

# Fundamentalism Not Limited to Islamists

Dear Editor,

In your Foreword (*PEHW*, Vo.1, No.2) and in relation to the phenomenon of fundamentalism and extremism, I observe that you have focused on modern violence linked to fundamentalist Islamists. It would be constructive in this regard to dwell also on fundamentalism developed in all three of the monotheistic faiths. Militant piety is active in Judaism (e.g. Zionism and ultra-orthodox Judaism) and among American Protestants (e.g. The National Association of Evangelicals, the Southern Baptist Convention and the more extremist group Christian Identity). Indeed, the term “Fundamentalism” was first coined and adopted by the American Protestants. It is also to be noted that, while fundamentalist Islamists are at odds with many an Islamic government, the Jewish and American Protestant fundamentalists constitute part of the government hierarchy in both Israel and the United States, which means that they pose a potential threat to world peace .

I feel that a comprehensive presentation of this worrying phenomenon would be more fruitful and would promote better means to coping with this crisis of our times, a crisis that is further amplified by short-sighted policies and manipulated by certain circles to achieve political, ideological and economic benefits to the detriment of international peace and human safety.

I take this opportunity to add a few thoughts on how to deal with this serious issue.

There is a pressing need to understand the underlying factors and motivating causes leading to the rise of fundamentalism, extremism and sometimes the related violence in all faiths. In one way, this phenomenon is a product of that bitter feeling in some circles of believers that their faith and doctrines are targeted for annihilation and extermination by modern scientific rationality or by another fundamentalist group or by both. This fear (which is not always justified) produces isolation and frustration, which, in turn, ignite extreme attitudes, and lead ultimately, with the aid of other catalyst factors, to violence. To combat such threatening developments, we need to adopt policies and approaches that conform with the very principles that we have adopted since the Age of Enlightenment, i.e. human rights and democracy (and not be in violation of these very humanistic achievements). The way ahead, therefore, is to build bridges, initiate dialogue and remove obstacles to cross-cultural communication as well as promote openmindedness and tolerance, the guarantors against suspicion and repulsion between different human groups. The West needs to understand

that intercultural misunderstanding (fueled mostly by misinformation), along with suppression and ignorance of other cultures, is damaging and will not eliminate harmful acts or beliefs that endanger us all. Rather the contrary, it further ignites hatred and sustains festering tensions. Humans have for a long time now realized that they are faced with two options, either to adopt non-ethical, coercive and primitive approaches (aided by, in our present time, sophisticated high-tech tools) or to opt for humanistic principles and peaceful, civilized means to solve conflicts. Civilized approaches to fundamentalism should outweigh the current overwhelming rude policies that encourage havoc, aggression and the law of the jungle. Our planet is unique in this universe. We need to keep it green and peaceful.

The central question that is posed before each of us, whether we are pragmatists, idealists, thinkers or decision-makers, is: do we really believe in and practice the basic fruits of modern times, namely, freedom, democracy and human rights? There is a need for a sincere answer by all.

Abdul Sahib Abdul Latif  
Vrije Universitet Brussel