JPJRS 6/2 ISSN 0972-3331, July 2003 5-23

Fundamentalism:
Historical Perspectives

Isaac Padinjarekuttu
Dept of Historical Theology, JDV, Pune 411014

Abstract: After describing fundamentalism as reclamation of authority over a sacred tradition, the author traces its origin to evangelicalism. Then he deals with fundamentalism in various religious traditions like Sikhism, Islam, Hinduism and Christianity. The author suggests that when fundamentalism has joined itself with political, military and police powers or with clerical power, resolute resistance must be offered, both from within and without

Keywords: fundamentalism, oppositionalism, secularisation, valorization of violence, reclamation of authority.

Fundamentalism is one of the most detested terms today. It is often felt to be a hostile and opprobrious term, suggesting narrowness, bigotry, obscurantism and sectarianism (Barr 1977: 2). In most languages the term *per se* is pejorative, evoking epithets such as reactionary, authoritarian, unreasonable, literalist, non-cosmopolitan, anti-modern, and even paranoid (Coleman 1992/3: 37). Because of this it is easy to dismiss fundamentalism as a movement by a group of fanatics without much consequence for the world. The fact is that it is indeed a global phenomenon and a challenge to all religions and confessions which can no longer be overlooked, and which must be taken quite seriously. Individuals, groups and peoples will not be able to live in peace if those who have commandeered the "fundamentals" for themselves believe that they can deny others the right to exist; or if non-fundamentalists do all they can to exclude fundamentalists from dialogue. Only an interaction between the two can bring about a solution to the problem of fundamentalism.

What is Fundamentalism?

What is fundamentalism? It is difficult to define it, as James Barr, who has done one of the first studies on fundamentalism, acknowledges (Barr 1977: 1). But at the same time a working definition is important and I use the following as a good starting-point:

> In simple terms, we define fundamentalism as a proclamation of reclaimed authority over a sacred tradition which is to be reinstated as an antidote for a society that has strayed from its structural moorings. Sociologically speaking, fundamentalism involves: (1) a refutation of the radical differentiation of the sacred and the secular that has evolved with modernization and (2) a plan to dedifferentiate this institutional bi-furcation and thus bring religion back to centre stage as an important factor or interest in public policy decisions (Shupe and Hadden 1989: 111, quoted in Coleman 1992/3: 37).

Fundamentalism involves the reclamation of authority over a sacred tradition (Religion plays an important role in all fundamentalisms. See Caplan 1987). It differs from utopian calls to create a new, imagined social order. Fundamentalists call for a return to a lost tradition and seek to reorient society and culture to a more "desirable" future (Caplan 1987: 38).

As is well known, the word fundamentalism was originally used for a particular trend in American Protestantism which in the face of all modern and liberal adaptations of the church sought to go back to the biblical "fundamentals" of the Christian faith: to fundamentals of the faith which were interpreted in a very arbitrary way. But today fundamentalist symptoms analogous to this movement within Protestantism can also be found in other confessions of Christianity: Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy as well as in other religions, too. Therefore, it is important to trace the history of fundamentalism as far as it can be done.

Origin of Fundamentalism

The word fundamentalism arose in the Christian context (The following two paragraphs are taken from the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 6, s.v.: 223). Originally it referred to an interdenominational movement that flourished in American Protestantism during

the first third of the 20th century. It was a reaction against secularisation and the infiltration of liberal theology into the seminaries and universities in the northern and eastern cities of America. Drawing its strength principally from the rural areas and small towns of the so called Bible belt (the south and mid-west America), old fashioned evangelical faith once again found expression in various assemblies, notably in annual Bible conferences. The Niagara Bible conference of 1895 drew up five points that became cardinal tenets of fundamentalism: (1) the inerrancy of the Bible, (2) the divinity of Jesus Christ, (3) the virgin birth of Jesus, (4) Christ's vicarious death, (5) and his physical resurrection and future second coming.

But the beginning of the fundamentalist movement proper is often dated from the appearance between 1905 and 1915 of 12 small volumes entitled *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth.* These booklets defended the inspiration and total inerrancy of the Bible; they opposed "higher criticism" of the Bible, "evolutionism," and the "social gospel". They said, for example, that the Pentateuch was written by Moses himself. Three million copies of the *Fundamentals* were distributed free to pastors, missionaries, theology students, etc. In 1919 the "World's Christian Fundamentals Association" which was quite militant in character was founded. The expression "fundamentalist" came to usage about 1920, meaning, as one newspaper expressed it, one who does "battle royal for the fundamentals." It was at that time a badge of honour for its adherents. Most American Protestant denominations, especially those with an evangelical bent, split into fundamentalists and modernists around this time. Due to the pressure from the fundamentalists several state legislatures in America barred the teaching of human evolution in public schools. Sometimes things ended in court cases like the famous trial of John Scopes, a biology teacher from Dayton, Tennessee, in 1925, who was accused of teaching Darwinism in violation of the law. Although Scopes was convicted, the trial attracted unfavourable publicity for the fundamentalists and it was a major setback for them.

> Fundamentalism cannot be understood without understanding the phenomenon of evangelicalism, a Protestant movement that emerged from the religious awakening of the eighteenth century and which had taken clear shape in England and the British empire, in America, and

in many mission fields. It emphasized (1) the Bible as authoritative and reliable; (2) eternal salvation as possible only by regeneration (being born again), involving personal trust in Christ and his atoning work; and (3) a spiritually transformed life marked by moral conduct, personal devotion and zeal for evangelism and the missions (*The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 5, s.v.: 190).

Fundamentalism originated in evangelicalism. What distinguished the fundamentalists from the evangelicals in the first place was that they were quite militant in their outlook. Secondly, they saw it as their absolute Christian duty, on the one hand, to uncompromisingly combat all modernist tendencies in the church and theology and all secularizing cultural trends, and on the other, to propagate the "fundamentals" which according to them are constitutive of the Christian faith. In short, fundamentalism stood for an organized militant defence of traditional evangelical doctrines.

Fundamentalism thus was also a mood as much as a set of doctrines and institutions, a mood of militancy in opposition to modernist theology and to some of the relativistic cultural changes that modernism embraced. It focused on the anxieties of American Protestant traditionalists after World War I, who lamented that America had lost its biblical moorings. Added to that, the revolution in morals, international events like Bolshevism and the social and moral impact of immigrations to America, etc. alarmed them. The fundamentalists saw all these as the end of the Bible- based civilization of America. After the Scopes trial the public paid less attention to fundamentalism. However, it has survived and is active although for many people today it is difficult to make a distinction between evangelicals, neo-evangelicals and fundamentalists. There are millions of Christians in America and elsewhere who follow the basic tenets of fundamentalism, like absolute inerrancy of the Bible, soul winning, church growth, extreme militancy against theological liberalism, separation from worldliness with a strict moral code, especially in sexuality, dispensationalism, a conservative role for women, crusade against abortion, rejection of the theory of evolution, etc. In America it also espouses the cause of political conservatism, militant capitalism, a powerful military, patriotism, etc. Beyond this original fundamentalism which is Western Protestant in origin, all the

latter "fundamentalist" movements which arose in various religious traditions did not usually refer to themselves as "fundamentalist" but were rather so dubbed by Western scholarly and more general discourse. But we place all these movements under the rubric "fundamentalist" because despite their differences they have some common characteristics. Thus we have today fundamentalism in every religious tradition. I shall trace the history of those movements which arose in the Indian context.

Sikhism

Of the great religious traditions of humanity, Sikhism is one of the youngest, being barely five hundred years old. Its beginnings and development have been recorded in both oral narratives and literary texts, but these do not always speak with one voice. This should not surprise us because faith entails mystery. But we know enough to say that its origin is intimately linked to the political, economic, social and cultural situations in the late fifteenth century Punjab. Guru Nanak (1469-1539) was appalled by the brutality of Babar's invasions of north India and lamented the lack of protection that was given to the people by their rulers. While his words were a prayer to God for the protection of the people, it was also a call to assume the responsibility for self protection. It developed into a new religion in 1499 when he claimed that God the supreme preceptor (*Guru*) had passed on the holy word (*shabad*) to him. The message was that there was no true Hindu or true Muslim, a true follower of the Hindu or Islamic faiths, to be found around him. What matters is that one must be a true devotee of God and realize that the practice of truth is the highest morality. Nanak developed a comprehensive and consistent theology (cf. Singh 1963, 1966). which combined piety and practical activity admirably. It is debatable whether he of thought himself as the founder of a new religion. But he wanted his disciples to continue living differently and he also named a successor to him, Angad. Thus inadvertently he founded a new religion of egalitarian social outlook, and a religious faith with no ritual. The successive Gurus were to ensure the survival of the religion. Let us mention some of them.

Arjan Mal (1563-1606) was the fifth in succession. He constructed the temple in the holy tank known as the Harmandar Sahib,

the honoured temple of God and gave the Sikhs their Holy Book, the *Adi Granth* (the original book). It was Hargobind (1595-1644) who introduced the doctrine of the two swords, one representing spiritual authority and the other temporal authority. He erected a new temple, the *Akal Takht*, the throne of the immortal God. He also engaged in constant conflict with the Mughals. During his time temporal power, honour, revenge etc. became more important than work, worship and sharing, which were the principles which Nanak gave to his followers. The unity of religion and politics was now complete and religion was the weaker side. This is clearly seen in the tenth and last Guru Gobind (1666-1708) Singh. He was clearly influenced by the martyrdom of his father Teg Bahadur in 1675. In 1699 Gobind instituted baptism for the Sikhs to constitute a community of the pure, *Khalsa*. The baptised Sikh was to call himself Singh (lion) and one of the symbols of the initiated man was the sword, the *kirpan*. This action was fraught with political implications. Not long afterwards the words "*raj karega Khalsa*" (the pure Sikhs will rule) were added to the daily prayer. Gobind Singh announced the closure of the canon (*gurbani*) and declared that after his death spiritual authority would vest in the Holy book. Temporal powers would be exercised by the *Khalsa*, represented by five baptized Sikhs. The journey from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh was a passage from sacralized secularity to secularized religion (Madan 1997: 57).

The effort to establish a Sikh state succeeded with Ranjit Singh in 1799. It was a secular state, something new in the Sikh tradition. He died in 1839 and his kingdom collapsed in 1846. There were new attempts to redefine the Sikh identity. Religion and politics were separated once again. The Gurudwara Act of 1925 made the *Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee* (SGPC) the controller of the temples and the political activity was looked after by the *Akali Dal*. They were in the forefront of agitations against the British. The Akalis slowly repudiated any notion of separation of religion and politics . This repudiation became the basis of the demand for a separate homeland. It was also born out of the need for an authority to enforce the rules of the Sikh community, the Adi Granth and the Khalsa tradition, which were abandoned by the secualarized and rich younger generation. Committed Sikhs felt that the original ideals of Nanak – work, worship, and sharing – were being replaced by para-

sitism, godlessness and selfishness as a result of modernization. So the call was to be good Sikhs, defending the faith and repudiating the separation of religion and state. These were essential for the preservation of the Sikh tradition. So they wanted independence from the Indian union. The failure to grant this or understand this created the Sikh problem. It is in this context that we can speak of Sikh fundamentalism.

Its rise is intimately linked to the activities of Jarnail Singh Bindranwale who organized a militant group of Sikhs and took refuge in the Golden Temple from where he incited the Sikhs against the government. People began to speak of Bindranwale as a fundamentalist. What they meant was that he was a person who employed religious appeal to mobilize his followers for political action. Thus we have a specific aspect of Indian fundamentalism, religious objectives mingled with politico-economic one. Even the government would be opposed if it stood in their way. Sometimes they are branded as political extremists, terrorists, etc. So here fundamentalism is not only a fight for pristine orthodoxy or pure tradition. But they understood themselves as true Sikhs although Bindranwale's own career was full of violence and sectarian politics which began with the open conflict with the Nirankaris in 1978. But he also issued a call to return to the fundamentals of the Sikh faith. He asked for a moral life and it appealed to many people. He delineated the foes of Sikhism as those who don't follow the tenets of the religion and also denounced the Hindus who were seen as oppressors. The Hindus were depicted as people who were standing in the way of the exclusive Sikh identity. This was another feature of Sikh fundamentalism, namely, the stress on identity. The search ultimately ended in the call for separatism which began with the Anandpur Sahib resolution of 1973. Bindranwale used the language of religion to give utterance to genuine and widespread economic and other grievances of the Sikhs. Lack of political will from the part of the Indian government made matters worse. So Sikh fundamentalism was also connected with economic discontent. This led to Operation Blue Star, the bizarre events of the following years, including the proclamation of the Khalistan and still more fundamentalization of the Sikhs which lasted till 1993. The recent scramble for the control over the SGPC is a clear indication

that religion and politics are still intertwined in Punjab and fundamentalist forces are active in Sikhism.

If we search for the specific characteristics of Sikh fundamentalism (Madan 1997: 98-105) they are religious faith and cultural identity combined with a militant pursuit of secular interests. This is nothing new in Sikhism. Modern Sikh fundamentalism has been a reactive phenomenon and defence mechanism. It was born out of fear, fear of the other - the nonconformists, the secularists, the Hindus - cultural disintegration, modernization and political domination. The fundamentalists, of course, claim to possess the truth and motivate and mobilize followers to follow them. They don't allow dissent and are convinced that political power is necessary to enforce conformity. There are no deep theological concerns or intellectual vigour behind Sikh fundamentalism. It does not emphasize the scriptures like the early Protestant fundamentalists, but the tradition of the Gurus. It emphasizes Sikh honour. Charismatic leaders play a role as in all such movements. Selective appeal to tradition by the leaders is accepted. They showed no opposition to science and technology. The valorization of violence has led to its being linked with terrorism. It feeds and is fed by Hindu communalism. And today it is also marked by the memory of the deep sense of injury felt by most Sikhs after Operation Blue star and the massacre of thousands of Sikhs in the wake of the assassination of Indira Gandhi.

Islam

Islam in south Asia has an eventful and richly documented history of about 1300 years. It is not possible to trace this history in full here but some turning points must be mentioned which affected the relationship between the Muslims and the Hindus, the majority community, which gave rise to Islamic fundamentalism. Islam arrived in India in 712 when Sind was conquered by Muhammad bin Quasim on behalf of Hajjaj bin Yusuf, governor of the eastern provinces of the Umayyad caliphate. It is recorded that he allowed the Hindus of Sind the status of the *zimmi*, the protected class. The non-Muslims had to pay the poll tax or *jizya* but there were various concessions and compromises worked out on the basis of expediency in order not to alienate the Hindu majority. These early Muslims were

not enthusiastic proselytizers. But as Aziz Ahmad writes, "the history of medieval and modern India is to a very considerable extent a history of Hindu-Muslim religio-cultural tensions, interspersed with movements of individual efforts at understanding, harmony and even composite development. The divisive forces have proved much more dynamic than the cohesive ones" (Azis 1964: 73). Islam always felt threatened because of the assimilative character of Hinduism and there was constant vigilance and effort to protect the Muslim way of life. Indian Muslims were a people living in two worlds, one, their immediate surroundings, and the other, the world of the sources of inspiration which sustained their spiritual experiences. Muslim fundamentalism has its roots in this twin predicament of the Indo-Muslim community, namely, the perceived threat of the Hindu cultural environment and the question of Muslim secular power or political expediency (Madan 1997: 113). (For a concise treatment of the topic, see Durrai 1993).

The next significant happening was the appearance of Mahmud of Ghazni in 1000 at Lamghan in the northwest, and during the next quarter of the century he invaded India 17 times. He was ruthless towards both the Muslims who were not of his brand and the Hindus. He vowed to cleanse pagan India of its ignorance and false religions and was the champion of Sunni orthodoxy. Here the relationship between religion and state begins to appear. This tension between state power and religious power became sharper during the Delhi Sultanate (thirteenth to the sixteenth century). Ala ud-din Khalji (ruling from 1296-1316)did not give much heed to the *ulama* and was condemned for his disregard for the *sharia*. It would not have been possible for so many foreign Muslim rulers to rule over India for centuries if they were trying to impose Muslim rule over the people. But there were people who wanted to reassert religious authority like Zia ud-din Barani who wanted to bring the royal power and function under the hierarchical control of religious authority coupled with a deep hatred of the Hindus.

Although Islam was spreading fast, India never became *dar-al-Islam* (the Muslim sphere) de facto. Added to that there were people like Akbar whose catholicity and tolerance are well known. But Aurangzeb (ruled from 1658-1707) was again an orthodox Sunni

Muslim and wanted to rule with the help of the Sharia. But with his death began the loss of power for the Muslims. It is in this context that Shah Wali-Ullah assumed the moral leadership of the Muslims (1703-1762). What pained him most was the loss of the state. His son Shah Abdul Aziz (1746-1823) carried forward his policies of Islamic revival and proclaimed that the areas under non-Muslim rule had been now dar al-harb (the land of war). The British were the targets in a special way now. The responses to the increasing loss of power could be many, like migration or call for jihad. In this context Sayyid Ahmad Barelwi (1786-1831) began the radicalization of the Muslims with the two goals of orthodox Islam and an ideal Islamic state. This necessitated even a jihad or religious war. He together with his followers of about 1500 launched many movements of violence and was killed in 1831. The movement known as the mujahidin movement was finally crushed by the British in 1858 after they had joined the sepoys who revolted in 1857.

Next the Muslims tried the method of redemption through education and accommodation to modernity. Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-98) led this movement. He attached the greatest importance to education and western thought. The Anglo- Muhammadan Oriental College at Aligarh was founded by him. But the synthesis between tradition and modernity was more problematic than he had thought. In response to this some began to take recourse to a more traditionalist education. This movement was led by Muhammad Quasim Nanotawi in Deoband in 1867. It also propagated radical views like taking recourse to lesser *jihad* and represented the nationalists among the Muslims. It founded an organization called the Jamiyyat-ul-Ulama-i-Hind (the party of the Ulama of India). It was founded because the Indian Muslim League was thought to be too modernist. The Deobandis wanted a scriptural religion and the rule of the Ulama. The quest for Pakistan is to be seen in this context.

In the twentieth century the distrust of modernism continued in Islam. Muhammad Iqbal (1876-1938) and Abdul Kalam Azad (1888-1958) shared this. They were revivalists and advocates of a pan-Islamism. But they disagreed with the tendency of the ulama to place their interpretations above the text. Abul ala Maududi (1903-1979) was another critic who joined the criticism of the ulama . But

he had more radical solutions. He also challenged the joining of the independence movement because he felt that nationalism was not a Muslim concept. And a separate homeland for Muslims was also a false ideal because it was merely a materialistic state without any role for the spiritual. He founded the jamaat-i-Islami (Islamic association) in 1941. He said that there could be no Islamic state without the fundamentals of Islam. When Pakistan was created he migrated there and campaigned for an Islamic state. He pronounced that western secular democracy was the very antithesis of Islam. Maududi was one who was interested in the fundamentals of Islam which according to him were the Koran and the exemplary life of the prophet. The Sharia was a complete scheme of life and an all-embracing social order, lacking nothing. There should be power vested in the hands of a reasonable group of people and that brings in the idea of the state which can be totalitarian but based on divine law. Power lies at the core of Maududi's concept of the true Islamic society. He also advocated jihad for the spread of Islam because the world had reverted back to the state before the arrival of Islam and there is need for spreading the faith. With this call to jihad which would embrace the whole of humankind he was a champion of Islamic fundamentalism. The jamaat-i-Islami is a fundamentalist force even today.

From this brief overview, we have the basic tenets of Islamic fundamentalism in south Asia. Like every religion it is concerned with safeguarding correct beliefs and correct practices. Groups of people don the mantle of the guardians of orthodoxy, here the ulama. Islam has a set of well defined fundamentals of its faith in spite of the sectarianism, the conflict between the *ulama* and the sufis and the mutual exclusiveness of schools of Islamic law. The danger of diluting these fundamentals is very real. So preserving orthodoxy is a major concern in Islam. When it came to south Asia and confronted other civilizations this urge to safeguard its identity and purity was paramount. For this it also wanted power. So fundamentalism had both objectives: purity of the faith and political power. The concentration on power in the hands of a strongly believing people would result in the totalitarian ambition of world domination supported by exclusive claims to the possession of truth. Such a project is quite attractive to Muslim fundamentalists because Islam does not, in principle, stress race, language or nationality. The history of Islam in

south Asia gives the background of Muslim fundamentalism today: cultural critique, political power, exclusive claims to possess the truth, ambitions of domination, innovation and redefinition of the received tradition to suit their need, charismatic and determined leadership and a formally organized movement. "A dialectic of tensions internal to the Muslim community and certain external pressures, gradually led many *ulama* and their followers from an early concern with orthodoxy and orthopraxis to a revivalist *angst* and, finally, to fundamentalism" (Madan 1997: 150).

Hinduism

Debates are still going on about the word Hindu and the appropriateness of the ascription of the idea of religion to Hinduism (Madan 1997:176-232). Whether it was the need of westerners to define Hinduism as a religion or it was political compulsions that led to it, as Romila Thapar maintains (Thapar 1989/2: 210), need not concern us now. We take it for granted that the Hindu religion is one of the most ancient religions of humankind.

Ananda Coomarswamy develops a distinction between spiritual authority and temporal authority in Hindusm basing himself on the Brahmanas and also on the Rig Veda (Coomarswamy 1978). Initially the two functions were different but later a union was effected and sacerdotium gained precedence over regnum because ultimatley every ruler is subject to another king, Dharma. Thus there is a union of the two, the sacred and the secular. There is a single principle of social integration and no separate principle governing politics. The king's power is checked by the brahmins who are Brahman incarnate (Gonda 1969: 67). After examining all the evidence, Madan says that there are no grounds for constructing a theory of the secular state for our times that might legitimize the autonomy of the secular power by invoking traditional non-religious values (Madan 1997: 184). But the arthashastra of Kautilya does speak of material well-being as supreme but ultimately even he conforms to the Vedic tradition. The Manusmriti also does not alter the above position. The Mahabharata says that he who seeks to achieve kama and artha must first concentrate on dharma, for kama and artha are never separate from dharma. Gandhi following this traditional point

of view rejected secularism if it stood for the divorce of politics from religion. But he endorsed the idea of a secular state which did not interfere in the religious lives of the people and was in that manner impartial. According to him Indian secularism is infusing the world with spiritual values. Another way of understanding secularism in India is as religious pluralism: granting all religions equality and treating all with respect. Vivekananda was the champion of this line of thought, understanding of Hinduism as a religion of tolerance and equality. Thus secularism in India is a rather imprecise notion of religious tolerance in society and a similarly unclear idea of non-preferentialism or equal respect for all religions as state policy. The Indian scriptures do not recognize a mutually exclusive role for the religious and the secular nor the idea of religion as a private activity. There is no mainstream Hindu tradition that supports such a view.

Contemporary fundamentalistic Hinduism has its roots in the 19th century revival movements in Bengal, Maharashtra and Punjab (Jones 1989). These in turn had their origin in some important developments in British India. One of them was the missionary movement officially allowed by the charter of 1813 and the other was the introduction of English education. The missionaries who had been influenced by evangelicalism had a negative attitude towards Hinduism. The reform movements in India were a creative response to this. They were helped by the Orientalists and their studies of Indian religious and philosophical literature. The movement started in Bengal under the leadership of Rammohun Roy (1772-1833) and his *Brahmo Sabha* (1828) and continued under Debendranath Tagore, (1817-1905) Keshub Chandra Sen (1838-1884), etc. who were in the forefront of the movement. Many social reforms were undertaken inspired by the missionaries. Hindu revivalism was part of it although with a rationalist critique of it. They wanted a purified Hinduism and national and cultural regeneration. In this connection the *Arya Samaj* founded by Dayanda Sarasvati (1824-83) in 1875 was very important. Its goals were regenerating Hinduism and opposing the evangelical activities of the missionaries. It was a religious, cultural and social movement. Religious reconstruction and social reforms were its essential aspects. Religious reconstruction aimed at a return to a pristine state of purity of the Vedas. He claimed for the Vedas the monopoly over truth and denied other religions any legiti-

macy to exist. He even claimed compatibility between Vedic knowledge and modern science. The ideology was fundamentalist as we understand the word today. So the development of fundamentalism in Hinduism is a later development which began only in the 19th century. The Arya Samaj was a watershed in the emergence of fundamentalism in Hinduism.

The programme was taken forward by the developments in the following decades. The first was the founding of the *Hindu Mahasabha* (1915) with the agenda of safeguarding of the specifically Hindu interests, like cow protection. After the *Khilafat* movement (1920-21) it was revived and had famous supporters, like Madan Mohan Malaviya, Lajpat Rai, etc. Then came the publication of the book *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu*? by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar in 1923. According to him, true followers of the original Vedic religion were the Aryans and he rejected all non-Vedic religions like Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, etc. He favoured the term Hindu and redefined it geographically. Hindus were those whose fatherland and holy land were India. They constituted the Hindu nation which belonged to one race and one civilization. This was the crux of the *Hindutva* ideology.

Hindutva was a complex whole of which religion was only a fraction. But he maintained that Hinduism should be the religion of all Hindus which included the Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs, the tribals, etc. But it cannot be the religion of the Christians and the Muslims because they don't consider India their holy land. They are, therefore, excluded from the nation. This has become the manifesto of the Hindu fundamentalism of today which is a totalitarian and exclusivistic system. What is special about Hindu fundamentalism is that instead of the concern with the Scriptures which is seen in Christian and Islamic fundamentalism, there is an overwhelming stress on culture. The idea of the chosen people, one of the hallmarks of fundamentalism, is broadened and sharpened to include the whole sphere of race, language and culture. This emphasis on culture was the basis of the founding of the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS) by Keshav Baliram Hedgewar in 1925. Originally politics was free for the members of the RSS and it was avowedly anti-Muslim. Under Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar, the organization made

an unambiguous statement about political power couched in cultural terms. He claimed that the Hindu monopoly over power follows form the preeminence of the Hindu culture. Religion played very little role in the RSS scheme. The ultimate objective of the RSS is political domination through cultural homogenization. Alien materialistic ideologies of the West are rejected as the enemy of Hindu national culture which is pure and sublime. Today the RSS is assisted by several other fundamentalistic organizations like the *Vishwa Hindu Parishad*, the *Bajrang Dal* etc. and are squarely behind the Baratiya Janata Party which rules India with its own fundamentalist agenda.

In present-day India, fundamentalism and nationalism are indeed one. Going beyond the *Arya Samaj*, it valorizes the national culture of India. As in other fundamentalist movements, power, discipline, surveillance, supreme leader, etc. play their roles, except purity of religion. Religion is only a mask for gaining political clout. However, there are plenty of Hindus for whom this insular religiosity seems to be very appealing.

Conclusion

There are various other manifestations of fundamentalism in many world religions or religious confessions like Roman Catholicism, Judaism, Buddhism, etc. Unfortunately these cannot be dealt with in this short essay. What remains to be done is to find some common manifestations of fundamentalism. T. N. Madan has identified some common characteristics of fundamentalism world wide by choosing elements from two main fundamentalist movements, the Protestant Christian which we have discussed above and Islamic fundamentalism as symbolized by the Iranian Revolution which has become paradigmatic as being fundamentalist in contemporary discussions. The key ideas he has borrowed from Christian fundamentalism are: (1) affirmation of the inspiration, final authority, inerrancy, and transparency of scripture as the source of belief, knowledge, morals and manners; (2) recognition of the reactive character of fundamentalism: it is not a original impulse as, for example, orthodoxy is, but a reaction to a perceived threat or crisis; and (3) intolerance of dissent, implying monopoly over truth. From the Iranian Revolution he has identified: (1) cultural critique, that is, the

idea that all is not well with social or community life as lived at a particular time; (2) appeal to tradition, but in a selective manner that establishes a meaningful relationship between the past and the present, redefining or even inventing tradition in the process; (3) capture of political power and remodelling of the state for the achievement of the stated objectives; and (4) charismatic leadership (Madan 1997: 27-28). In this way he has been able to give a reasonable content and meaning to the difficult term fundamentalism. S.N. Eisenstadt in his perceptive study names another distinctive characteristic of modern Fundamentalism, namely, its "very Jacobin" nature" (1999: 2). Martin E. Marty says that another characteristic of fundamentalism is its "oppositionalism." According to him, fundamentalism takes form when members of already conservative or traditional movements experience threat from something or someone, be it modernity, secularization or the West, the infidel or the Great Satan. This oppositionalism is expressed by rejecting hermeneutics, pluralism and relativism (Marty 1992/3: 3-13). From a psychological point of view fundamentalism can arise through alienation: personal isolation, social marginalization, and losing ethical and cultural roots or more generally the loss of history. Such experiences are matched by a desire for certainty, for eternal truths, for a stable picture of the world. Fundamentalism here is the result of the experience of a lack of foundations in a very confusing world. A typical example that is given is the Islamic experience: the memory of the Arab-Islamic world empire which in its heyday was superior to all others, especially European and Christian peoples, is a strong one. The collapse of this world is a trauma for many Muslims. Moreover, European powers were able to become colonial lords over the Arab and Islamic world and it was the beginning of a series of humiliations for them. Furthermore, Islam understands itself as the divinely appointed religious and political order of the world and so as a religion of victors but now it is robbed of this destiny by unbelievers. It is also not able to cope with the phenomenon of modernity which is seen only as a threat because it comes again from the West (Mueller-Fahrenholz 1992/3: 15-16).

From this it is clear that fundamentalism is a very complex phenomenon. For example, the whole issue of fundamentalism and gender has not even been mentioned here (see Hawley 1994). It has

theological, psychological, sociological and political causes and ramifications. The question is, how is fundamentalism to be dealt with? There are no easy answers. Surely, fundamentalists should be made aware of the roots of freedom, pluralism and openness in their religious traditions. But the so-called progressives or liberals must also be made aware of the need for self-criticism in the face of any lazy adaptation to the spirit of the time and lack of religious substance, theological depth and binding ethics. Dialogue must be sought with fundamentalists and collaboration be striven for in both politics and social issues, in religion and theology. But what is the response when fundamentalism has joined itself with political, military and police powers or with clerical power? Here resolute resistance must be offered, both from within and without (Kueng 1992/3: 124). We shall have to live with fundamentalism against us, alongside us and even in us. The liberation of fundamentalists and non-fundamentalists for openness to reality is a world wide challenge.

References

Azis, Ahmad

1964 *Studies in Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Barr, James

1977 *Fundamentalism*, London: SCM Press.

Caplan, Lionel. ed.

1987 *Studies in Religious Fundamentalism*, New York: State University of New York Press.

Coleman, John

1992/3 "Global Fundamentalism: Sociological Perspectives," *Concilium.*

Coomarswamy, Ananda

1978 *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power in the Indian Theory of Government*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal.

Durrai, K.S.

1993 *The Impact of Islamic Fundamentalism*, Delhi: ISPCK.

Eisenstadt, S.N.

1999 *Fundamentalism, Sectarianism and Revolution*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gonda, J.

1969 *Ancient Indian Kingship from the Religious Point of View*, E.J. Brill, Leiden.

Hawley, John Stratton

1994 *Fundamentalism and Gender*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jones, Kenneth

1989 *Socio-religious Reform Movements in British India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kueng, Hans

1992/3 "Against Roman Catholic Fundamentalism," *Concilium*, 124.

Madan, T.N.

1997 *Modern Myths, Locked Minds*, Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Marty, Martin E.

1992/3 "What is Fundamentalism? Theological Perspectives," *Concilium*, 3-13.

Mueller-Fahrenholz, Geiko

1992/3 "What is Fundamentalism Today? Perspectives in Social Psychology," *Concilium*, 5-16.

New Catholic Encyclopedia, vol. 6,

s.v. "Fundamentalism," 223.

Shupe, Anton and Jeffrey Hadden (eds.)

1989 *Secularization and Fundamentalism Reconsidered*, vol. III, New York.

Singh, Khushwant

1963/66 *A History of the Sikhs*, vols. I, II, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Thapar, Romila

1989/2 "Imagined Religious Communities? Ancient History and the Modern Search for a Hindu Identity," *Modern Asian Studies*, 23.

The Encyclopedia of Religion, vol. 5,

s.v., "Evangelical and Fundamental Christianity," 190.

Article received: July 1, 2003
Article approved: July 16, 2003
No of words: 6,369

JPJRS 6/2 ISSN 0972-3331, July 2003 24-47

Fundamentalism: Biblical Perspectives

Scaria Kuthirakkattel SVD
Dept. of Scriptural Studies, JDV, Pune

Abstract: Tracing the roots and trends of fundamentalim and its tinges in the Bible, the author asks if the Catholic Church is an agent and perpetrator of fundamentlism. The author notes that in course of the New Testament era biases and prejudices become part of the New Testament. This is particularly prominent in Matthew and John. In the final part of the essay some pertinent, practical insights are offered.

Keywords: fundamentalism in the Bible, fundamentalism in the Church, biblical interpretation, foundational experience, Abba experience.

This essay on Fundamentalism from Biblical Perspectives is developed in three parts. First we try to understand the meaning and different nuances of fundamentalism in so far as the Bible is concerned. Secondly, we ask: Is there fundamentalism of a theological and/or religious nature in the Bible? Finally, what are the implications and imperatives of biblical fundamentalism?

I Tracing the Roots and Trends

In the first part of the article an earnest attempt is made to answer the following questions. (A) What is meant by the term, fundamentalism? What are its synonyms and antonyms? (B) Do we have tinges and traces of fundamentalism in the Bible? (C) Was the Catholic Church, especially its hierarchy, an agent and perpetrator of fundamentalism in its understanding of the Bible and in its application of punitive measures against scientists and biblical scholars? (D) What is meant by fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible in the official teaching of the Catholic Church (1993)?