible;

* with an assurance that those who do not share their religious viewpoint are not really 'true Christians' at all (Barr, 1981: 10).

Furthermore, he contends that this movement could even be described as a theology-less movement in the sense that it is a "fossilized theology", a "fragmented theology" and an "inactive theology" (Barr, 1981:160). It seems that he regards a theology that departs from the presupposition of the unity of the Bible and the unfolding revelation-history as fundamentalist.

The logical consequence of Barr's view is that all forms of orthodox reformed theology and evangelical theology must be considered fundamentalist because they answer to most of the attributes Barr lays at the door of fundamentalism. It seems that Barr's description of fundamentalism is too simplistic. On the one hand the definition limits religious fundamentalism only to Christian fundamentalism and on the other hand it raises suspicion of certain strands of protestant theology which is not extremist or fanatical. Marsden (1991:1) rightly reminds us that a (Christian) fundamentalist is an evangelical who is angry about something. Evangelical beliefs include the Reformation doctrine of the authority of the Bible, the historical character of God's saving work recorded in Scripture, salvation to eternal life based on the redemptive work of Christ, the importance of evangelism and missions, and the importance of a spiritually transformed life (Marsden, 1991:5). Contrary to this outlook, he describes fundamentalists as a subtype of evangelicals and militancy crucial to their outlook (Marsden, 1991:1&104). He makes a valid point when he indicates that militancy (extremism, fanaticism and anger) is an integral component of fundamentalism.

Many Christians who view themselves as Reformed, Evangelical, Charismatic or conservative, and who confess the divine authority of Scripture, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and adhere to the bodily resurrection of Christ, the final consummation and the eternal life, amongst others, will not regard themselves as fundamentalist in the above mentioned exposition. Furthermore, fundamentalism is not only a theological position flowing from certain biblical presuppositions. Although it seems to be lenient towards conservatism, fundamentalism is also more than mere conservatism or orthodoxy. Modernists can also be fundamentalists when they use their "absolutes" in a fanatical way, are suspicious of other views and are guilty of stereotyping. This reality indicates how difficult it is to define fundamentalism even within Christianity itself.

The difference between evangelicalism and fundamentalism becomes clear when one considers Marsden's interesting account of the history of evangelicalism in the US. Evangelicalism ruled as a result of the second Great Awakening immediately after the civil war. There was a strong current of mission and an urge to transform the whole American society into a Christian nation on the basis of evangelical beliefs. Evangelicalism also aligned itself with internal politics and anti-black sentiments, and even contributed to the religious base of a militant racist movement such as the Ku Klux Clan (Marsden, 1991:100). In 1920 the Northern Baptist Convention instituted a "Fundamentals" conference to muster opposition to liberalism. Marsden (1991:57) says: "Soon the term caught on to describe all sorts of American Protestants who were willing to wage ecclesiastical and theological war against modernism in theology and the cultural changes that modernists celebrated".

The second phase in the history of evangelicalism started around 1930, and this period witnessed the growing division between the fundamentalists and the neo-funda-

mentalists (Marsden, 1991:74). The first movement aligned itself with political life in the US in an attempt to realise the old idea of a Protestant Christian America. The movement attempted to congregate Christian opposition to Roman Catholicism, Judaism and liberalism. The latter was an attempt to be engaged in Christian missions and to restore the classic evangelicalism of the Awakening without being engaged in political and anti-establishment actions. Fundamentalism was an upcoming religious fanaticism with visible strands of militancy and extremism, while neo-fundamentalism was a resurgence of true evangelicalism. Marsden (1991:74) makes it clear that fundamentalism and evangelicalism cannot be regarded as synonymous. Unlike evangelicalism, this fundamentalism adhered to a certain means of interpretation of Scripture, which can be termed biblicism. Biblicism uses the biblical texts to prove a view and to derive ethical principles from these texts without taking into account the revelation-historical relevance and cultural-historical background of Scripture for the understanding of biblical passages.

Since 1930 this Christian fundamentalism has been characterised by its growing global influence in countries with a strong Christian ethos, such as African and European countries. It became known because of its pro-nationalist and pro-capitalist positions in world politics in the wake of the Viëtnam war and the growth of international communism. It also became notorious for its support for the formation and protection of the state of Israel because of the importance of Israel in the doctrine of dispensationalism, and secondly its presence in the world-wide development of the Charismatic Movement which penetrated many churches.

The definition of Barr has a second deficiency and that is that the term fundamentalism cannot be used for a phenomenon in Christianity only. Nowadays, scholars in religious studies use the term fundamentalism in a much broader sense. Fundamentalism became a description for any form of religion that contains militancy, extremism and fanaticism, and which is directed vehemently against an identified opponent. Because the phenomenon of militancy and religious fanaticism also appears in other religions, such as Islam and Judaism, scholars speak of Islamic fundamentalism and Jewish fundamentalism as well. Bruce (2000:94) is an exponent of this view and he maintains that fundamentalism is typical of many religious movements. In other words, fundamentalism can be regarded as a phenomenon, particularly on the terrain of the religious. However, Islam, Judaism and Protestant Christianity seem more prone to fundamentalism than other religions because they are "religions of the book". These three have religious text as their doctrinal and spiritual foundations.

The concept fundamentalism is thus also used to describe the extremism, radicalism and militancy in certain strands of current-day Islam. This topic has been thoroughly investigated by Milton-Edwards (2005:1). She provides an outline of the ancient history and developments of Islam, and describes the negative influences colonialism had on the countries with Muslim majorities after the decline of the Ottoman Empire and other Islamic strongholds. The Islam identity in the twentieth century became threatened from two sides. Firstly, attempts in Islam to modernise itself eroded its identity. Furthermore, the development of political nationalism in colonies such as Pakistan and Indonesia and the strife for political independence temporarily pushed Islamic ideals to the background and out of the leadership's concern. From outside came the advance of secularism and the cultural and political power of what she calls "westernism," and this worldwide phenomenon posed a threat to Islamic values.

The trend towards modernism in Islam itself, the growth of political nationalism and resistance against the colonial powers and the threat of westernism and secularism,

gave impetus to the idea that Islam needed to be remodelled if the decline of Islam civilisation was to be brought to a close. Milton-Edwards (2005:21) singles out several key figures in Islam thinking in the early twentieth century that nurtured this idea. Their influence spread geographically across Asia and the Middle East and endures to the present day through the movements and ideological inheritors of Islamic modernism. Eventually Islam became involved in politics since 1945 in a variety of ways. Some Islamic movements have been allowed to a modicum of political power at the popular level. Contrary to this positive development, other fundamentalist movements such as in Afghanistan, Iran, and Middle Eastern states have succeeded in controlling the state. As a result of the rise of fundamentalism, the experiments in secular nation-building in Muslim societies across the modern world began to fall apart (Milton-Edwards, 2005:49). Islam weaved itself back into the public domain and Islamic fundamentalism entrenched itself deeply in world politics and became a force to be reckoned with, both on the diplomatic and military levels.

The resurgence of extremism with its fanatical characteristics in Islam flows from a certain approach to the Qur'an. Various terms are in use to describe this approach such as Islamism, integrism, neo-normative Islam, Islamic revivalism and Islamic nativism (Voll, 1995:33). For the purpose of this study, the term "scripturalism" will be used to describe the hermeneutical approach to the Qur'an in Islamic extremism.

Scripturalism tends to apply the verses of the Qur'an in a normative way, irrespective of the spirit of the whole message of the Qur'an. God intervenes in the Qur'an, as in the Bible, in order to bring concrete responses to a historic situation out of absolute eternal principles. As is the case with Biblicism in Christianity, the unity and the cultural context of the religious text is disregarded in favour of the literal application of all norms in every situation. The Shari'a governs all human relationships through its principles for economics to politics and for the inner life to conjugal relations from the perspective of faith. The Shari'a then consists of living one's public life and private life in the sight of Allah (Geraudy, 1990:51). However, the extremist approach perverts this noble concept of the Shari'a to an idolatrous cult of tradition. In Kuwait, some Sunnis follow the Saudi Arabian (Najd) clergy and their beliefs that emphasise keeping women apart from the larger society and maintaining a patriarchal social structure. The veiling of women is in essence also one of the results of Scripturalism. Kiddie (1988:76) points out that the practice of veiling goes back to the pre-Islamic Near East civilisation. The practice existed in pre-Islamic Persia and also in the Byzantine Empire and was taken over by Islam.

Judaism also has its fundamentalist segments. According to Antoun (2001:19) Jewish fundamentalism is the religious reaction to anti-Semitism and its twentieth-century culmination in the Nazi Holocaust. Since World War II fundamentalism was fed by the struggle in the Middle East and the subsequent wars between the Israelis and the Arab states. The most important segments with fundamentalist characteristics became known as the Haredim (Heilman & Friedman, 1991:198) and the more radical Gush Emunim (Aran, 1991:265).

The Haredim are ultra-Orthodox Jews. The tern haredim is used because these people visibly distinguish themselves not only from non-Jews, but also from most of their Jewish neighbours by way of their dress, attitudes, worldview and the character of their religious life. The historical line of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the teachings of the prophets represents the unchangeable Jewish tradition. This tradition must be maintained in the modern world and therefore the life view of the Haredim refuses to endorse

or to legitimize contemporary Western culture.

The Haredim views the Jewish history as sacred. According to this belief Jewish life and tradition was an alternative superior to anything that non-Jewish contemporary culture could offer. Aran (1991:265), Antoun (2001:20) and Bruce (2000:4) refer to another group namely the Gush Emunim as an example of contemporary Jewish fundamentalism. This group saw the war as a fulfilment of Old Testament prophesies and they defended the occupied territory with militant force. Aran (1991:289) informs us that the Gush Emunim is an active core group of observant Jews, mainly yeshiva students, teachers and graduates – young people who number at most several thousand. This group retains many characteristics typical of schismatic and even deviant fringe groups.

Fundamentalism is, however, not limited to these three religions. In the run of their study of fundamentalisms of our day, Marty & Appleby (1991:531-813) published several articles on the rise of fundamentalism in other religions and cultures. Gold (1991:531) describes how this phenomenon can be discerned in organised Hinduism. According to him Hindu fundamentalist groups flourished since the eighties of the previous century. This Hindu fundamentalism appeals to what may be urban Hindus' lowest common religious denominator: a Hindu identity that must be protected against global influences.

In the same volume, Madan (1991:594) teaches us about the rise of fundamentalism in the Sikh religious tradition. He says that Sikh fundamentalism is a reactive phenomenon, a defence mechanism. This fundamentalism is marked not so much by deep theological concerns or intellectual vigour as by religious fervour and political passion. Here also fundamentals of faith become absolutes that are used to protect an identity. Remarkable is the fact that Sikh fundamentalism gained momentum when Hindu fundamentalism began to flourish.

Swearer (1991:628) provides valuable information about fundamentalist movements in Theravada Buddhism. He says that fundamentalisms in Sri Lanka and mainland Southeast Asia arose from the collapse and transformation of classical religious and cultural syntheses following on the colonial period and the introduction of Western values, technology, education, and economic and political systems. Theravada Buddhist fundamentalists created an innovative and popular synthesis of religion and culture designed to preserve Thai Buddhist identity against conventional Thai Buddhism and the morally compromised secular society. These movements are frequently led by strong, often military aggressive, charismatic leaders whose followers, whether at the centre or periphery of the cultural and socio-political mainstream, perceive themselves to be threatened as individuals, communally, or as a nation (Swearer, 1991:678).

Another theological argument used to ascertain whether a religion is fundamentalist is to establish whether such a religion claims to be totalist. A strong supporter of this idea is Antoun (2001:85). He employs the term totalism and with this term he describes the intention of some religions to extend their meaning beyond the spiritual to the areas of politics, economy, family-life and all other spheres of life. When a religion defines itself as totalist, such a religion must be regarded, according to his view, as fundamentalist. Milton-Edwards (2005:11) entertains the same idea, and therefore she describes Islam as essentially fundamentalist because Muslims view their religion as a universal religion in the sense that it dominates all dimensions of human existence. This argument can be questioned because all the major religions are by definition holistic. They profess a value system that should be realised by their adherents in all spheres of life. Religion is not only spiritual in nature, but attempts to concretise a certain value system in soci-

ety. To reduce religion to the sphere of the spiritual is to distort the very essence of religion. Christianity regards the concept of the kingdom of God as meaningful for the totality of the life of Christians. Islam proclaims the all encompassing character of the Shari'a and Judaism the rule of Jahweh over creation. These facts are the reason why Sutton & Vertgans (2005:9) use the term "praxisitioners" instead of fundamentalists when dealing with resurgent Islam. This major trend in these religions does not mean that they are fundamentalist per se. On the other hand, religions with a narrow spiritual content can also be fundamentalist because they can be, for example, schismatic, intolerant and judgemental and these features are typical of fundamentalism. Viewing totalism as a characteristic of religious fundamentalism will entail that all religions are intrinsically fundamentalist, and such a derivation is not true.

These theological perspectives reveal that scripturalism, the attempt to establish a rigid orthopraxis, the identification of a common enemy, anger, totalism, religious fanaticism and extremism are indicators of the emergence of fundamentalism in religious traditions.

3. Psychological perspectives

A thorough study on the "psychology" of religious fundamentalism was done by Hood, Hill &Williamson (2005:30). The contention of their research is that religious fundamentalism provides a unifying philosophy of life within which personal meaning and purpose are embedded. People become fundamentalists because religion as a "meaning system", strengthened by a sacred text, endows them with a sense of meaning and purpose in a situation of insecurity. Creating meaning in life may seem to be a positive contribution of religious fundamentalism. However, the effects of fundamentalism are usually negative (Hood, Hill & Williamson, 2005:211). Altemeyer (2002:18) deals with these effects in this research. He addresses the question: what is there in religiousness that might promote bigotry, because religious fundamentalism runs with prejudice? He finds the answer in the fact that fundamentalism is mostly embedded in "religious ethnocentrism". With this concept he describes the tendency in fundamentalism to make "us versus them" and "in-group versus out-group" judgements of others on the basis of religious identification or beliefs. His investigation revealed that religious fundamentalism correlates with prejudice against various racial-ethnic minorities among students and slightly more among the parents. Fundamentalism related yet higher than usual with hostility toward homosexuals and still higher with Religious Ethnocentrism. So as relatively prejudiced as religious fundamentalists tend to be toward racial and ethnic minorities, and toward homosexuals, they are even more likely, compared with others, to make ethnocentric judgements on religious grounds (Altemeyer, 2002:23). His study further reveals that the prejudice is the consequence of people's development of their sense of self-identity.

Another finding of his study is: "that religious fundamentalists tend to have a very small 'us' and quite a large 'them' when it comes to faith". This high level of religious ethnocentrism, learned early in life, can provide at least part of the reason why such people would incline toward "in-group", "out-group" distinctions later. The "in-group", "out-group" paradigm, which is apparent in fundamentalism, usually results in racism and xenophobia. With the "we feeling" and subsequent solidarity in the own group as measurement, a group (either ethnic racial or religious) can have the tendency to judge other

groups by the standards and values of their own. According to Marger (1994:15) this tendency produces a view of one's own group (the "in-group") as superior to others (the "out-group").

Therefore, fundamentalism often leads to social stratification and violations of human rights. Social stratification is a system of legitimate, structured social inequality in which groups receive disproportionate amounts of society's wealth, power and prestige and are socially ranked accordingly (Marger, 1994:70). Social stratification flows from the supposition that society consists of irreconcilable groups and the premise that a unitary government with general franchise cannot govern these groups.

The dialectical principle must lead to the "us-them" social attitude and structure. As has been proven historically, total division and conflict develops according to a particular pattern. In the "us-zone" the uniqueness of the own group is idolised. The emotional core of conflicts between groups can often be found in chosen traumas and chosen glories of opposing sides. Chosen traumas refer to the shared mental representations of humiliating events during which losses, which could not be mourned effectively, occurred. Chosen glories recount the shared mental representations of events of success or triumph. Both are often mythologized and passed from generation to generation, although historical grievances are stronger markers of a group's identity than the mental representations of past glories. Traumas experienced many centuries in the past are still active in the identities of same groups. It is as if time collapses and feelings about ancient events are condensed and intertwined with current events.

This is what happened in Apartheid South Africa with the glorification of "white" history over and above the neglect of "black" or "indigenous" history. This pattern of reasoning results in abuses of human rights. Marcuse's (1971) social analysis, which maintains that oppression breeds aggression and eventual revolution, assists man to understand that this pattern must result in inter-personal conflicts.

Fundamentalism is on the one hand fuelled by fear of others, and on the other hand fuels this fear. Riddell (2004:39) discusses a report of the Runnymede Trust in the UK which analysis Islamophobia (fear of Muslims) in that country. The report identified eight features of Islamophobia, which include amongst others:

Islam was seen as being inferior rather than different.

Racial discrimination against Muslims is defended rather than challenged.

Muslim criticism of the West is rejected and not considered.

In Islamic fundamentalist circles the fear can be termed as Christianophobia and Westophobia. These fears reflect the same features as Islamophobia. Besides the violation of human rights, these fears are also responsible for the dangerous though popular human custom to stereotype others. A stereotype is a "picture" in one's head that one does not acquire through personal experience, but that was drawn by traditions, group pressures, group isolation, racist propaganda, general perceptions and beliefs of other group members (Marger, 1994:74-75). Stereotyping is usually responsible for perceptions of other people according to generalised images. In the American society stereotyping can lead to the following negative descriptions of groups: if you are white you are rich, racist and oppressive, if you are black you are prone to drugs and criminality. In the United Kingdom whites have a colonial and imperial mentality and blacks are lazy and a burden to the state. This stereotyping often lends justification to dehumanising actions against people perceived as "others" (Vorster, 2004:198).

Stereotyping is typical of fundamentalism. In Western communities Muslims are nowadays seen as violent and dangerous and prone to terrorism and indiscriminate

killing of people. Little attention is given to the heterogeneous character of Islam (Sutton & Vertigans, 2005:9). In Islamic communities Christians are projected as sexually immoral, materialist, and hedonist as if Christianity and Western culture are synonymous. Although Hood, Hill and Williamson (2005:194) warn against stereotyping religious fundamentalists as "militant," they acknowledge that fundamentalists can also become violent. Social prejudice, the "in-group" "out-group" paradigm, discrimination and social stratification, reconstruction of history, in-breeding, fear, the tendency to stereotype and the inclination to violence, are powerful ingredients of contemporary religious fundamentalism that become clear when examined from a psychological point of view. Other prominent features can be discerned when this phenomenon is viewed from a political angle of approach.

4. Political perspectives

An editorial in the journal Studies in World Christianity points out that: "fundamentalism seems now to be used more often as an ideological category than a theological term. This might lead us to suspect that fundamentalism describes a phenomenon which is not primarily religious, but rather a movement generated by social, cultural and political change" (Anon, 2002:1).

What is remarkable in this interesting statement are the words "ideology" and "political change". It supposes that fundamentalism is more than just a hermeneutical methodology in the understanding of religious texts. All the publications referred to in this article dealing with the rise of the various kinds of religious fundamentalisms refer to the importance politics play in these developments. What Jansen (1997:1) says about Islamic fundamentalism is virtually true of all other religious fundamentalisms. He speaks of the "dual nature" of Islamic fundamentalism, which entails that this constituent of fundamentalism is both fully politics and fully religion. Most of the countries where religious fundamentalism occurs were at a certain stage colonies. Indigenous populations were confronted with the culture, systems, language and religion of the colonial power. Own indigenous cultural traditions, religions, languages and systems were either oppressed or ignored. Colonialism gave rise to the fear of losing identity. This fear and the longing for identity was the breeding ground for the rise of religious fundamentalism which produced certain ideologies and religious sectarian groups.

Most Muslim communities suffered the negative consequences of colonialism. They lost their political and ethnic independence and their political systems were replaced by Western structures. In Eastern Europe the Muslim communities were oppressed by the dictatorial systems instituted by Communism. The liberation struggles that ensued in these countries became a potent breeding-ground for religious fundamentalism. Islamic fundamentalism provided the ideological framework for national liberation.

Antoun (2001:3) indicates that fundamentalist movements are defined, ideologically, by their opposition to and reaction against the ideology that suits the permissive secular society, the ideology of modernism. They opt for theocracies instead of the modern secular nation-state. This option has severe political consequences, because to fulfil this ideal they have to develop a political ideology.

These ideologies became politically active and created religio-political movements and groups because that was the only way to rid themselves of colonialism. Some reli-

gious institutions turned into political tools. In Christianity in the colonised world political theologies emerged (Fierro, 1977:309; Gutierrez, 1974:101). In many cases the political theology became a moral justification of a struggle for political liberation. Davis (1998:43) describes how this method was applied also in Islam. He refers to Afghanistan and indicates how religio-politics turned the Taliban into a military force. The same evidence is given by Voll (1991:354) regarding Islamic fundamentalism, by Gold (1991:533) regarding Hindu fundamentalism, by Madan (1991:609) regarding Sikh fundamentalism and by Davis (1991:782) regarding political fundamentalism in Japan. Religious fundamentalism as a political pattern developed thus where indigenous peoples felt that their identities were threatened by colonialism, and they turned radical and sometimes used violent means in order to protect their identities.

The same kind of religio-political fundamentalism can emerge when minorities in a heterogeneous society feel threatened. I experienced this kind of fundamentalism first hand during the times of Apartheid in South Africa and dealt with it more comprehensively in other publications (see Vorster, 2000:35 and Vorster, 2004:139). Whites in South Africa were not oppressed by British colonialism since 1948. However, they made out the Black majority as a threat to their own identity. This fear was fuelled by the many failures of post-colonial African states to produce healthy non-discriminatory societies. To protect themselves they held on to political power and attempted to force a segregated society by way of active social stratification. N. Vorster provides a lengthy survey of the process of stratification in South Africa in his well-documented dissertation (Vorster, N. 2003:9).

The White population in South Africa developed a political theology weaved around certain so-called fundamentals of Biblical faith using a fundamentalist pattern of reasoning. These fundamentals were elevated by many prominent theologians to absolutes, and formed the pillars of the Apartheid theology. God called nations (in the sense of cultural units) into being and expect from them to maintain their God-given identities. The Afrikaner nation in South Africa identified itself as a Christian nation on the model of Israel in the Old Testament. They had a covenant with God. They had moved into the interior of the country in an "exodus" to occupy it and they believe that they were not allowed to mix with the indigenous people of the country. Racial integration was regarded as a sin. They gave recognition to national racially separated churches which can co-exist but should not unite. Ethnic separateness and isolation were regarded as important Christian virtues and they attempted to protect their own Christian identity by way of the political model of Apartheid. South Africa is a classic example on how the fear of minorities can lead to a fundamentalist pattern of reasoning that breeds a religio-political and ethnocentric ideology.

The same process unfolded in Islamic countries where minorities felt their identities threatened. In her book where she discusses Islamic fundamentalism since 1945, Milton-Edwards (2005) describes how even Sunni's and Shi'ites develop religio-politcal ideologies by way of a fundamentalist pattern of reasoning where they are minorities in respective countries (Voll, 1991:364 & Sachedina, 1991:403). When they felt threatened by the other group they form fundamentalist activist groups to protect their own identity by force. Religious fundamentalism as a result to fear of loss of identity is also alive amongst some sectors in the evangelical movement in America. Not all evangelicals are fundamentals, but some of them fear secularism and turn to the fundamentalist pattern of reasoning. This religious fundamentalism is then strongly aligned with extreme political conservatism. Furthermore, fundamentalism breeds potent nationalistic and ethno-

centric feelings. Although deeply rooted in religion, fundamentalism is thus not only a religious phenomenon. It breeds religio-political ideologies that can unleash radical and violent political action to protect the ethnic identity of people experiencing a threat.

5. Sociological perspectives

Religious fundamentalism is an aggressive and far-reaching reaction to change. To understand the sociological forces that can be unleashed by rigorous social, political, demographical and cultural change, Toffler's viewpoint expressed as early as 1970 should be reconsidered. He said then that the acceleration of change in our time is in itself an elemental force. This accelerative thrust has personal, psychological, as well as sociological consequences (Toffler, 1970:11). This experience leads to future shock which is "a time phenomenon, a product of the greatly accelerated change of society. It is culture shock in one's own society". The rising tide of religious fundamentalism is for many people a way out of their future shock; an escape route out of the disorientation they experience. Fundamentalists find solace in anchoring their lives in a few self-identified truths. These truths are seen as absolutes and they become the unchangeable framework within which their world and life view are formulated. These truths also determine the logic of their religion. Therefore, religious fundamentalism is not only conservatism or traditionalism with anger, but an aggressive attempt to live up to the self-identified truths in the wake of accelerating change.

The rise of Christian fundamentalism can therefore be ascribed to the deep rooted changes in Western culture, particularly the declining position of Christianity as the dominant cultural ethos. Christianity has been largely replaced by the emerging liberalism and humanism as cultural dominants (Vorster, 1981:233). Already in 1967 the prominent German theologian Moltmann (1967:305) commented that the Christian church can no longer present itself as the religion of society. Since then this declining influence accelerated and disrupted also the fixed relations of Christians (Anderson, 1990:26).

In an attempt to deal with the growing secularisation in Western societies, theologians challenged the traditional biblical hermeneutics, doctrines, forms of worship and roles of churches and proposed new theologies, that would, according to them, be more suitable for the future. The influential German theologian Bultmann (1967:25) introduced the hermeneutics of demythologisation, which urged scholars to question core doctrines of the Christian faith, such as the resurrection of Christ. Some even questioned the existence of a supernatural God and opted for a "God is dead theology" (Robinson, 1964; Altizer, 1966:95; Van Buren, 1967:50). New relevant theologies were introduced with the total emphasis on Christians and churches being agents of social and political changes, even by means of the support of revolutionary violence. In this regard the "Theology of Revolution" (Cox, 1967:66; Shaull, 1969:190); the "Theology of Transformation" (Castro, 1968:77-81; Verkuyl, 1971); the "Theology of Liberation" (Gutierrez, 1974:223) and the "Black Theology" (Cone, 1975:75; Moore, 1975:78) can be presented as examples. These political theologies all questioned core values of traditional Christian faith (See Fierro, 1977). The growing secularisation of Western culture, as well as these fundamental changes in Christian theology, confronted Christians with a changing environment that left no sphere of their daily existence untouched. Change confronted them from the family structures to the church and from their deepest religious experiences to daily lifestyle. This comprehensive process of change triggered the retreat

to the secure enclave of religious fundamentalism. Contemporary Christian fundamentalism emerged as a reaction to the radical theologies of the seventies of the previous century (Barr, 981:336). Moltmann (1994:82) actually predicted this development in 1994.

The same process can be discerned in the Islamic societies. Being a holistic religion these movements amount to a certain form of religious oppression. Furthermore, the Western influences that followed colonisation, such as Western political structures, impeded the application of the sharia'h – a further annoying factor for Muslims. They were confronted with Western values and often identified Western values with Christian values. These changes had a certain impact on the development of Muslim communities. After the independence of Islam states, two other major forces appeared on the scene. These are globalisation and Islam modernisation itself. Muslims regard globalisation as a new form of cultural colonisation, and modernisation in Islam itself as a deviation from core doctrines and values. Here also future shock caused aggression against the forces of change and a new interest in the "fundamentals" and the security they hold. Just as in Christianity, large scale social changes are responsible for the rebirth of fundamentalism in Islam. The most extreme exponent of this fundamentalism was the Taliban in Afghanistan (Maley, 2001:14; Davis, 2002:43).

When dealing with the sociological perspectives, another supposition should also be examined, and that is the thesis that religious fundamentalism is sociologically linked to certain societal trends. The question was asked whether fundamentalism is not limited to underdeveloped communities or the "lower class" where the benefits of science and technology have not yet born the fruits of social development and prosperity, or perhaps to culture. Is Islam fundamentalism limited to pockets of illiterate people in secluded and under-developed communities? Is the resurgent fundamentalism in African religious traditions in South Africa an observable fact only in the poor rural communities? Coreno (2002:340) describes how Marx and Weber argued that religious fundamentalism is more attractive to the lower classes because the moral certainty of doctrines provides infallible spiritual solutions to the problems of living in a world of economic and status insecurity. He also points out how Durkheim and Berger maintained that religion provides the values and rituals that help forge social bonds between believers. In this way religion can integrate social structural locations across society and create enclaves where a certain religious tradition can be observed. This cultural enclave can easily breed fundamentalism, which can be portrayed as a unique moral milieu, a special discursive community and an enclave culture.

Over and against these scholars Coreno (2002:343) himself opts for what he terms the "class-cultural" model to explain fundamentalism. He contends that the basic premise of the class culture model is that divergent cultural commitments, like religious beliefs and practices, often define the symbolic boundaries of distinct class culture. A class culture can be thought of as a subsection of the class structure in which distinct moral commitments are articulated and shared by a community. Therefore religious subcultures continue to flourish as defence against any number of existing forms of social malaise, whether these are defined as manifestations of alienation, anomie, or secularisation. He proposes that fundamentalist subcultures are embedded in class culture (Coreno, 2002:344).

With reference to other sociologists, Coreno (2002:344) argues furthermore that the class culture model stresses the importance of class fractions as well as more comprehensive class designations. As social groups carve out distinct niches, each class may splinter into contradictory and possibly antagonistic fractions, each defending its inter-

ests. A class culture may be attracted to religious fundamentalism and Coreno refers to studies that indeed indicate that the old middle class, for example, are more likely to be attracted to this way of thinking and living. As a fraction they formed a class culture because as a result of modern changes they perceived the threat of downward mobility, economic stagnation, status insecurity and declining political power. They embrace religious fundamentalism as defence against a world that they feel has been corrupted by secularisation and moral decline. If I understand Coreno correctly, any class or ethnic culture can in a certain point of time embrace religious fundamentalism when they experience a threat to their own security.

Barr (1981:90) rejects the class model. He also opposes the supposition of many people that religious fundamentalism is a product of a pre-scientific society, and that it will die away with the advance of scientific knowledge and the increasing secularization of life. Secular society seems to be a fertile soil in which religious fundamentalism flourishes. His impression is that fundamentalism is quite evenly spread through the different social and professional classes.

Religious fundamentalism is a radical reaction to change and the emergence of a perceived enemy that "threatens" the sanctity of old fashioned values, ideas and the safety of the traditions and customs of a community. Thus any community will expose a tendency to religious fundamentalism and its extreme ways in any given situation of change and uncertainty. The development of a national identity was what happened in India before their independence in 1948 over and against the "threat" of Islam. The interaction with the external environment moulded a diverse Hinduism into one geographical and political entity and created even amongst them a religious fundamentalist attitude.

6. Conclusion

Taking into account the research done by many scholars on this phenomenon, and in view of the facts revealed by the examination of the theological, psychological, political and sociological perspectives, I would offer the following description of modern-day religious fundamentalism:

Religious fundamentalism is a pattern of reasoning that breeds radical ideologies by way of singling out certain fundamentals of a religion and elevates them to absolutes. These absolutes form the paradigm of the ideology that develops as reaction to what it fears as a threat to its own identity, and which reacts if necessary by way of radical and militant methods.

Any attempt to discuss the management of religious fundamentalism where it threatens to destabilise a society should pay attention to the trends suggested in this definition. Against this background serious attention should be paid to the characteristics, roots and outcomes of contemporary religious fundamentalism and its violations of human rights in order to propose positive and workable steps in the management of this destructive force in a human rights environment.

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