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Fundamentalisms
— searching out
the truth

Policy and Christian Fundamentalism

Debt & Deficit: the Evolving of a Phobia

Perspectives on Private Schools



EDMONTON

SOCIAL PLANNING

COUNCIL

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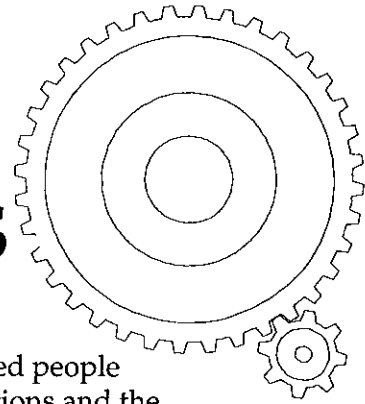
Mission

"The Edmonton Social Planning Council believes that all people should have the social rights and freedoms to live and work in an environment that enhances individual, family, and community growth without restricting the same rights and freedoms for others. The Council seeks to create, to advocate, and to support changes in policies, attitudes, and actions in order to enhance these social rights and freedoms."

Our Goals

- To undertake research into the nature and magnitude of social issues in the community.
To increase public awareness and understanding of current social issues and to exercise an independent voice in the community.
To encourage greater public participation in the development of social policies and in the implementation of programs.

THE MODERN MIND AND FUNDAMENTALISMS



*By John
McLean*

Our society is in a constant state of flux. It is constantly undergoing a process called modernization—the engine of which is technological growth. Technological growth is induced to bolster and transform the economy. During this process our institutions and culture are constantly transformed. Some institutional changes are directly involved in the process, such as the political, and others are changed through the filter down effect. Our world is in constant motion, and because of this rapidity we sense the precariousness of our world and its institutional arrangements. We also sense, in our activities and consciousness, the control, limitations and frustration of the rationality of technologically induced economic growth.

There are many responses to this constant state of flux called modernization—one response is to react against it, or resist modernization. Another response is to legitimate modernization. We all respond in one fashion or another, but they are primarily ideological responses—ideas that have a very narrow agenda.

In addition to this constant state of flux we find ourselves in, the average person finds life very alienating. Our institutions are very large and abstract, so we do not relate to them in any significant way. We value individualism to a great degree, however, with individualism comes the feeling of being alone in the world—alienated. Most of us feel this alienation daily, and one response is to develop that sense of home, privately, with our families (the institution of the family though has been in a crisis situation for the last few decades).

Another characteristic of our society is a sense of meaninglessness. Pre-modern societies generally had overarching religious meanings that explained and justified the society. A web of meanings was the glue

that held society together, that bonded people together, that legitimated the institutions and the patterns of daily life. These meanings also gave individual experience a sense of wholeness and purpose and human beings need purpose and meaning to live full and rich lives. When a society does not provide substantive meanings for its members, a crisis of meaning naturally occurs. I believe our society is now in a state of crisis as economic growth and deficit reduction seem to be the basis for our society. For individuals, in terms of meaning for their lives, it's like being on a diet of bread and water.

Technologically induced economic growth is the engine of modern society—it pervades every aspect of our lives. It also affects our way of thinking, our consciousness. Modern consciousness is very functional and mechanical. It is attached to the ticking of the clock, is very regimented, and structured. However, it limits the human imagination as it is machine-like. Bureaucracy is also a key phenomena in modern life—it also affects our thinking patterns. Think of the impersonal, alienating way bureaucracies run, and how they pervade every aspect of society and encircle the individual. Bureaucracy is a trap to many people.

Pre-modern societies had over-arching religious meanings that gave purpose for the suffering and evil present in the world. The human condition has not changed—there is still suffering, sickness and death. However, religions that made the human condition easier to bear are now put in jeopardy. Modern society is in religious crisis. We live in a secular society and religious practice is now a private affair. Our public life has been stripped of meanings that bureaucratic and technological structures cannot replace. There are strong responses to this sterility in public life.

There are a multitude of responses to the situation we are in—these responses are realistic given the context of modern life,

and that no society previously has been in such an overwhelming situation in terms of a lack of meaning. These responses though are desperately lacking.

The subject of many articles in this publication is what we call religious fundamentalisms. A religious fundamentalism is one which is framed around a few ideological principles that become the agenda for reshaping our society, politically, economically or socially. Fundamentalist religions, on one level, are an attempt to recapture that sense of community and meaning that is lacking in the fabric of society. Modern society very much shapes all of us. Whether we reject secularity, bureaucratization, and anything else in modern society, our response, in part, is shaped by what is around us.

The average person does not appreciate the barrenness of public life, the confinement of bureaucracies, the alienating effect of daily life, and the sense of meaninglessness. In recapturing religious meaning, fundamentalist religions tend to shape their spiritual life around a narrow agenda—in other words, the new religions mirror modern society in many ways. Tradition is abhorred; overt rituals are rejected (however, all of life is made up of ritualistic behavior); individualism is revered, whereby, each person may have a personal relationship with Jesus, and so on. The religious texts are literalized (the modern individual tends to see things in black and white), the result being, not a religious tradition with many layers of meaning, but an ideology, a set of ideas, that forms the basis of the new religion. Furthermore, since public life is so barren of meaning, these new religions seek to evangelize and project their ideas onto public life.

The secular fundamentalist is the other side of the same

coin. The secular fundamentalist also has an agenda that revolves around one or two themes: think of the some of the key words we are constantly bombarded with: racism; power struggle; sexism; ecology. Ideologies are built around these themes, and are a response to what individuals see in modern life. However, they also mirror modern life. They tend to be scant on meaning as they literalize the complexities of life in their effort to effect change in society.

For instance, the issue of cultural diversity in modern society seems to be constantly reduced to issues of racism. The rich, textured subject of what it means to be a woman or a man is now reduced to issues of sexuality.

Work and the fulfillment of the human being is now reduced to issues of competitiveness and economic gain. The goal of life on earth is now reduced to having a good pension, or saving the forest. The integrity of the family is now reduced to the realization of self-identity. In our efforts to transcend the day to day realities in our search for meaning and meaningful activities, our agendas have become very narrow and limited.

Public culture is devoid of nourishment for societal members. I do not believe it can be animated with an agenda of ideas that serve a fragment of our society. Our public institutions—political, social, economic, cultural, religious—are in a state of crisis. I believe we need to grapple with the barrenness of our society, so that we begin to cultivate a broad and thorough understanding of human needs, and how our public institutions should be shaped around the complexity of human needs. ✽

John McLean is a social planner with the Edmonton Social Planning Council.



Fundamentalisms

in a GLOBAL CONTEXT

The gigantic stadium is filled with tens of thousands of people. Marching bands and cheer leaders are entertaining the crowd. Balloons and live doves are released bringing cheers from the people. Is this the Super-Bowl or the Grey Cup?

Blaring trumpets, rumbling drums and rousing speeches from popular sports personalities and well-known politicians lift the crowd's anticipation of the arrival of the guest of honor. This is the Grand Festival of one of Japan's many New Religions in 'Tokyo Stadium' where believers are gathered to welcome the arrival of their Messiah. When he finally arrives, everyone jumps to their feet with a prolonged standing ovation. Then the messianic sermon begins. The preacher reviews the plight of despairing individuals and the decline of Japanese morality since the war and he condemns the evils rampant in contemporary society from corruption in high places to the pollution of the large cities. Then he offers a simple solution which will cure all illnesses, restoring families, reviving the national spirit and creating world peace. Other ways to salvation will fall. The old religions like Buddhism, Confucianism and Shinto are moribund. The one and only way to happiness is what the Messiah himself offers. When the sermon ends to tumultuous applause, the bands begin again to play as the black Cadillac glides across the field to take the Messiah away.

This typical 'Tokyo Stadium' scene is repeated over and over again in countries around the world. It could be a festival of the Soka Gargai sect in Japan, or the Unification Church in Korea, or a Shi'ite rally in Iran, or a Pentecostal revival meeting in the southern U.S.

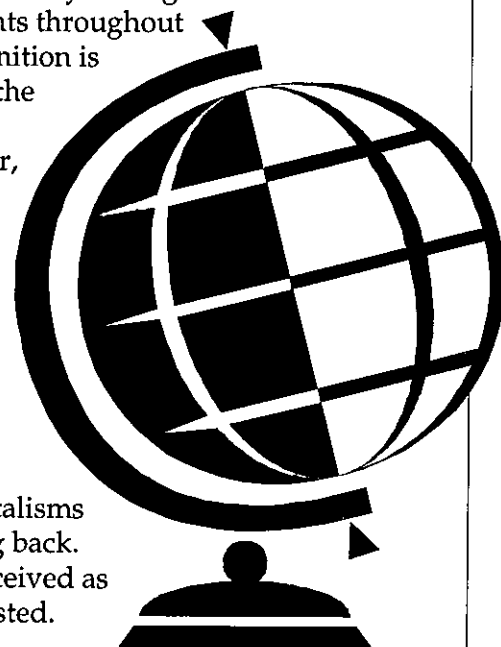
The University of Chicago has initiated a major study of fundamentalisms throughout the world. Volume One of a projected five volume series of the Chicago Fundamentalist

Project is entitled "Fundamentalisms Observed," and includes 14 articles documenting the characteristics of fundamentalisms. Besides Protestant fundamentalism in North America, the articles examine fundamentalisms in Hinduism, Theravada Buddhism, Islamic resurgence in Malaysia, the Confucian revival in East Asia and new religions in Japan.

Even though the word 'fundamentalism' originates within North American Protestantism, it is applicable to a global context. Even the original meaning of the word continues to be relevant. The word originated in the context of protest against the corrupting influences of 'modern' scholarship, as Protestant leaders early in this century wrote essays to delineate the 'fundamentals' of the faith. In 1920, the editor of a Northern Baptist newspaper wrote that a "fundamentalist" is a person willing to do "battle royal" for the fundamentals of religious belief. The name has stuck and it still aptly points to the militant attitude of fighting back against the corrosive effects of modern, secular life.

The Chicago Fundamentalist Project acknowledges the tremendous diversity among fundamentalist movements throughout the world. No single definition is adequate to do justice to the variety of particular religious traditions. However, there are enough 'family resemblances' to argue that fundamentalisms are a characteristic way in which religions around the world cope with the changes of the modern world. The language of militancy seems especially apt. Fundamentalisms see themselves as fighting back. The modern world is perceived as a threat, and must be resisted.

By Bruce Miller



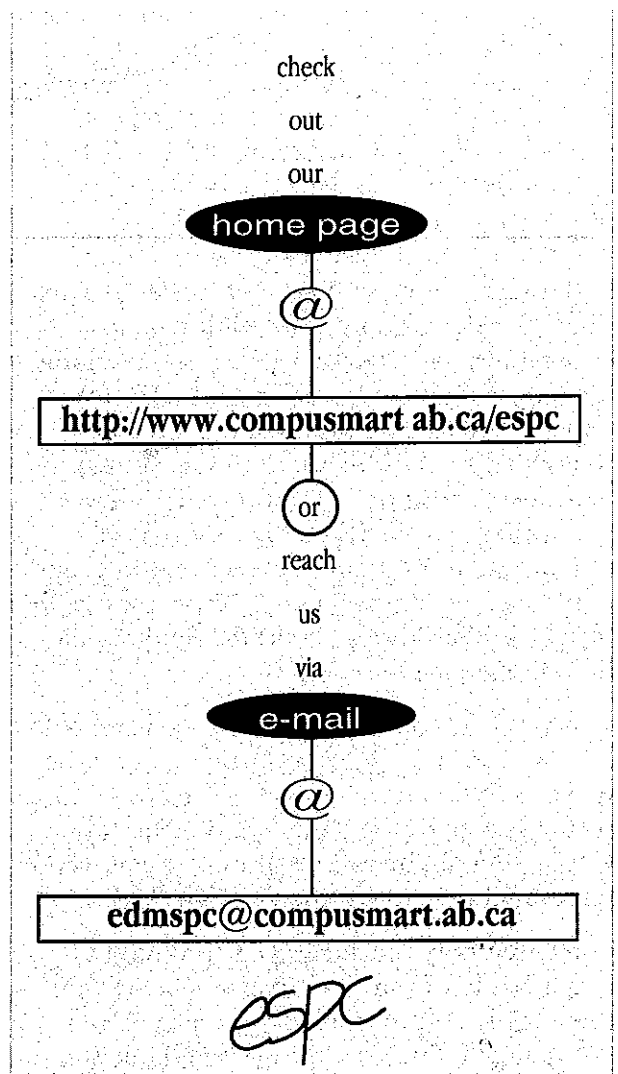
The many crises of modernity have created for people everywhere a crisis of meaning and identity: people uprooted from traditional communities by urbanization and the global economy, the colonization of indigenous peoples bringing westernization and modernization, and the conditions of misery experienced by millions of oppressed peoples throughout the world. In Latin America uprooted families living in slums at the mercy of criminals or government predators are a fertile seedbed for fundamentalist proselytism. There may be good reasons for criticizing fundamentalisms but one cannot overlook the fact that for countless uprooted individuals who are experiencing a crisis of meaning and identity what fundamentalisms offer is attractive indeed. They have the opportunity to fight back. And in fighting back, fundamentalist movements name and dramatize the threat of the enemy. The enemy may be modern science or secular humanism and identified by Christian fundamentalists as the Antichrist or identified by Islamic fundamentalists as "the Great Satan." The enemy is identified and suitable weapons can be selected to fight back. In most cases the appropriate weapon is some selection of doctrines from the particular religious tradition and the retrieval of these fundamentals as the answer to the threats of our time. Other characteristics of this battle are the heightened sense of boundaries—the separation of believers from outsiders, and the highly selective use of modern technology and the use of mass media. What justifies everything in the fighting back is the ultimate reality of the spiritual battle. It is a fight under God or Allah or some transcendent reference, and this becomes particularly powerful when believers see themselves as instruments for carrying out God's or Allah's plans against challengers.

The strength of fundamentalisms cannot be denied. They are responding to the personal crises of individuals and they offer a strategy for coping with the crises of our age. However the individualism which is its strength is also its weakness and danger. Besides the fact that individuals are vulnerable to manipulation by mass movements, fundamentalisms do not address the real causes of alienation and uprootedness and crisis of identity. The very militancy which sets the fundamentalist over against the world undercuts the sense of responsibility which would lead to the alleviation of societal problems and the challenge of

reshaping communities. There is no question that believers gathered in 'Tokyo Stadium' caught up in the rapturous words of their messiah have found a solution for their personal identity crisis, but on balance what does such fulfillment mean when the world is disintegrating. It is like Nero playing his violin while Rome burns.

The task of understanding fundamentalisms in the global context is just beginning. The rise of fundamentalisms must be taken seriously by people who inherit the spirit of modernity. Fundamentalisms are symptomatic of modernity's failure. But if fundamentalisms are spawned by the disintegration of communities it is doubtful if the individualism of fundamentalisms can be a force for the recreation of responsible communities. ✧

L. Bruce Miller is minister of Robertson-Wesley United Church, a Commissioner of the Quality of Life Commission, A Fellow of the Jesus Seminar, and a lecturer at St. Stephen's College and the University of Alberta.



Christian Fundamentalism and social policy in *Alberta*

Christian fundamentalism and Alberta politics have a long and intimate relationship. For 36 years until 1971, the province was governed by the Social Credit League, a political movement dominated by fundamentalist preachers William Aberhart and Ernest Manning. While the influence of fundamentalists declined after the election of Peter Lougheed's Conservatives in 1971, they have reasserted themselves since Ralph Klein's election to the leadership of the Conservative Party in 1992. 'Moral' issues such as book banning and abortion have received considerable attention, while the overall philosophy of the government reflects at least to some extent the American religious right-wing's emphasis upon hard work, self-reliance, and the moral superiority of the capitalist system.

The political stances taken by modern American fundamentalist leaders such as Oral Roberts, former presidential candidate Pat Robertson, and Moral Majority leader Jerry Falwell have created a popular myth that Christian fundamentalism is *inherently* pro-capitalist and anti-welfare state.

Such a conclusion is erroneous. Alberta's Social Credit League was initially victorious in 1935 on a platform geared towards the less affluent majority which was suffering economically during the Great Depression. Their central promise of 'scrip' grants to help bolster the economy was a variant of Keynesian economics, normally associated with left of centre politics. NDP hero Tommy Douglas, himself a Baptist minister, flirted with Social Credit during this period. He was endorsed by Aberhart and Alberta Social Credit in his successful bid for a seat in parliament in Saskatchewan in 1935.

The radical economic reforms promised by Aberhart proved impossible to implement, as courts ruled they lay outside the province's jurisdiction. Aberhart's untimely death left

the premier's chair open for his assistant, Ernest Manning, who also took over the bible-thumping CFCN radio show.

Manning steered the Alberta government on a moderate conservative path, with a heavy dose of Christian rhetoric. Until the last years of his regime, Alberta spent a considerably smaller proportion of its budget on social welfare than its neighbors, and what help the poor and the distraught did receive was accompanied by much moralizing and disapproval.

Nevertheless, Manning's Alberta did not effectively resist the growth of the post-war Canadian welfare state. The province accepted federal assistance for provincial social programs through the 1966 Canada Assistance Plan Act, which created Canada's first national welfare scheme.

Indeed, in the late 1960s, Manning paid considerable attention to social policy, especially through his plan for upgrading the 'human resources' of Alberta. While castigating those who make the error of defining, "their utopia in collectivistic and socialist terms," he emphasized that, "the time has come for humanitarian values and social concern to be registered in a much more explicit and positive way."

Though this outpouring of social concern can be ascribed partly to a fear of communism, it would be churlish and inaccurate for non-fundamentalists to pretend that it was not also related to compassionate Christian aspects of the social credit movement which remained important if subordinate to the free market philosophy.

During this period, social spending increased markedly. Several innovative programs were initiated, including a program of community development among the desperately poor rural Metis, and the preventive social service

*By Jonathan
Murphy*

program, which subsidized locally controlled voluntary preventive social service initiatives. Manning's emphasis on local community responsibility to identify and deal with social concerns was an interesting precursor to today's communitarian movement.

Good times and heavy religion don't seem to go together. By 1971 the province was awash in oil, and the small town fundamentalist-dominated Socreds were thrown out in favor of Peter Lougheed's urban and urbane Progressive Conservatives. For 20 years, until the money ran out, fundamentalist influence on government was, if not absent, at least invisible.

When Christian politics re-emerged as part of Klein's ruling coalition, it had changed considerably. Gone was Manning's pious, small 'c' conservatism. Today's Christian fundamentalist politicians espouse a radical, punitive ideology virtually indistinguishable from the American brand.

The prescriptive view of Christian ethics justifies attempts to force compliance of the whole population through political organization and lobbying. Key elements of this ideology include moral endorsement of capitalism "the free enterprise system is clearly outlined in the book of Proverbs in the Bible;" an opposition to welfare based on Biblical exegesis such as, "If any would not work, neither should he eat;" and an effort to preserve the 'traditional family' through a concerted attack upon mothers working outside the home, opposition to birth control education, hostility towards employment equity, and antipathy towards single parent families.

Red Deer M.L.A. and labor minister Stockwell Day is the most senior representative of the religious right in the Klein government. His extensive comments on social issues, most dating from before his appointment to cabinet in 1992, provide a valuable insight into the social agenda of many of today's Alberta fundamentalists.

Day opposes improved social assistance on the grounds that there are many jobs available—the problem being people's unwillingness to work. "Socialistic thinking has perpetuated an idea that some jobs should be beneath our dignity. If it's minimum wage or if it involves waiting on

someone or cleaning up somebody else's mess, that's beneath our dignity."

His rosy view of waitressing extended to justifying opposition to employment equity programs for women, on the grounds there is a restaurant in Edmonton with a waitress, "earning about \$60,000 a year...and really enjoying that."

Pursuing the theme of family unity, he noted that, "the percentage of single parent households with children between the ages of 12 and 20 is significantly associated with rates of both violent crime and burglary." He also reported that a Statistics Canada study showed, "one in 18 separated women were assaulted compared with one in 56 divorced women and one in 500 married women." He did not point out that a primary reason for the marriage breakdown might have been the spousal assaults.

His support for harsher punishment for criminals again echoes the retributive approach of the American religious right. Day has called for more young offenders to be tried in adult court and for the establishment of boot camps. During public debate over the fate of accused U. S. murderer Charles Ng, he asked the government to intervene in federal jurisdiction; "maybe arrange for a work detail for Mr. Ng to be walking along the U.S. border someday...if nothing else, ship the man to Ottawa."

After being appointed to cabinet, Day weighed in to support rookie fellow Red Deer M.L.A. and fundamentalist Victor Doerksen, who demanded that John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* be pulled from Alberta schools because of its profanities such as "god-awful" and "god-damn lazy." Day pointed out, "I think it's clear most Canadians profess to be of the Christian faith, are sending their children to school, and they don't need to be exposed to the name of Jesus Christ being taken in a blasphemous sense."

Most recently, the minister was involved in a bitter and ultimately unsuccessful showdown with caucus and cabinet colleagues over abortion. Day strongly supported a group, headed by Joanne Hatton (wife of *Alberta Report* publisher Link Byfield), which was campaigning to eliminate "taxpayer funded" abortions.

Continued on page 11—Day

SECULAR SOURCES *of* *Fundamentalism*

Over the past few years, I have experienced a growing 'dis-ease' in my mind. I don't like its implications because it demands such a fundamental rethinking of our public life and calls into question many of the political and social ideals that have framed how I have tended to understand issues of public debate on religion, religious life, and attempts by religious movements to influence social policy.

My 'dis-ease' has two sources which I will describe here.

The Anorexia of Meaning

The first is the sea-change I have witnessed in the minds of students in the last few years. Ninety per cent of the students in my classes, mainly in religious studies, come with completely unfurnished minds. The sources of Western culture, Athens and Jerusalem, are unknown to them. They do not, even in the most superficial way, identify Moses with the Jewish people, the Bible or the sojourn in Egypt; events that play such a prominent role in the formation of the tradition of Western ideas. The name of Jesus is primarily a curse, and the seal of the prophets, Muhammed (pbh), has resonance solely through the lens provided by current mass media.

The liberal humanist tradition, stretching from Athens through the renaissance and the 18th century down to today, has not fared any better. The key concepts, thinkers and artists of history are simply not a normal part of the circle of fellowship of our students.

My sense is that this is a peculiar situation in the history of culture. The central vocation of virtually all of the other cultures with which I am familiar is to open up its sources of meaning for the young and to educate them in its complex layers. They seek, in many and varied ways, to teach their

children the stories, texts, songs, and ideas which are the landscape of meaning. Initiation into the heart of culture continues to be a paramount task for the whole of the human family except for those of us in the West.

This sea-change doesn't stop with the barrenness of the landscape of meaning. Most students think of community as a brief set of relationships which they put together based on choice, ideological fancy, and convenience. Here today, gone tomorrow. I don't mean to suggest they don't grieve over lost relationships because they certainly do. They, like most of my generation, are good at fraternal relationships. As parents, we have a fragmented and distant memory of community, but our children experience fraternity at best.

There is another ingredient in this curious mixture. In the academy we have a three-dollar word for this dominant method of education. We call it the hermeneutic of suspicion. Much of our education—at least in the cultural and historical spheres of life—is through the critical lens with which we view and teach anything and everything having to do with values and meaning.

We only open up the sources of tradition, the landscape of meaning and value, by critical examination. I call this the Soviet method, since colleagues of mine from the former Soviet Union speak so eloquently of their efforts to reconstruct traditional sources of understanding solely from the narrow ideological reductionism to which they have been exposed. That, of course, is a kind of archeological exercise. One endeavors to construct a world of meaning based on the scraps one gleans from the criticism of those who, hating the sources

By David Goa

of Western culture in Athens and Jerusalem, feed a regular diet of reductionism and one dimensional criticism.

Just before the turn of the century, the eminent thinker about our social life Emile Durkheim argued that the "meshes of the social fabric...are so dangerously slack" because we have created a society where egoism and anomie shape the new character (see Emile Durkheim, *His Life and Work: A Historical and Critical Study*, Steven Lukes, Penguin Books [1973]: 198).

What choice is there other than egoism when one has no experience of community and family? What choice is there other than anomie, a dull sense of the meaninglessness of all we think, say and do, for those who are blessed with some natural depth of spirit and mind, when there is no connection with those men and women through the ages who have struggled with meaning. Self indulgence, suicide, and fundamentalism are all responses to the same barren cultural and social landscape.

The Destruction of Public Discourse

The second source of my 'dis-ease' is born of my observations of communities which have increasingly been seen as seized by fundamentalism over the last few years. These communities include the full range of religions: Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Buddhist, Hindu, and the religions of the First Peoples of Canada. Let's consider the Muslim community since it bears the brunt of the world's virulent reactions to fundamentalism.

My concern is largely with the Muslim community in Canada. Here I come to the essential point of this essay. The Muslim community I know is one of extraordinary diversity. We have Muslims in Canada from the Arab world, from Bosnia and virtually all cultural and national communities including refugees from Somali and the Kurdish world. The large wings of Islam, Sunni and Shia, as well as various smaller wings of Islam, make Canada their home, some by choice and others as refugees.

Within a number of these communities you need not look very far to find a full range of paradigms of understanding of Islam, its theology and philosophy, its laws and

practice. Traditionalists, modernists, liberals, conservatives, secularists and fundamentalists are easily found. Several dozen cultural frameworks and virtually all the paradigms of interpretation of this remarkable revelation and tradition are present with their clear voices.

Yet, amidst the global crises that we hear about endlessly in the media, we are led to think of Islam as one dimensional, univocal and virulent. Why? Consider the situation we have created as our public culture. In our educational system since the 1950s we have deliberately and with consummate skill bracketed or exorcised virtually all serious consideration of meaning and value that draws on our cultural memory and tradition, with its attachments to Jerusalem and Athens. The exceptions perhaps are the civil values of individualism, instrumental reason, and the ultimate values of progress and democracy.

The choice we made, however, was to expunge the sources of these worlds of meaning from our teaching because we thought ignorance of them would lead to tolerance of the new and growing pluralism. This has resulted in reducing public life to the marketplace and has transformed the many forms of value into an issue solely of global economic expediency. And in its most recent stage, our society has even reduced the individual into a set of corporatist fraternities as John Raulston Saul recently pointed out in the 1995 Massey lectures, *The Unconscious Civilization* (1995).

Clothing the Naked Public Square

So we have a naked public square, a creature largely of the political left and right. Both have conspired to render the discussion of meaning and the presence of cultural tradition mute. Both have idealized the individual as if he or she exists separate from community and was of value only when freed of traditional frameworks of meaning. Both have idealized progress and expunged tradition.

Both have subjected us to a method of consideration which always places values and meaning in a suspicious light. There has been no place for a discussion of the complex issues facing us at the end of the millennium. Discussion of family, for example—from

both the left and the right—is reduced to the frantic cries of single issue politics.

A society which has lost its capacity to regard both the individual and the community, to appreciate instrumental reason and the human imagination, and hold the appetite for progress in check with the sustaining values of tradition, it seems to me, to prepare the landscape of various forms of corporate self-interest that verge on fascism. Fundamentalism is another response to such a barren landscape.

My suspicion is that our naked public square form of secularization, wedded as it has become to the corporatism of both the left and the right, is itself a form of secular fundamentalism. The only way many religious people see to combat the devastation to their lives and to recover the commitment to community, while remaining in touch with a world of value and meaning larger than their own self-interest is through the reestablishment of a religious life. Whether that religious life will simply sputter in a momentary fundamentalism or grow into the full flower of a religious tradition remains to be seen. How we re-shape our civil and public culture in the face of these concerns will go a long way in framing the options. ✽

David Goa is the Curator of Folklife at the Provincial Museum of Alberta.

Day—Continued from page 8

Although Day is certainly a powerful member of cabinet, his defeat on the abortion issue suggests there are limits to his influence. On issues such as welfare reform the Calgary-based business interests which are driving the government fiscal agenda are only too happy to receive the endorsement of their fundamentalist colleagues. But when the Christian right attempts to interfere with popular freedoms, and the resultant divisive conflict endangers the economic and social restructuring required of the Alberta Advantage, it is quickly pulled into line.

In tracing the political history of fundamentalism in Alberta, one is struck by an apparent contradiction. The Christian Right justifies its political program, including restrictions on civil liberties, on a supposedly literal and inerrant reading of the Bible. Yet Stockwell Day's free market predilections are in almost direct contradiction with the egalitarian and economic interventionist philosophy espoused by William Aberhart, that other Alberta fundamentalist. If we are to accept the fundamentalist premise, one of them must be wrong. ✽

Jonathan Murphy is executive director of the Population Research Laboratory at the University of Alberta. He contributed to Trojan Horse, a collection of essays on Klein's Alberta published in 1995. This article is partly based on his research for that book.

The Edmonton Social Planning Council has other publications to offer...

Choosing Quality Childcare – A Guide For Newcomers

This is a 36 page guide to all the childcare options: day care centres; family dayhomes; private caregivers and out-of-school care centres. It also includes a 12-minute video which highlights things to look for when you are shopping for childcare. Both the manual and the video will be released by the Edmonton Social Planning Council in late March, 1996. (Available through many agencies free of charge, call for information)

The Family Budgeting Guide (on sale now for \$10.00)

This book has been completely revised and republished with up-to-date costs of raising a family or living without a family in 1995. There are lists for basic necessities, sample budgets and tables to help people determine their income needs and spot over-expenditures. (regularly \$20.00 now half price plus \$3.00 shipping and handling)





FUNDAMENTALISM:

a feminist critique

By Gail
Allan

Right-wing fundamentalism presents a profound concern for women, particularly those who affirm a feminist perspective. I view this concern from several aspects: the opposition of the fundamentalist "world-view" to the values and visions claimed by feminism; the direct attack on feminism and the women's movement by those proclaiming a fundamentalist ideology; the implications of fundamentalism for the daily reality of women's lives. In addition, since I write as a Christian feminist, I have a particular concern for the way that right-wing fundamentalism, especially as we have experienced it in North America, claims divine authority to sanctify its claims, and in the process limits women's religious and moral agency.

I understand right-wing fundamentalism as an ideology which seeks the security of certain "fundamental" beliefs or values, in response to the apparent chaos of a rapidly changing world. Representatives of the Christian Right, for example, speak of "the truth" as an objective reality to be discovered and accepted (David Wilson, "Grassroots America: The Christian Right marches on," *United Church Observer*, 58:11, June 1995). This truth is generally derived from a literal interpretation of scripture or other source of "law." The result is a perception, as in any fundamentalism, that there is one right way of being and acting in the world, and a tendency to demonize the other—whatever and whoever falls outside "our way." There is also a tendency to locate authority in an outside power, to which obedience is due.

The North American manifestation of fundamentalism, largely identified with the Christian Right, identifies these fundamentals with the values and structures of life in the "Christian culture" of the decades before so many "others" began to claim a voice in society. Therefore, it is a return to these values and structures, in family, church, government and every other institution, that is sought,

including clearly-defined gender roles, patriarchal authority structures, and an ethic of individual responsibility.

The modern women's movement, though by no means without historical precedents, represents a decisive break with the values and structures fundamentalism seeks to reassert. Feminism is founded in a validation of the experience of those who have been defined as *other*, by virtue of gender, race, class, or sexual orientation, and places authority not in a single outside source, but in communities who search for truth in a dialogue of present experiences, the wisdom of the past (including, but not limited to that found in scriptures), and analysis which draws on many fields of knowledge. For Christian feminists, this means an interpretation of scripture that places it in the context of experience, and may uncover a variety of meanings in the text, some liberating and some oppressive.

The values that feminism claims are justice, compassion, mutuality, diversity and community. These require a celebration of many ways of being, and a willingness to respect and engage difference. They are values which challenge structures that create relationships of domination and subordination, insisting on the need for transformation of all social, political and economic institutions to meet the needs and include the voices of those who have been marginalized in the existing order. Thus change is understood to be not only unavoidable, but a necessary source of creativity, and feminists concerned about such issues as poverty and violence seek not a return to a former time, but new ways of living that will



address the root causes of problems, from the perspective of societal as well as individual responsibility.

However, it is the fear of change that fuels right wing fundamentalism, and as both Robin Morgan, and Susan Faludi have noted, movements generated by fear always seek a scapegoat (Robin Morgan, *The Anatomy of Freedom: Feminism, Physics, and Global Politics*, 1984 and Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*, 1991). Throughout history, women have been the scapegoat for men's most deep-seated fears—of the body, of sexuality, of loss of control. Now the women's movement as a whole has been named the scapegoat not only for men's sense of lost power, and for the declining influence of conservative Christianity in North America, but also for all the ills of a society undergoing deep and traumatic change, much of it rooted in a global process of economic restructuring. This backlash focuses on "the family" as the object of its concern, claiming that feminism has resulted in the destruction of the family, which has led to society's problems. The message is that it is women's participation in the economy that creates unemployment and delinquency, women's insistence on relationships of mutuality rather than submission that leads to family breakdown and divorce, women's demands for control over their bodies and sexuality that threatens morality. Fundamentalism proclaims itself 'pro-family' and in this guise seeks a return to structures in which men have power over women (and white, heterosexual males over all other people), and children are taught values which legitimate this authority. Yet there is no evidence that the women's movement has ever been 'anti-family' if family is a place where people grow in loving and mutual relationships, free of violence, repression and abuse.

It is clear that from a feminist perspective, the ideology of right wing fundamentalism and the backlash it has promoted, has specific, damaging effects on women, and all others who do not meet its narrowly defined norm. Suggestions that women's economic role should be limited to home, family and community voluntarism deny not only equality rights, but the reality of women's increasing poverty. Such views play into the

hands of neo-liberal economic forces which in the name of deficit reduction and competitiveness remove such measures as pay equity legislation, and cut back on social services, eliminating jobs largely held by women and adding to the burden they are expected to bear for the community. An ideology rooted in fear and anger, which treats women as the problem, or even the enemy, and upholds structures of domination, cannot fail to contribute to the violence that women experience in their homes and communities, as well as to the violence experienced by gays and lesbians, racial and religious minorities, and others who fall outside the fundamentalist definition of acceptable cultural values. There is also a disturbing tendency in these ideologies to generate horizontal violence among those named as *other*. Thus we see women who have found security in traditional gender roles and models of power pitted against those who wish to encourage a wide variety of possibilities for women's lives; women attending the Beijing Women's Conference with the goal of resisting its commitments are just one recent example. Men who have been impoverished by an economic system which does not need their labor are encouraged to direct their frustration at women who are even more impoverished by the same system. The potential of oppressed and marginalized people to work in solidarity for social justice, frightening as it is to those whose interests are served by right wing fundamentalism, is therefore diminished.

It is however, precisely through acts of solidarity by 'unlikely coalitions of justice-seeking friends that we will build communities which can offer alternatives to the injustice and brokenness of the modern world (Mary Hunt, *Fierce Tenderness: A Feminist Theology of Friendship*, 1992). It is not by withdrawing into the protective custody of absolute answers from the past, but by welcoming the complexity and the challenges of conversation among diverse voices, that we will create new life for the future. ✧

Gail Allan has studied community development and theology, and has worked in development and social justice education. She recently completed a thesis titled "In Our Own Voices: Creating Feminist Theologies in Canada," a case study of the Task Group on Issues Surrounding Sexism, Imagery and Language of Alberta and Northwest Conference of the United Church of Canada, of which she is a member.

justify expenditure cuts. The treasurer's last budget speech suggested a deficit of over half a billion dollars. Yet nine months later Albertans are told that there has been a mis-estimate of over a billion dollars, so that the surplus is likely to be 573 million. This story is a repeat of the events of the last few years; massive overestimation of the deficit. The treasurer refers to his conservative approach to revenue estimation as an "insurance policy." But who pays the costs of that policy and who reaps the benefits of the ensuing deficit figures?

A full answer would require a detailed historical analysis of the Province's revenues and expenditures. A cursory examination shows that Alberta's taxes have been considerably lower than in all other provinces for many years, a feature that particularly benefits the wealthy. And the only significant expenditure that has been seriously out of line with the patterns in other provinces has been very high levels of economic and industrial "development" expenditure (amounting to about \$18 billion over the last ten years, and annual expenditures up to seven times higher than the average of the other provinces). That item not only includes Alberta's infamous bailouts of the likes of Swan Hills, NovAtel, Gainers and Magcan, but it includes consistent and massive support to agriculture and the resource-based industries. For example, the oil and gas industry has received substantial tax breaks such that if the oil and gas industry in 1993 had been paying tax at the rate they were in 1983, we estimate that royalties received by the province would have been \$1.16 billion more than was actually collected. That would have almost wiped out the 1994 deficit.

Compare the treatment of industry to that of ordinary Albertans. Unwritten moral agreements with the poor, students and seniors are ignored, and these groups are forced to pay a disproportionate share toward removing the deficit. Those affected by changes in social assistance programs are facing average cuts of over \$3,800 each year. Alberta's 180,000 seniors face average annual cuts of more than \$540 while seniors with incomes greater than \$25,000 face cuts of at least \$1,450.

Yet tax holidays to the oil patch are not even debated. The government appointed Albertan Tax Reform Commission (1994) didn't consider resource revenues. Formal loan agreements with Wall and Bay Street bankers are likewise treated as non-negotiable. Unlike the Socreds in 1937, who chose to renegotiate their loan agreements with international financiers, the current government chose to cut the deficit by insisting that the weakest members of society bore a disproportionate share of the burden.

Politicians of all parties seem to accept the "facts" as presented in the province's budget and the Public Accounts. The province has danced to the beat of the accountants' claim that there is a fiscal crisis and that public spending must be reduced to get our fiscal house in order. Yet the assumptions and biases in the accounts, promoted by an accounting profession whose allegiance is to the rich and powerful, are unrecognized. Unwarranted acquiescence to the partisan expertise of accountants and their pessimistic pictures of the state of the province's finances has created a phobia about deficits and debt, foreclosing reasoned discussion about public policy towards health care, education, social assistance and the role of government in an international economy. Let's talk about what are sensible strategies for the province and not be misled by incomplete and fiscally conservative Public Accounts. *

David J. Cooper is Certified General Accountants Professor of Accountancy at the University of Alberta and Dean Neu is Associate Professor of Accounting at the University of Calgary. Details of their calculations are in their paper "The Politics of Debt and Deficit:" published in The Trojan Horse, edited by G. Harrison and G. Laxer (Black Rose Books, 1995).

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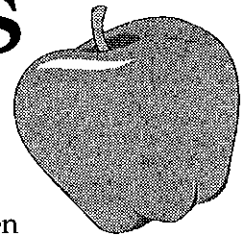
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perspectives on

Private Schools



Canada, for better or worse, has no constitutional impediments in place which would prevent governments, federal or provincial, from providing assistance and support to religious activities, projects or organizations. The absence of restrictions of this type has made it possible for governments in five provinces, to decide as a matter of public policy, to provide some financial assistance to private or independent schools. While not all of these private schools are religious in nature, many of them are.

It has been estimated that enrolment in private schools in Canada has grown by over 90 per cent between 1971 and 1996, from approximately 135,000 students to over 260,000. Most of this growth has taken place in Québec, Ontario and British Columbia, three provinces which have long histories of private or independent schools. In Alberta there are just under 20,000 students enrolled at present in private schools, accounting for about 3.9 per cent of the total school enrolment. This represents an increase of about 14,000 students since 1971 when the enrolment was under 6,000 and accounted for under two per cent of the total enrolment. It is estimated that of the approximately 200 private schools in Alberta, approximately three quarters of them are affiliated with or operated by a religious denomination.

This phenomenal growth in private school enrollment and in the number of private schools, has been taking place, for the most part, at a time when the overall number of students in public schools has been declining. Between 1971 and 1986 the enrollment in public schools declined by almost 18 per cent to approximately 4.65 million students. During this same period it is estimated that enrollment in private schools increased by over 60 per cent to about 234,000. Since 1986

the numbers in public schools have been growing steadily and now total about 5.2 million students.

These gross figures should be examined carefully however, before conclusions are drawn. In 1971 private school enrollment represented approximately 2.4 per cent of the total school enrollment in Canada. In spite of the huge changes in the ensuing 15 years, by 1986 private school enrollment only accounted for about 4.8 per cent of the total enrollment. In other words only about 2 per cent of the decline in public school enrollment in this period resulted from a move to private schools. If all students enrolled in private schools in 1986 were moved to public schools there would still have been an overall decline in school enrollments in Canada of approximately 16 per cent. Clearly, the most significant element accounting for the drop in student numbers in public schools was the decline in the number of school age children as the offspring of baby-boom parents graduated. Working with the estimates of enrollments in private and public schools in 1996, if we were to close all private schools we would still have a decrease of about seven per cent in the overall figures from 1971. While the increase in the number of students enrolled in private schools in Canada in this period has been quite substantial, it cannot, by itself, account for the decline in enrollments in public schools.

Nor can the funding of private schools be seen as a drain on public monies. In five provinces, Ontario included, no grants or financial support are provided by the provincial governments to private schools. Indeed, were private schools in Ontario closed and all students transferred to public schools, the government would be compelled to provide approximately \$400 million in additional grants, per annum, to enable public school systems to educate these students. Similarly in Alberta, where

*By Frank
Peters Ph.D.*

some grant money is provided to private schools, the government is able to save approximately \$75 million per annum, compared to what it would have to pay were these students enrolled in public schools. There would be increases in costs to the public in all provinces were private schools to be closed, though the actual figure would vary depending on the size of the grant currently provided and the number of students in the private schools.

The great majority of private schools in Canada are affiliated with a religious denomination. Many are linked with mainstream Protestant denominations. Some of the private religious schools, particularly in Ontario and Québec, are not Christian in their affiliations. In British Columbia and Manitoba, Catholic schools make up the single largest grouping of private schools. Were these located in Alberta, Saskatchewan or Ontario, they would be categorized as separate schools and come under public schools' legislation. All private schools, in all provinces, are subject to government supervision and must follow government-approved curricula. Most of them employ certificated teachers.

The growth in private schools can be seen, in part, as a response to an increasingly secular, areligious society. An increasing number of parents are seeking to ensure that their children receive an education which fosters and supports their particular beliefs and value systems. This re-emphasizing of the "spiritual" dimension of schooling accounts for by far the greater portion of the expansion of private schools in both Canada and the United States in the past two decades. Recent court rulings in Ontario have explicitly stated that public schools must be secular and religiously neutral in nature. These rulings have merely firmed the resolve of those who see an intrinsic relationship between education, value formation and religious development.

Strong arguments can be developed in favor of both permitting private schools to operate and for providing government support to them. Canada's commitment to a pluralistic and multicultural society would appear to support religiously-based schools which can facilitate the development of values and beliefs congruent with the traditions and

cultures of the parents. It has been pointed out that we would never accept a single-party political arrangement in this country, nor would we accept an established church. Why then, it is asked, should we not be willing to accept and support an educational structure which is diverse in its value orientations and which acknowledges the religious and cultural diversity of our population. A former chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada stated that, "a truly free society is one which can accommodate a wide variety of beliefs, diversity of tastes and pursuits, customs and codes of conduct." A single, uniform, secular public education system may be unable to foster the diversity and variety of which Justice Dickinson spoke.

One could also see government funding as a safeguard. If private schools are permitted but not funded by government, would this not lead to an economic elitism in terms of enrollment which would be abhorrent? The removal of all government support could cause an escalation in fees, making it impossible for many middle-income earners to send their children to these schools.

Choice in schooling is currently enjoying considerable favor with government policy makers. Advocates of private schools support this policy. They are convinced however, that were governments to provide greater amounts of funding to these schools then the choice could be more meaningful and real for many parents. They would be able to choose between public and private schools without having to consider substantial financial output to cover private school fees. At present alternative schools with different methodological orientations or very explicit and focused goals can be set up as charter schools or as alternative schools within the public school structure. Supporters of private schools would encourage governments to increase the financial support to private schools and thus expand the base for this choice to those wishing to have religiously or value-based schooling, as well as to those providing alternative methodologies.

A single public educational system is frequently advocated as a means to bring about the tolerance and understanding required in a pluralistic, multicultural society. However, as the evidence clearly points out, it is simplistic to assume that this

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'Plastic words' build **rigid** policies

Plastic Words: The Tyranny of a Modular Language

By Uwe Poerksen; Translated from German
by Jutta Mason and David Cayley

The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995

113 pages, \$33.50

After cutting millions of dollars in funding for health services, laying off thousands of nurses and fast-tracking decisions out of reach of public debate, the provincial government recently made the surprise announcement that it plans to set up a \$40 million a year system of computerized medical records.

Dr. Lyle Oberg, chair of the Conservative party policy, defended the "smart card" proposal with these words: "It's the wave of the future. We have to have an information system like this in place."

This Alberta example is a perfect illustration of the kind of language German linguist and philosopher Uwe Poerksen calls "plastic words" in his newly translated book, *Plastic Words: The Tyranny of a Modular Language*. According to Poerksen, "plastic words" are those which politicians, bureaucrats, corporations, social planners and other "experts" use to create an aura of scientifically determined inevitability around ideas that change the fundamental values of a society. Ironically, scientific determinism also gives ideas an aura of sacredness. And the sacred cannot be questioned.

In the Alberta example, phrases such as "information system" and "wave of the future" leave the impression that the government is taking the initiative in the advancement of science. However, these terms actually mask the core issue of a citizen's right to privacy. The smart card proposal is much less a harbinger of the scientific utopia Oberg's language conjures, and more akin to the pass laws of apartheid South Africa, wherein passbooks allowed the government

to track and ultimately control the day to day movements of black South Africans.

In *Plastic Words*, Poerksen argues that corporations and governments are increasingly using plastic words to shift societal concern away from the day to day living conditions of individual members of society, and toward the efficiency of the system as an end in itself.

By Suzette C.
Chan

According to Poerksen, "plastic words" start in the vernacular as words to describe dynamic processes. Such words are recruited by scientists as metaphors for transitional technology and unstable physical states. However, by virtue of being associated with the quantitative world of science, these same words are repatriated into the vernacular by bureaucrats who strip them of their wealth of meaning and history, to use them solely to lend a frisson of absolute scientific truth to their ideas.

Tracing the history of the word "information," Poerksen writes:

...Since the 1970s dictionaries have reflected a drastic change in meaning. Its definition has been flattened and reduced in a way that seems almost reckless. The word comes to have only one meaning, in the most varied private and public spheres. Dictionaries only begin to register the change at the end of the 1970s: the spectrum of meanings has become narrowed, the multiplicity of meanings has almost disappeared. "Training," "inquiry," and "evaluation" are not named any more. "News" is added.

The meaning has shifted completely, away from something happening in time toward its target. "Information" has become predominantly a result or a kind of object.

This change in the word's definition stems from its involvement with science. In the 1950s and 1960s the word was taken up and reworked by the sciences of cybernetics and information theory. It is now a returning emigrant: its everyday usage has undergone

a scientifically authorized expansion and is supported, strengthened, and extended by a prior and parallel scientific usage. It has taken on scientific dignity. (p.39) That plastic words eat their own histories is crucial to Poerksen's theory. Without an identifiable lineage, plastic words give the impression they have been spontaneously generated in an instance of linguistic immaculate conception. The social, political and historical construction of concepts are obliterated by a singular, crystalline, unassailable meaning.

Poerksen argues that by replacing words laden with history and local meaning with these plastic words, "experts" create a world of abstraction through which only they can navigate. He writes:

Abstract language allows the world to be planned, levels it out evenly, and makes it available to the drawing board. It constructs homogeneous and easily visualized spaces. It avoids sensuousness, diversity, and individual variation, and focuses on what remains when one gets rid of all particular cases. This is precisely how it opens up the world for exploitation. (p.85)

Thus, through parasitical association with scientific concepts and obliteration of their historical construction, plastic words privilege a class of ideas that exist outside the public's power to debate, question or change.

Poerksen is well aware that proposing a "class" of plastic words runs the risk of demonizing the words themselves. To avoid that kind of magical thinking, he proposes a 30-point criteria for determining whether a word is "plastic," an exhaustive process rooted in the same absolutist, qualitative thinking Poerksen criticizes.

This apparent irony actually reinforces Poerksen's point: the use of these ahistorical, pseudo-scientific plastic words is a symptom of people's desire—natural or conditioned—for fixed meanings and fixed answers. ✧

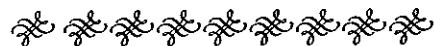
Suzette C. Chan is an information service professional whose primary function at the Edmonton Social Planning Council is to facilitate the process of communications exchange between developmental resource partners.

Schooling—Continued from page 18

understanding will come about by the mere physical proximity of peoples of different backgrounds. It is clear that the constructs of tolerance, understanding and respect for cultural and religious diversity must be dealt with systematically and seriously in the curriculum in all our schools, public and private. Neither the cultural heterogeneity of the public schools nor the value-based orientations of the private schools will necessarily foster the civic virtues which our community demands.

Private schools can be seen as a threat to our public school system or even to our society, though the nature and size of that threat are rarely enunciated. They can also be seen as a means to provide parents with an opportunity to exercise certain of their rights and responsibilities in relation to the education of their children. Whether to support the wishes of this small, but significant, number of people within our society, through the provision of financial support from government revenues, is clearly a public policy decision. It is a decision that must be made in the context of our other public policy positions, not the least of which are our commitments to pluralism, multiculturalism, religious freedom and choice. ✧

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In the Name of Religion:

Fundamentalism Among Muslims

The phenomenon that has popularly come to be known, as "Islamic fundamentalism" is a complex phenomenon, covering a number of politico-religious movements among Muslims which are portrayed by media as violent, revolutionary and anti West; in fact, a 'threat' to the West. No doubt, Islamic fundamentalism, advocating a reassertion or revival of Islamic religious values in personal and political life, has emerged as an ideological force and an alternative in the social and political realm, using Islamic symbolism and discourse as a primary source of its legitimacy and public mobilization. But, the term "Islamic fundamentalism" is an unfortunate choice by media and the scholars in the field. It means "belief in the fundamental values of Islam," but it covers radical elements which are part of the politicization of religion for the purpose of gaining power. While using the term, I will try to distinguish the two elements under the term "Islamic fundamentalism" and try to evaluate it.

The Islamic revivalist movements have emerged in the last quarter of a century in all Muslim Countries. These arose as a reaction to profound social and economic changes brought about by the onset of 20th century modernism which was perceived as a threat to Islamic values and often equated with Western colonialism. Hence Islamic fundamentalists also perceive the West as a 'threat.' These two terms *Islam* and *the West* no longer refer to objective contents but to mental constructs of images, prejudices and projections, part myth, part reality. Unfortunately, Islam and the West today, are facing each other with combative ideologies. This anti-modern, anti-western sentiment are most clearly exemplified in the 1979 Iranian Revolution and in the intensification of militant Islamic fervor among the Arab nations, especially after the war in 1967 with Israel. This fervor has, by extension, spread to other parts of the world.

What do these movements, as the force behind the spread of Islamic resurgence

stand for? For some, as Esposito (1994) points out, these represent an authentic alternative to their ineffectual and corrupt regimes. Others see them as destabilizing forces: "demagogues who will employ any tactic to gain power." The violence and terrorism perpetrated by many radical extremist groups; the so-called "Islamists", in Lebanon, Egypt, Iran are well known to us through the popular media. Yet reality is more complex than its popular image. While there is a sizeable vocal minority consisting of violent extremists, a large majority want and seek change within the political system through a process of gradual reform. But all those are subsumed under the title of fundamentalism which gets equated with terrorism. These two strands in fundamentalism need to be clearly distinguished.

While Islamic revivalism, during the 1970s and 80s, was attributed to radical extremist groups, in the 1990s it has become a broad-based mainstream socio-religious movement which appeals to middle and lower class young men and women, both educated and uneducated. Esposito notes that a new class of modern educated, but Islamically-oriented elites has emerged. Their goal is "transformation of society through Islamic formation of individuals and through social and political action." They offer an alternative view of politics and society that challenges the Western presuppositions of life styles and systems of power and privilege. These elites are not all terrorists or extremists, nor, for that matter, are all Muslims fundamentalists. "Muslim" is not a monolithic category, either culturally, nationally or in religious orientation. There are traditionalists, religious liberals and secular thinkers among Muslims. Similarly, not all forms of Islamic fundamentalism are violent though fundamentalism, in general, is anti-modern and against the Western ethos.

Why this religious revivalism in Muslim societies, particularly as a reaction against modernity and the West? It can be understood in two dimensions, economic and socio-moral. On the politico-economic dimension, the

By Zohra
Husaini

resentment of Arab nations of the support given by the West to Israel, the presence of Western economic interests controlling their oil wealth and Western interference in their political and economic systems and the resentment of forced modernization of Iranian society by the Shah of Iran led to anti-Western sentiment. Added to it was the economic discontent of the lower and middle class young men and women who did not enjoy the economic benefits of modernization. On the socio-moral dimensions, concerned with the moral and spiritual crises of our times, (a crisis that the secular humanism of the West must also take seriously if the sweeping tide of fundamentalism is to be turned), the Islamic fundamentalists consider Western society, with its materialism, unbridled individualism and secularism resulting in permissiveness, family breakdown and sense of alienation as immoral and a threat to their value system. Hence their view that defence or safeguard against it is a renewed theocratic claim for Islamic values in public life and politicization of the religion. Consequently all issues, whether economic or political, become religious issues.

One may ask a general question: what is the appeal of fundamentalism that enabled it to spread so rapidly in all the major world religions? Eliad (1985) points out that all religions have myths and symbols specific to each faith. He argues that the religious consciousness of humankind attempts to grasp something of the sacred and the infinite which is expressed imaginatively and symbolically in myths and rituals. In the face of our finitude and the "limit situations,"—death, birth, suffering—, the sense of the sacred gives meaning and order to our lives. The hold of the fundamentalism on the minds of people is due to their skillful use of the powerful symbol of religion which appeals to the primordial and the archetypal in us. As Nielsen (1994) points out, it is this connection between mythic and symbolic discourse and the fundamentalists' agenda that sways already discontented and often angry masses.

Now, the great problem with Islamic fundamentalism, particularly in its extreme form, is that it uses the symbolic discourse of religion to legitimize and justify its ends which are political and not religious or spiritual. Religion is about the meaning of life. Islamic fundamentalism colonizes the

language of meaning as if it had exclusive right over religion and then attempts to silence other voices in religious discourse. Religious language is mythopoetic and is always open to interpretation. Fundamentalism renders it rigid, absolute and literal. Disregarding the ever growing richness of Islam through centuries, it puts forward a narrow, ahistorical authoritarian paradigm of the religion of Islam, taking it into the political realm. Powerful symbolism is used often to coerce and intimidate people so as to impose the narrow, literalistic and univocal world view of the fundamentalists on all others to gain power. It has made religion a system of exclusion in this pluralistic world and it refuses to even entertain the possibility of what Arkoun (1994) calls, the plurality of human articulation of meaning and purpose of existence.

This is the politico-religious landscape of Islamic fundamentalism at the end of the 20th century.

A final word. In this global age, Islamic fundamentalism faces many challenges from within and from the world outside. From within, it is challenged to be more responsive to demands for openness and tolerance towards different or even opposing views and values, and to live up to the great Islamic tradition of *ijtihad*, which means the struggles of human reason to ponder over and judge issues, both religious (not necessarily theological) and worldly in their historical and contemporary context. From the world out there, it is challenged to a task, with all other religions, which is vital to all societies, that is, in Arkoun's words, "... reappropriation and universalization of meaning of human existence and action of ALL human beings, not only of those born in a privileged religion." This is a task in which Islam and the West are both challenged to join hands and, through a non-fundamentalist dialogue and exchange of ideas, create a global ethics for global peace. That will be completely in accordance with the beautiful Islamic injunction—'sulhi-kul,' that is 'peace with all.' This is the only way to prove Huntington's (1993) thesis of a "*The Clash of Civilizations*" wrong. ✨

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church in the *heart* of the city

Trying to get a sense of the role of inner city churches is a difficult task. When you think you've been able to spot trends or account for misfits, you are faced with a number of arguments, any one of which could ruin your hypothesis.

One might naturally assume inner city churches would be facing overwhelming demands as our provincial government has downloaded much of its social responsibility onto communities. But the truth is some churches, even in the inner city, are not sensing a greater need.

Out of the 11 inner city churches I spoke with only two had more than one-third of their congregation who reside in the inner city—the other nine had small percentages (they estimated). Worship can be different than outreach—perhaps inner city residents aren't attending worship, but are using the other outreach services such as meals or counselling. When I asked the churches if their inner city location affected their ministry the answers ranged from 'Yes—we've had to put bars on the windows,' to 'No—not really.' In fact only a couple offered any services which would bring impoverished residents to their churches. The 11 churches reported the following ministry:

- 1) serve a meal at Operation Friendship regularly
- 2) collect clothes for Bissell
- 3) advocacy; counselling; prison visits; food bank; meals
- 4) no program, but do cooperate with Edmonton City Centre Church Corp. and Bissell Centre
- 5) nothing presently—exploring options to build some networks
- 6) hope to do more outreach with Chinese people in the area
- 7) put bars on windows—have invited police to come speak to their congregation about safety
- 8) perform 'spiritual warfare praying'
- 9) no affect
- 10) soup line on weekends, free counselling
- 11) life skills program; go into schools and friendship centres, serve some meals

Out of the 11 churches, six said their attendance rates have been pretty steady over the years—the other five said they've experienced slight gains. One of them said the gains have been quite substantial. In Reginald Bibby's book *There's Got to be More* (1995) he says church participation rates are down sharply and attendance has not kept pace with the rise in population. In 1957 the national rate of attendance was 53 per cent; by 1975 it was 31 per cent and in 1993 the rate was 23 per cent. He says most people are not looking for churches and most churches are not looking for people. He aptly points out that all people have fundamental spiritual, personal and social needs. "The obvious conclusion: churches today are collectively failing. What makes the situation so disturbing is that they are failing at a time when conditions suggest that they should be flourishing." Bibby has hope for churches though, he says providing the ministry is meaningful, there is every reason to believe that many people will want to be part of those churches.

Suzanne Cowles works with Inner City Pastoral Ministry and she sees wonderful opportunities for churches in the inner city. She feels some churches are really missing out by not connecting with residents and that a number of local churches are holding onto traditions from days when they served members who called the inner city home. Many years have passed and some of those same people may drive from the suburbs to the inner city church they've attended for years—but they may not feel comfortable in the neighborhood now. Many don't or won't recognize the need. She wishes these churches would widen their circles to include neighborhood residents. She sees much could be gained by both churches and residents if more compassion were shown.

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I spoke with two women recently about their faith experiences. Both women have lived and attended church in the inner city for years and both had lived on low incomes. Coincidentally both have recently left former churches to find church homes where their outlooks and philosophies would be mirrored by the minister and congregation. One left her church because she was fed up with the hypocritical actions of members—she remembers one church board member stating ‘The church is not a charity,’ and that was the final straw for her. She was tired of rigid structure and organization. She did not feel like the church was making an attempt to give people a hand-up as opposed to a hand-out.

She says she’ll eventually try another church but for now she’s nurturing her own faith and looking for ways everyday when she can put her faith to work by reaching out to someone else. She aims to be non-judgmental and she wishes more people would seek the pure joy of helping someone without expecting something in return.

The other woman I spoke with believes church attendance has declined because both people and churches are not loving God or reaching out. She lives her faith daily through prayer and personal encounters with people as she passes out tract literature. She said right now churches are telling people what they want to hear and people are being led astray. She says a day will come when churches will be forced to look to God instead of worrying about their own survival. Her vision involves kindness and caring—not handouts or money. She says some of the most generous people she knows are also the poorest. Many of them share everything they receive and do not expect anything in return. “If everyone reached out it would be like living in heaven on earth,” she said.

She has found a new church home and is comfortable there. The struggle for all churches

is not necessarily people leaving, instead it is the absence of congregational growth.

Now more than ever people are searching for hope and meaning, but church isn’t always where they look. It is no doubt a time of struggle for many churches and Edmonton’s inner city is no exception. As other churches across the nation question how they could be more relevant and vital—some Edmonton churches will be doing the same. If Reginald Bibby’s predictions are right, by the year 2015 only 15 per cent of Canadians will attend church. By that time some of Edmonton’s churches will perish simply because not enough people will attend to pay the bills. Perhaps something other than church, as we’ve come to know it, will rise to the spiritual challenge. ✧

Sheila Hallett-Kushniruk is the publications editor of First Reading.

Gospel—Continued from page 14

Ever since the beginning the Christian Church has committed itself to mission—to the task of sharing the ‘Good News’ with all nations. That has been characteristic of the evangelical wing of the Church, particularly those called fundamentalists. Since the days of the fundamentalist-modernist in the United States and Canada scores of denominations, missionary societies and Bible institutes have been founded, all with the goal of promoting the Gospel throughout the world.

We recognize that mistakes were made by these heralds of the Gospel. Sometimes it was a case of ‘zeal without knowledge.’ In North America the intellect was sometimes despised, and overseas the message was not always contextualized. It is to be questioned, however, if evangelicalism would be the force it is in the Protestant world of North America if it were not for the earlier fundamentalism of the period 1920-1950. And overseas, for example, in the countries of Africa, it is to be questioned if the causes of education and medicine would be where they are without the costly dedication of fundamentalist missionaries. ✧

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