YOUTH IN ASIA:
CHALLENGES OF FUNDAMENTALISM AND RELATIVISM

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INTRODUCTION

The Fourth Bishops' Institution for Theological Animation [BITA-IV] of the Office of Theological Concerns was held at the Baan Phu Waan Pastoral Centre, Sampran, Thailand, from 24th to 26th April 2012. The theme of this BITA was "Fundamentalism and Relativism: Their Impact on Youth in Asia". It was attended by 26 Asian bishops from eight countries of Asia (Indonesia, Malaysis, Philippines, Bangladesh, India, Korea, Thailand and Myanmar).

There were four major inputs, three Regional Reports on how the phenomena of Fundamentalism and Relativism affect the Youth in Asia (by three representative Bishops from South Asia, South East Asia and East Asia), three Creative Pastoral Responses (by three Bishops in the areas of Formation, Communication and Catechetics) and a lively Panel Discussion with two young lay persons. The workshops, plenaries and open fora provided all the participant-bishops to share their views constructively. In this volume of the FABC Papers, we publish the four main inputs of this BITA, all of which were delivered by our own OTC members.

In many parts of Asia, Fundamentalism has lifted its dangerous head in many areas: religious, ethnic, political and even secular, often driving its adherents to extreme and exclusive positions which invariably end up in violence and upheaval. This, in fact, has been a major reversal of the traditional Asian concept of harmonious living in a multi-cultural, multi-religious Asia. At the same time, extreme positions of subjectivism, individualism, secularism, scientific atheisim and a warped sense of freedom have driven many people to embrace various strands of relativism not only on ethical issues but on any and every issue to do with human living, making objective truth appear to be an unattainable reality. While some traces of fundamentalism and relativism are part and parcel of our daily living, the above-mentioned extreme positions of the same phenomena have negatively affected not only our youth in Asia, but many people on all the continents. However, Asia, despite her multi-cultural and multi-religious pluralistic societies, has borne the brunt of both these devastating phenomena. As the readers of these four main articles would be able to perceive, often there is the gut-level, spontaneous human reaction to both these extremes: to be fundamentalistic in combating relativism, and to be relavistic in combating fundamentalism! That is to say that they tend to feed each other in the form of a vicious circle. Both these reactions are not only irrational but they also push their adherents to the opposite extremes of the very extremes they claim to combat! Since virute always lies in the middle, one needs to avoid both these extremes at any cost, and cultivate attitudes that are balance. The four essays in this volume not only situate Fundamentalism and Relativism with regard to their impacts on our Asian youth, but they also point out the danger of avoiding/combating one extreme if it amounts only to a matter of embracing the other. The last essay on why our youngsters leave the Church, also touches upon contemporary secular fundamentalism and atheism which have become modern fads among many a young person across the globe today. We sincerely hope that the reader of this volume will not only get a deeper and global understanding of both Fundamentalism and Relativism, but will also have an idea as to how they affect our Asian youth today.

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    - Sr. Maria Anicia B. Co, RVM

Fundamentalism as a growing concern in Asia has been noted since two decades ago. The background paper for the 6th FABC Plenary Assembly held in Manila, Philippines in 1995 includes fundamentalism in the second cluster of challenges of an evolving Asian context:

> A second cluster of challenges concerns *national integration.* At the moment a grave crisis of fragmentation seems to be sweeping through most Asian countries. Composed as they are of many racial, linguistic and religious groups, the Asian nations have not yet found a cohesive stability whereby all groups can exist in harmony. Some countries, such as India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Malaysia, are plagued by endemic conflicts and bloody communal violence. In this volatile situation, what is remarkable is that religions, instead of being

forces of unity, are spawning hatred, rivalry and division. Religious fundamentalism is springing up everywhere in Asia.[1]

In 1996, 26 bishops from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal, met in Kathmandu, Nepal, to study and reflect on the theme: "Christian Response to the Phenomenon of Violence in South Asia." Among the issues they discussed in this regional consultation was the growing phenomenon of religious fundamentalism and principles for a Christian response.[2]

One of the papers presented for workshop discussion during the 7th FABC Plenary Assembly in 2000,[3] "The Call to A Renewed Church in Asia and The Challenges of Religious Fundamentalism" mentions aggressive proselytizing by Christian fundamentalists among Christians and among followers of other religions which people of other religions find "insulting, demeaning and threatening."[4] The paper also noted the rising fundamentalism among Hindus in India and the incidents of murder and violence against Christians in 1998, the mob violence and burning of churches in Indonesia, blasphemy law in Pakistan and Jewish fundamentalists in Israel. The reference to fundamentalism in the assembly's final statement, "Christian Discipleship in Asia Today: Service to Life," is more

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[1] Felix Wilfrid, "The Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences (FABC): Orientations, Challenges and Impact," *FABC Papers* 69.

[2] "The Christian Response to the Phenomenon of Violence in South Asia. Rising Fundamentalism and Ethnic Violence and the Church's Response. A Pastoral Overview," Regional Consultation, Kathmandu, Nepal, September 16-22, 1996. In this consultation, Thomas Michel presented a paper on "Christian and Muslim Fundamentalism," *FABC Papers* 82.

[3] This was held in Samphran, Thailand on January 3-12, 2000. The Final Statement is entitled, "A Renewed Church in Asia: A Mission of Love and Service" has a paragraph on Fundamentalism. *FABC Papers* 93.

[4] John Locke, , "The Call to A Renewed Church In Asia and The Challenges of Religious Fundamentalism," *FABC Papers* 92m. See also, "Religious Freedom in the Context of Asia," *FABC Papers* 112, pp. 14-18.

nuanced. It speaks of 'fundamentalist extremism and fanaticism': "In the area of religious pluralism, we reflected on the growing fundamentalist extremism and fanaticism discriminating and excluding people who belong to other religious traditions, thus destroying the harmony of peoples' lives and their solidarity already witnessed to in a dialogue of life."

The Statement of the Consultation on Evangelization and Inculturation held in Bangalore, India on March 1-4, 2000, mentions fundamentalism as one of the serious challenges to the Church's evangelizing presence. The Consultation was attended by representatives from the Bishops' Conferences of Bangladesh, India, Korea, Nepal, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand.[5]

In his address to the bishops of the Philippines on their *ad limina* visit in 2003, John Paul II acknowledged the bishops' "distress over the number of youth who have left the Catholic Church in favor of fundamentalist sects, many of which accentuate material riches over spiritual ones."[6]

Closer to our time, last September 28, 2011, Fides News cites the following from an interview with Archbishop Thomas Menamparampil:

> In Asia, the greatest danger is precisely religious fundamentalism: on the one hand, Pentecostalism, which attracts and takes away the Catholic faithful from the Church; on the other hand there is Islamic fundamentalism, which disturbs social and religious harmony". To this phenomenon the Church "cannot respond with an aggressive approach" but

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[5] Saturnino Dias (ed.), *Evangelization and Inculturation* (Mumbai: Pauline Publications, 2001), 256. http://www. fabc.org/offices /oe/ docs/doc3.pdf.

[6] John Paul II, *Address to the Bishops of the Philippines on Their ad limina visit*, Thursday, 30 October 2003

"investigating and understanding the social and psychological reasons which make them bloom."[7]

This paper hopes to contribute to the discussion on fundamentalism by offering some perspectives for understanding this complex phenomenon and its impact on the youth and women. First of all, it discusses the origin, background and subsequent development of Christian fundamentalism. Secondly, it deals with the extension of the meaning of fundamentalism and the application of the term to other movements. Thirdly, it seeks to understand religious fundamentalism in Asia using some perspectives and approaches. Fourthly, it gives a summary of issues and challenges.

ORIGIN, BACKGROUND AND DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIAN FUNDAMENTALISM

The studies, researches and conferences on fundamentalism in recent years indicate that fundamentalism is "an appropriate project for interdisciplinary public policy study" as Marty and Appleby expressed twenty-one years ago.[8]

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[7] http://www.fides.org/aree/news/newsdet.php?idnews=29962&lan=eng

[8] M.E. Marty – R.S. Appleby, *Fundamentalisms Observed,* Vol. I (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 815. Douglas Long has compiled a list of institutions and agencies involved in fundamentalist and extremist causes. Based in the US, these institutions and agencies have a global reach through their websites and publications. The list includes research institutes, civil liberties organizations, watchdog groups, activist groups and fundamentalist and extremist organizations. Douglas Long, *Fundamentalists and Extremists* (New York: Facts On File, Inc., 2002), 193-201. He also offers an annotated bibliography of books and articles on the subject (180-192). On October 25-26, 2002, a theological symposium on "Pluralism and Fundamentalism in the Church" was held at De La Salle University, Manila with 136 participants including theologians, teachers and students of theology and religious education from well-known institutions in the Philippines. A fruit of the symposium was the organization of *Damdaming Katoliko sa Teolohiya,* a formal association of

Fundamentalism is "nowadays used to describe just about any militant religious movement with a claim for authority and certitude."[9] The word fundamentalism now suggests "narrowness, bigotry, obscurantism and sectarianism"[10] and "conjures images of a *jihad*, hostages, protests, militancy, terrorists, and a myriad of similar pictures."[11] These connotations have gone beyond the meaning of the term at its origin.

Fundamentalism is a term that originated within American Protestant Christianity in the United States in the early 1900s. As a reaction and in opposition to Darwin's theory of evolution, the trends in biblical scholarship and liberal theology, a group of conservative Protestants defined the fundamental beliefs of Protestant Christianity: the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture, the divinity of Christ, his virgin birth, the doctrine of vicarious expiation, and the bodily resurrection at the Second Coming of Christ.[12] The articles on Christian doctrine written between 1910 and 1915 by leading conservative American and British theologians were bound into a book entitled, "The Fundamentals: A Testimony of Truth." The term "fundamentalist" is said to have come from Curtis Lee Laws, a conservative Baptist editor, who in 1920 described the fundamentalists as those who are "ready to do battle royal for the Fundamentals" of the faith.[13] Since then, the title "fundamentalist" became "associated with those who accepted the ideas of the Fundamentals, i.e. every word of the Bible was

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Catholic Theologians in the Philippines. Dennis T. Gonzalez (ed.), *Fundamentalism and Pluralism in the Church* (Manila: DAKATEO, 2004).

[9] Jakobus Vorster, "Analytical Perspectives on Religious Fundamentalism," in *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 17 (2007):5.

[10] J. Barr, *Fundamentalism* (London: SCM Press, 1981), 1, cited by Vorster, ibid.

[11] Shelton Woods, *A Broken Mirror. Protestant Fundamentalism in the Philippines* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 2002), 9.

[12] Long, *Fundamentalists and Extremists*, p. 3; Malise Ruthven, *Fundamentalism. A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.7.

[13] Ruthven, ibid., p. 8.

true and that it was divinely inspired by an omnipotent God."[14] About the same year, the Northern Baptist Convention instituted a "Fundamentals" conference and soon the term was used to describe "all sorts of American Protestants who were willing to wage ecclesiastical and theological war against modernism in theology and the cultural changes that modernists celebrated."[15]

Although the original sense of the term was somehow positive among many conservatives who accepted the basic Christian doctrine, fundamentalism became synonymous with ignorance and anti-intellectualism after the Monkey Trial in Dayton, Tennessee in 1925 when during the hearing, the evolution antagonist, William Jennings Bryan, was outmatched by his opponent. As a result some fundamentalists began to engage in scholarly apologetics but others chose the path of anti-intellectualism.[16]

Around 1930 the disagreement among fundamentalists regarding involvement in politics led to a division between fundamentalists and neo-fundamentalists. To "realize the old idea of a Protestant Christian America" was the goal of the fundamentalists' involvement in political life. They "attempted to congregate Christian opposition to Roman Catholicism, Judaism and liberalism. On the other hand, the neo-

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[14] Woods, op. cit., p. 9.

[15] G. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 57, cited by Vorster, *Analytic Perspectives*, 7.

[16] Ibid., 18. "According to Gary Wills, the trial was something of a put-up job, engineered, in effect, by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) to challenge an obscure and little-used Tennessee state law banning the teaching of evolution in schools. John Scopes, a biology teacher, claimed to have broken the law. The fundamentalist defenders of the state law won the trial on points. With a fundamental jury, three members of which testified that they read nothing but the Bible, the verdict was a foregone conclusion. The state law was upheld. John Scopes had his conviction quashed on appeal. ACLU could not pursue its original aim to bring the case to a higher federal court. Scopes became a geologist after winning a scholarship to the University of Chicago." Ruthven, op. cit., 12-13.

fundamentalists focused on engagement in Christian missions "to restore the classic evangelicalism of the Awakening without being engaged in political and anti-establishment actions." Neo-fundamentalism was a resurgence of true evangelicalism while fundamentalism was developing into religious fanaticism with visible strands of militancy and extremism.[17] Fundamentalism is distinguished from evangelicalism by their adherence to a certain means of interpretation of Scripture which can be called Biblicism. They use the biblical texts "to prove a view and to derive ethical principles from these texts without taking into account the revelation-historical relevance and cultural-historical background of Scripture for the understanding of biblical passages."[18] Characterized by pro-nationalist and pro-capitalist positions in world politics, this Christian fundamentalism became "notorious for its support for the formation and protection of the state of Israel and its presence in the world-wide development of the Charismatic Movement which penetrated many churches."[19]

By the 1960s "fundamentalist" usually meant "separatists" and no longer included the many conservatives in mainline denominations. Such fundamentalists also stayed separate from two related revivalist movements, the holiness movement and Pentecostalism."[20] "Christian fundamentalism, after achieving social and political prominence in the early decades of the twentieth century, re-emerged as a legitimate

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[17] Marsden, op. cit., 74, cited in Vorster, *Analytic Perspectives*, 8.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid. Christian fundamentalism recognizes the importance of Israel in the doctrine of dispensationalism. It is said to have global influence in countries with strong Christian ethos.

[20] Marsden, op. cit., 188-189, quoted in Woods, op. cit., 14. See John Prior, "Jesus Christ the Way to the Father: The Challenge of the Pentecostals," *FABC Papers* 119.

vehicle for political ideas in the USA from the 1970s, a period of political, social and economic upheaval in America."[21]

The missionary thrust of evangelical Christianity brought their particular understanding of Christianity to other parts of the world including Asia. James Barr identified four basic fundamentalist characteristics: inerrancy of scripture, individual salvation, personal witness to belief, abstracted from social context, invalidity of hermeneutic exegesis of scripture.[22] For Marcel Dumestre,[23] the four features that generally characterize North American fundamentalist beliefs are: evangelism, inerrancy, dispensational premillennialism and separatism. Evangelism is the compulsion to evangelize coming from the importance that fundamentalists place on "being saved." If being saved is the sure way to heaven, it is incumbent upon the "saved" to bring Jesus Christ to the "lost." Inerrancy is the fundamentalist's belief that no part of the Bible is in error. Dispensational premillenialism is the belief that salvation will be dispensed to the Christian faithful at the coming of Christ before the millennium (the thousand-year reign of Christ). Separatism refers to the uniformity of belief and practice which fundamentalists consider as primary value and their intolerance of dissenting opinions.

Thomas Michel discusses the characteristic features of Christian fundamentalism under four headings: 1) their

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[21] Jeff Haynes, "Religious Fundamentalism and Politics," http://www.law.emory.edu/ihr/worddocs/haynes5.doc**.**

[22] James Barr, *Fundamentalism* (London: SCM Press, 1977) quoted in William Beeman, "Fighting the Good Fight: Fundamentalism and Religious Revival," in J. MacClancy (ed.), *Anthropology for the Real World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Anthropology/publications/FUNDMNT ALISM.htm

[23] Marcel Dumestre, *A Church at Risk: The Challenge of Spiritually-Hungry Adults* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1997), 49, cited in Eduardo Natividad, "Fundamentalism and Pluralism, Chaos and Dialogue in Theology," in Gonzalez, *Fundamentalism and Pluralism*, 95.

understanding of Scripture, its inspiration, interpretation, and authority; 2) a unique history of salvation; 3) eschatology, 4) critique of modernity. Below is a summary of the main points of his presentation.[24]

1. Scripture: Its Inspiration Interpretation, and Authority

The Fundamentalists' view may be stated as follows:

- "Scripture is inerrant because it is inspired by God (2 Timothy 3: 16) who is Truth. Thus, Scripture cannot contradict itself. The inerrancy of Scripture flows from the truthfulness of God; to challenge one is to challenge both. Because Scripture is inerrant, its authority cannot be contested."
- The Bible came from God. "God moved the Biblical authors to write and inspired every detail of the original text… the Bible is self-contained and self-interpreting. The Biblical word is complete and comprehensive, providing all that needs to be known for salvation, and containing within itself the principles of its own interpretation."
- Because the Bible is inspired, it is not subject to any historical limitations. There is only one correct interpretation of Scripture, that which comes from a literal reading of the text. The way words and deeds are understood today is exactly the way they were understood by the original authors, editors and communities.

Michel concludes this section with the recognition of common Biblical concerns and interests of Catholics and Evangelicals. "Both regard the Biblical teachings as normative and seek to live their lives in accord with them. Both hold that the Holy Spirit has been with the church since the beginning and guides its understanding of revealed truth. Both agree that

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[24] See Michel, *FABC Papers* 82.

church tradition is important and offers invaluable assistance and insight in explaining Biblical teaching."

2. History of Salvation: Dispensationalism[25]

Dispensationalist theory divides the world into seven epochs, each of which is characterized by a specific way in which God brings about human salvation. The seven epochs are:

Epoch	Description			Biblical Texts
1	Innocence	Garden of Eden	Adam and Eve were sinless while in the Garden	Gen 1-3
2	Conscience	The Fall to Noah	People were saved by following their conscience	Gen 3-8
3	Human Government	Noah to Abraham	Obedience to human rulers	Gen 9-11
4	Promise	Abraham to Moses	Salvation through the promise	Gen 12-Ex 19
5	Law	Moses to Christ	Salvation by perfect adherence	Ex 20 until the birth of

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[25] John Nelson Darby is recognized as the father of dispensationalism. This was made popular by Cyrus Scofield's *Scofield Reference Bible*. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dispensationalism.

			to the Law	the Church
6	Grace	The Death of Christ to the present	Church Age	Church age until Rapture
7	Millennium	Begins with Christ's Second Coming	The Kingdom Age	Rev 20:4-6

"What is important in dispensationalist thought is not the earthly teaching of Jesus but rather his death which expiated for all sins committed by humankind and ushered in the new dispensation, the age of grace."

3. Eschatology: the Final Days

One of the best known elements of fundamentalist thought is the imminent Second Coming of Christ. Drawing from obscure passages in the prophecies of Daniel, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Book of Revelation (the Apocalypse), "fundamentalist thinkers attempt to predict the coming eschatological crisis. The Antichrist, an ecclesiastical and political tyrant supported by the apostate Christian churches, will appear and lead many astray. World history will degenerate to a seven year period called the Great Tribulation (Mt 24: 21-29). However, before the beginning of the Tribulation, Christ will return to take those who have been "born again" and call upon the name of Jesus out of this world so they will escape the coming sorrows. This is called the Rapture (cf I Thess 4: 16-17), and it is expected quite literally. The Tribulation will culminate in the Battle of Armageddon,

after which Christ will come to establish the millennium." Fundamentalists apply this eschatology to current events.[26]

4. Anti-Modernist Social Critique

Opposition to modernism might be the key element which unites Christian fundamentalists of various Churches and ecclesial communities. Fundamentalists are not opposed to advances in technology but they object to "the modernist philosophy of life which, in their view, offers an anti-religious understanding of the human person, the universe and society, and proposes a system of values meant to replace a religious "theocentric" outlook with an anthropocentric humanism." Their anger is directed at "what they consider to be liberal hegemony that controls decisions and public opinion on a global scale." They feel that their own views are ignored, 'that their concerns are dismissed as devoid of serious consideration, and their religious outlook caricatured as "fanatic" and "obscurantist".'

Fundamentalists are opposed to modern society which "values quantity more than quality, pragmatism more than truth, efficiency more than beauty." They hold that "modern progress has been achieved at the cost of religious and moral values and results in dehumanization, the breakdown of families and promiscuity." For fundamentalists, "there is one God, one moral universe, one Scripture. Truth is not founded on human reason, but has been revealed in the Scripture, which offers a clear, comprehensive, incontrovertible guide by which societies and individuals can order their lives according to God's will. Success in life is not based on a university education, a high salary and traveling first class, but on accepting Christ as one's personal savior and being preserved "from the tribulation to come."

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[26] See Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, 1970.

The Catholic Church is not immune to fundamentalist tendencies. "Catholic fundamentalist movements have crippled the rest of Catholicism by inhibiting its response to social problems, obscuring its former image of hope and outreach, and setting sectors of the Church against each other. Many prophets - progressive theologians and bishops - are intimidated, and are unwilling to risk their careers on behalf of the causes which annoy the fundamentalists: women's rights in the Church, civil rights, environmental questions, the world economic order, support for Third World Churches and their struggles for liberation, and inculturation."[27] Tomas O'Meara names two targets of fundamentalism within the Catholic Church, namely, history and diversity.[28] To the fundamentalists, Vatican II succumbed to history ruled by modernity with its characteristics of ambiguity, change and imperfection. The Council's intention to address modern day concerns and problems was deemed as a flawed premise. Some ideas of Vatican II such as "the church as interpreter and sign of the kingdom," "God's grace works in people and social

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[27] Locke, *FABC Papers* 92m. Georges De Schrijver, "Fundamentalism: A Refusal to Recognize a Religious Dimension in "Secular Existence," in Gonzalez, *Fundamentalism and Pluralism*, 1-28, names and discusses three fundamentalist groups – Opus Dei, Society of St. Pius X and Radical Orthodoxy. Patrick Arnold cites besides Opus Dei, Marcel Lefevre's Society of St. Pius X, the following: the Catholics United for the Faith, Communion and Liberation, the so-called "neo-orthodoxy" and Catholic Restoration Movement, and various forms of anti-communist religious groups in Latin America and in the former East bloc. Patrick Arnold, "The Reemergence of Fundamentalism in the Catholic Church," in Norman Cohen (ed.), *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon: A View from Within A Response from Without* (Grand Rapids: W. Eerdmans Publishing, 1990), 173 cited in Emmanuel de Guzman, "Fundamentalism and Multi-Contextuality in Classrooms of Theology," Gonzalez, *Fundamentalism and Pluralism*, 134, fn. 5. See also, Claire Hoertz Badaracco, "Opus Dei and the Role of the Media in Constructing Fundamentalist Identity," in Stewart Hoover and Nadia Kaneva (eds.), *Fundamentalism and the Media* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2009), 142-147.
[28] Thomas O'Meara, *Fundamentalism: A Catholic Perspective* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 87-91, cited in De Guzman, "Fundamentalism," 127-129.

movements too" seem unacceptable to fundamentalists. "Catholic fundamentalist stance excludes the voices of others who are different in thinking and practice."[29] For fundamentalists, "other races and other religions are not just different; they are evil." [30] Catholic fundamentalists are to be distinguished from "true religious conservatives" who are sensitive to genuine Catholic tradition while being open to change, adaptation and learning from the modern world.[31]

FUNDAMENTALISM AND FUNDAMENTALISMS

Fundamentalism is part of Christian history. The word which originally had a positive meaning later gained more negative overtones and was applied to any movement promoting adherence to traditional beliefs. Its meaning has broadened to refer to antimodernist movements in other religions including Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam.[32]

The application of the term to other religious movements outside Christianity is contested. The appropriateness of the term is being questioned especially when applied to Islam. "For Protestants biblical inerrancy is one of the hallmarks of fundamentalists distinguishing them from liberals. But all observant Muslims believe the Koran and are committed to a doctrine of scriptural inerrancy; thus, all Muslims would be fundamentalists but how do we distinguish between the militants (seeking to Islamize society) and the quietist (avoiding politics completely) among Muslims?"[33] According to Rahman, "a literal translation of fundamentalism into Arabic gives us *usuliyah*, a word that refers to the study of the sources of the

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[29] De Guzman, 128.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Long, op. cit., p. 4; Haynes, "Religious Fundamentalism and Politics"; Ho Jin Jun, *Religious Pluralism and Fundamentalism in Asia. An Evangelical Response* (Colorado Springs, CO: International Academic Publishers Ltd., 2002), 78.

[33] Ruthven, *Fundamentalism*, 4.

various rules and principles of Islamic Law. Most of the activists who are dubbed "fundamentalists" in the West are not engaged in this Islamic science, but have quite different concerns. The use of term "fundamentalism" is, therefore, misleading."[34]

Scholars of Judaism consider 'fundamentalist" to be "much too broad a term when applied both to ultra-orthodox groups known as Haredim (some of whom refuse to recognize the legitimacy of the State of Israel) and the religious settlers of Gush Emmunim (the Bloc of the Faithful) who place more emphasis on holding on to the land of Israel than on observing the Halakha (Jewish Law)."[35]

The use of the word is also criticized for being "a term of abuse levelled by liberals and Enlightenment rationalists against any group, religious or otherwise, that dares to challenge the absolutism of the post-Enlightenment outlook." It is "a caricature or mirror-image of the same post-Enlightenment outlook it professes to oppose: adopting the same rational style of argument used by the secular enemy, repressing the multifaceted, polysemic ways in which myth and religions appeal to all aspects of the human psyche, not just to the rational mind, exposing "the hubris of reason's pretence in trying to take over religion's role."[36]

For Hallencreutz and Westerlund, the broad use of the term has become "increasingly irrelevant." "Viewed as a derogatory concept, tied to Western stereotypes and Christian presuppositions, the casual use of the term easily causes misunderstandings and prevents the understanding of the

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[34] Fazlur Rahman, "Religious Fundamentalism, Causes and Remedies," http://www.hssrd.org/journals/2004/ english/fundamentalism.htm#Top.

[35] Ibid., 5.

[36] Ibid.

dynamics and characteristics of different religious groups with explicit political objectives."[37]

Juergenmeyer refuses to use the word 'fundamentalism' for three reasons: (1) the term is predominantly pejorative, referring to those who hold an intolerant, self-righteous, and narrowly dogmatic religious literalism; (2) the term is an imprecise category for making comparisons across cultures; (3) the term does not carry any political meaning: religious and political interests motivate true fundamentalists. For Juergenmeyer, the true fundamentalist is "the religious nationalist who seeks to establish a theocracy, through political activities, within his own nation."[38] Fundamentalism is, indeed, inappropriately applied to radical groups within a given religion who are not hesitant to use physical violence in order to achieve their purpose. More appropriate expressions would be Islamic radicals, Jewish radicals, and Buddhist radicals.[39]

Despite the criticisms, the term "fundamentalism" has become increasingly common in academic and popular discourse since 1970s. While adopting the term, some scholars and writers distinguish it from extremism and terrorism.[40]

The term is defined as religious nationalism or religious extremism when applied to the radical or extreme political movements of non-Christian religions in Asia or Africa. Ho Jin Jun defines fundamentalism in other religions as "a radical

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[37] C. Hallencreutz and D. Westerlund, "Anti-secularist policies of religion", in D. Westerlund (ed.), *Questioning the Secular State. The Worldwide Resurgence of Religion in Politics* (London: C. Hurst, 1996), 4, cited in Haynes, op. cit.

[38] Mark Juergenmeyer, *The New Cold War?: Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), cited in Ho Jin Jun, *Religious Pluralism and Fundamentalism*, 78-79.

[39] Ho Jin Jun, ibid., 79.

[40] Long, op. cit., 23-24; Mohamed Jawhar Hassan, "Terrorism, Insurgency and Religious Fundamentalism in Southeast Asia." http://www.isis.org.my/attach-ments/384_TERRORISM_INSURGENCY_AND_RELIG_FUND.pdf

outlook shared by religious adherents who attempt to establish an ideal religio-political reality (theocracy) based on their sacred books, as a reaction against the secularist nation, secularization and globalization."[41]

Some scholars think that fundamentalism cannot be limited to the sphere of the religious and draw attention to the viewpoint that "fundamentalism should be seen as a sociological trend that appears under certain social conditions. The phenomenon pertains to much more in the fields of religion, politics and culture."[42] De Schrijver also notes that fundamentalism may take different forms, i.e. religious, political or ideological.[43]

Jeffrey K. Hadden identified four types of fundamentalism: 1) *Theological fundamentalism* as the Christian theological movement concerned with defending traditional Christian doctrine against modern thinking; 2) *Political fundamentalism* as a combination of theological fundamentalism and the personal commitments of religious adherents to combat worldly vices; 3) *Cultural fundamentalism*, as cynically portrayed by social critics such as H.L. Mencken and novelists such as Sinclair Lewis, is the melding together of the two types (theological and political) to combine a caricature of culturally unenlightened individuals bent on preserving tradition at the expense of progress. 4) *Global fundamentalism* as a phenomenon denotes many religiously motivated politically active groups existing in a variety of religious traditions and political systems.[44]

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[41] Ho Jin Jun, loc. Cit.

[42] Vorster, *Analytical Perspectives*, 6.

[43] De Schrijver, op. cit. 11.

[44]Rahman, "Religious Fundamentalism," citing Jeffrey K. Hadden and Anson Shupe "Secularization and Fundamentalism Reconsidered" as quoted by Steven Jones, *Fundamentalism* (Virginia: University of Virginia, 1998) [database online]; available from http://religiousmovements.lib.virqinia.edu/nrms/fund.html.

With the broadening of the application of the term fundamentalism comes the need to define it in a way that encompasses the various phenomena and realities it is said to describe. Bruce Lawrence defines fundamentalism as: "the affirmation of religious authority as holistic and absolute, admitting of neither criticism nor reduction; it is expressed through the collective demand that specific creedal and ethical dictates derived from scripture be publicly recognized and legally enforced."[45] For Lawrence, fundamentalism is "a specific kind of religious ideology that is anti-modern but not anti-modernist. It rejects the philosophical rationalism and individualism that accompany modernity, but it takes full advantage of certain technological advances that also characterize the modern age."[46] After comparing fundamentalism in various contexts, Lawrence lists five "family resemblances" of fundamentalism: a) Fundamentalists are advocates of a minority viewpoint. They see themselves as a righteous remnant. Even when they are numerically a majority, they perceive themselves as a minority; b) They are oppositional and confrontational towards both secularists and "wayward" religious followers; c) they are secondary level male elites led invariably by charismatic males; d) They generate their own technical vocabulary; e) Fundamentalism has historical antecedents, but no ideological precursor.

In the last chapter of volume 1 of the multiyear project on fundamentalism funded by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, eight family resemblances are noted: a) religious idealism as basis for personal and communal identity; b) fundamentalists understand truth to be revealed and unified; c) its language intentionally scandalous; d) they envision themselves as part of a cosmic struggle; they seize on historical moments and reinterpret them in light of this cosmic struggle; e) they demonize their opposition and are reactionary; f) they

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[45] Bruce Lawrence, *Defenders of God: The Fundamentalist Revolt against the Modern Age* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1990), 78, cited in Rahman.

[46] Ibid.

are selective in what parts of their tradition and heritage they stress; g) they are led by males; h) they envy modernist cultural hegemony and try to overturn the distribution of power.[47] In the final volume of the same project, Appleby, Emmanuel Sivan, and Gabriel Almond list five ideological and four organizational characteristics of fundamentalism. The five ideological characteristics are: a) concerned "first" with erosion of religion and its proper role in society; b) selective of their tradition and what part of modernity they accept or choose to react against; c) embracing some form of dualism; d) stress on absolutism and inerrancy in their sources of revelation; e) opting for some form of Millennialism or Messianism. The four organizational characteristics are: a) an elect or chosen membership; b) sharp group boundaries; c) charismatic authoritarian leaders; d) mandated behavioral requirements - of fundamentalism.[48]

Hadden and Shupe 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 cultural moorings." According to them, the global presence of fundamentalism is to be explained by the changes brought about by globalization to which fundamentalism reacts.[49] In the words of John Locke, fundamentalism is "as global as the globalization process itself."[50]

For Marty and Appleby, fundamentalism functions "as a tendency, a habit of mind, found within religious communities and paradigmatically embodied in certain representative individuals and movements" and manifests itself as "a strategy,

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[47] Marty and Appleby, "Fundamentalism Observed," 854-888 cited in Rahman.

[48] Ibid., "Fundamentalisms Comprehended," *The Fundamentalism Project* Volume 5, 495-528 cited in Rahman.

[49] Hadden and Shupe, op. cit., quoted by Rahman.

[50] Locke, *FABC Papers* 92m.

or set of strategies, by which beleaguered believers attempt to present their distinctive identity as a people or a group."[51]

Fundamentalists, according to Antoun, can be identified by: a) the search for purity in an impure world; b) 'traditioning' -making the ancient immediately relevant to the contemporary situation; c) totalism – taking religion out of the worship centre and into many domains; e.g. home, school, bank; d) activism - confronting establishments, political or religious, by sometimes violent protest; e) the struggle between good and evil; f) the selective modernization and controlled acculturation.[52]

Fundamentalism is described by Bruce as "a rational response of traditionally religious peoples to social, political and economic changes that downgrade and constrain the role of religion in the public world."[53]

Despite the varied phenomena described by the term fundamentalism, the definitions and descriptions proposed by scholars point to its religious mooring.

RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM IN ASIA

Vorster defines contemporary religious fundamentalism "as a way of reasoning which breeds ideologies that are both religious and political in nature and mount themselves against a perceived threat or enemy in order to protect their identities. These ideologies elevate certain fundamentals of a particular religion or life- and worldview to absolutes and interlace their ideas and methods around these absolutes. With a strong reactionary attitude, fundamentalist ideologies and religions

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[51] Marty and Appleby, "Fundamentalisms Observed," 835 quoted in Vorster, *Analytical Perspectives*, 6.

[52] R.T. Antoun, *Understanding Fundamentalism. Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Movements* (Oxford: Altamira Press, 2001), xii cited in Vorster, ibid.

[53] S. Bruce, *Fundamentalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 117 quoted in Vorster, ibid.

easily resort to extremism, militancy, abuses of human rights and even violence."[54]

The features of religious fundamentalism identified by Woodhead and Heelas are: a) a desire to return to the fundamentals of a religious tradition and strip away unnecessary accretions; b) an aggressive rejection of western secular modernity; c) an oppositional minority group-identity maintained in an exclusivist and militant manner; d) attempts to reclaim the public sphere as a space of religious and moral purity; e) a patriarchial and hierarchical ordering of relations between the sexes.[55]

Islamic Fundamentalism

For Islam, "fundamentalism" is an "outsider category." It was not coined by Islamic scholars or by Muslims in general, though it has been generally adopted by Islamic fundamentalists. "The definition of "Islamic fundamentalism" should be based on the concepts and actions of Muslim themselves, so that they are not misrepresented."[56]

The resentment of some Muslims toward the use of the term is expressed by Riffat Hassan, an Islam scholar:

The West in general, and American media in particular, use the term 'fundamentalism' with reference to Islam shows that this term is the equivalent of emotionally loaded terms such as "extremism," "fanaticism," and even "terrorism."[57]

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[54] Vorster, *Analytical Perspectives*, 17.

[55] L. Woodhead and P. Heelas (eds.), 'Introduction to Chapter Two: Religions of Difference', in *Religion in Modern Times* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 32.

[56] Ho Jin Jun, op. cit. 80.

[57] Riffat Hassan, "The Burgeoning of Islamic Fundamentalism: Toward an Understanding of the Phenomenon," in Cohen, *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon*, 157, quoted in Ho Jin Jun, loc. cit.

Ho Jin Jun offers this definition of Islamic fundamentalism as "an organized movement which attempts to practice the teachings of the Qur'an and also to impose these teachings on every part of society, including politics, using any means, including violence."[58]

Rahman calls for an understanding of Islam and its historical background in order to assess correctly the current situation. "Islam is characterised among the religions by the particular emphasis which it has from the beginning given to social order. The Prophet Muhammad not only preached ethics, he organised a state. Indeed, Islamic history is calculated to begin not on the year when the Prophet was born, not when he began to receive Divine revelations, but when the Muslim Community came to power in a State of its own. The 1 A.H. marks the establishment of Islam as a religio-political sovereignty in al-Madina. The State was organized in accordance with God's revelation; it prospered and expanded and Islam as a process in human history was launched on its career."[59] He calls attention to the Muslim sense of humiliation during Western colonial domination of their lands. "The fact that the West was Christian and its acquired territories were predominantly Muslim is not trivial and has to be seen in the perspective of a historical rivalry between the social systems of the two opposite peoples."[60]

"From having possessed, in previous centuries, the world's most powerful, advanced and prosperous states, in the Ottoman, Safavid and Moghul empires, Muslims had by 1800 succumbed almost everywhere to the rule of others. In South and Southeast Asia it was Christian European powers -first the Portuguese, then Dutch, British, Spaniards, Russians, and Americans -who came to dominate Muslim regions. In the same

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[58] Ho Jin Jun, ibid. 81.

[59] Rahman, op. cit.

[60] Ibid.

period, Chinese, Thai, and Burmese Buddhists incorporated Muslim regions into their domains. In Asia, only Afghanistan was able to remain independent, due to its topological isolation and a skillful playing off of Russian designs against those of England. In the Middle East and North Africa, the British and French were locked in a power struggle over regions inhabited by Muslims, with the other European powers holding on to whatever enclaves they could. Iran and Turkey, while remaining nominally independent, had to accept humiliating capitulations which gave European powers rights to intervene, interfere, and impose their will."[61]

In the years after World War II, as one Muslim nation after another achieved independence, the Islamic "revivalists hoped that Islamic states would be set up. What actually happened was quite different. Muslim rule replaced the colonial regimes, but the ideals of the Islamic state were far from being implemented. The new ruling class throughout the Muslim world generally created nation states on a European nationalist model. Legal codes were based on those of Western nations and were often merely revisions of colonial law. On the grounds that it was more egalitarian and would prevent the abuses of uncontrolled capitalism, socialist policies of a one-party state, state ownership of industries, and centrally planned economics were adopted. Cultural mores, as well as development concepts, were borrowed from the West."[62] Even after independence, when direct foreign rule was withdrawn, control was exercised through indirect means. "No leader was to be tolerated if he became strong enough to pursue a reasonably independent policy, or sought self-reliance."

Many Muslims thought that Pakistan would be a model of modern Islamic democracy but "Pakistan's Islamic identity did not enable the country to overcome ethnic clashes,

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[61] Michel, *FABC Papers* 82.

[62] Ibid.

economic mismanagement and corruption, military takeovers, and equitable distribution of wealth." Thus, Muslims thought that a more revolutionary societal structuring would be needed for a truly Islamic state.

The expulsion and oppression of Palestinians upon the creation of the state of Israel in 1949 led to the conviction that the West was opposed to Islam and that "Arabs and Muslims generally were victims of injustice perpetrated by inimical Western powers." In 1967, the defeat of Egypt by tiny Israel discredited Nasser, the military and the ideology of the pan-Arab nationalism.

The 1979 Iranian revolution proved to the world how Iranian Muslims through religious solidarity could overthrow a wealthy and unpopular Muslim regime, one which was a strong proponent of secularization and closely allied to the West and presumed to be of unassailable stability. "The Islamic Republic of Iran replaced, in the thoughts of many, the failed Pakistan as the model of an Islamic state. All observers, whether sympathetic or not, agreed that the government of Ayatolah Khomeni was truly revolutionary in rethinking and reorganizing every aspect of social life according to the principles of Islam."[63] Later events in the Muslim world would encourage the growth and spread of revivalist ideas.

Ho Jin Jun observes that "most Muslim nations are not tolerant towards other religions instead they persecute them. Islamic fundamentalists are initiating persecution and violence against the minority religion in their community." Observance of plurality is hardly expected in countries belonging to the category of fundamentalist Islamic nations such as Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Iran, Libya, Malaysia and Sudan.[64] Ho Jin Jun states his conclusion to his survey of Islamic

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[63] Ibid.

[64] Ho Jin Jun, op. cit., 91.

fundamentalism in this way: "Islamic fundamentalism is more seriously creating conflict with the West than any other kind of religious fundamentalism. Islamic fundamentalism is no longer a religion but rather assumes a political ideology for Muslim countries."[65]

Jewish Fundamentalism

Judaism also has its religious fundamentalists. "Jewish fundamentalist groups in Israel, including the largest, Gush Emunim (Bloc of the Faithful), are characterized by an utter unwillingness to negotiate with Palestinians over what they see as holy land."[66]

Gush Emunim was founded after the 1978 Camp David agreement between Israel and Egypt, which resulted in the handing back of the Sinai desert to the latter. Fundamentalist groups were opposed to this. For them to hand back any territory to Arabs is tantamount to going against God's will as revealed in the Bible. Simmering religious opposition to the peace plan with the PLO, involving giving autonomy to the Gaza Strip and to an area around Jericho, reached tragic levels in February 1994 when a religious zealot, Baruch Goldstein, linked with other militants, murdered a number of people during a dawn attack on a mosque in the occupied West Bank town of Hebron. After the massacre the Israeli government banned the militants but the banning of such extremist groups did little to diminish the growing political influence of Jewish fundamentalist groups in Israel.[67]

Hindu Fundamentalism

Hinduism is known to be the most tolerant religion among other religions but the recent destruction of churches

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[65] Ibid.

[66] Haynes, loc. cit.

[67] Ibid.

and killing of missionaries has undermined the claims of Hinduism to be tolerant. The peace and stability of Indian society is increasingly threatened by the frequent confrontations between Hinduism and Islam, clashes between Hinduism and Sikhism and the tensions between Hinduism and Christianity which are generally initiated by Hindu fundamentalists.

Ian Talbot mentions five problems of India: 1) marked increase in the frequency and intensity of communal rioting; 2) the mushrooming and spread of Hindu fundamentalist organizations; 3) an increase in the number of conflicts to acquire national political prominence; 4) continuous political and religious tensions; 5) violence in the Punjab and political encouragement for the spread of militant regional Hindu festivals into new areas.[68]

As far as Hinduism is concerned, "fundamentalism" is used interchangeably with the term "communalism," which is an alternative to nationalism. Communalism has emerged as a strong reaction against secularism. Fundamentalists emphasize the establishment of a strong Hindu community and the exclusion of other religions from Indian territory. Communalism means "the dominance of one religious community. If that community is in a minority, this is opposed to all ideas of democracy. But if that community is in a majority, even so its dominance over others as religious communities would be wholly democratic."[69]

Hinduism is also present in Sri Lanka and there were some conflicts between Christianity and Hinduism in the early part of the twentieth century. The tendency is for Tamil people to convert from Hinduism to Christianity because of ethnic

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[68] Ho Jin Jun, op. cit., 94; cf. Ian A. Talbot, "Politics and Religion in Contemporary India," in George Moyser (ed.), *Politics and Religion in the Modern World* (London: Routledge, 1991), 141.

[69] Ho Jin Jun, ibid., 95.

discrimination suffered at the hands of Buddhist Singhalese and the inability of Hinduism to console them spiritually and practically.[70]

Indian churches have developed indigenous theologies more than other churches in Asia; but the struggle of Indian churches is how to survive as a minority. The fact that Indian converts from Hinduism to Christianity must report their conversion to government offices indicates that the system itself makes the change from Hinduism to Christianity exceedingly difficult and pressured. Hinduism is often thought to be confined generally to India, Nepal and the Bali Island of Indonesia. At present, however, Hinduism has made inroads into other Asian countries, such as Japan, Korea and Taiwan, through Hindu mysticism and the New Age Movement.[71]

Buddhist fundamentalism

Buddhism has largely spread in Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Tibet, Mongolia, China, South Korea and Japan where, in most cases, the major religions of Islam, Hinduism and Christianity are not flourishing.[72] Often perceived as apolitical because of its self-detachment from reality, Buddhism in Asia is now expressing a powerful voice in some nations with its social and political consciousness. It is showing a strong nationalist and anti-secularist stance. Militant Buddhism emerged in Sri Lanka since independence from British rule. Buddhist leaders in Myanmar established Buddhist socialism; and in Thailand Buddhism is almost a political ideology. Ho Jin Jun thinks that such a religious atmosphere in Buddhist countries encourages fundamentalists who are attempting to lead Buddhism towards specific religious and

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[70] Ibid., 104.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid., 105.

political goals.[73] Buddhist fundamentalist groups have appeared mainly in Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Thailand where Theravada Buddhism is dominant.[74] Ho Jin Jun concludes his survey of Buddhist fundamentalism by saying that "Buddhism is no longer a peaceful and tolerant religion…Buddhism fundamentalism is mainly confined to Thailand and Sri Lanka, but most Buddhist nations exclude minority ethnic groups and religions."[75]

Following this brief survey of religious fundamentalism in Asia is the presentation of Vorster's conclusions to his study of literature and researches on fundamentalism and examination of perspectives as well as his proposed list of core characteristics of religious fundamentalism.

Perspectives and Core Characteristics of Religious Fundamentalism

Vorster classifies the different studies on fundamentalism and analyses fundamentalism according to theological, psychological, political and sociological perspectives.

1. Theological Perspectives

After discussing the works of Barr, Marsden and Bruce on fundamentalism; Milton-Edwards and Voll on Islamic fundamentalism; Antoun, Heilman and Friedman, Aran, Bruce, on Jewish Fundamentalism; Gold on Hindu fundamentalism; Madan on Sikh tradition and Swearer on Theravada Buddhism, Vorster concludes thus: "These theological perspectives reveal that scripturalism, the attempt to establish a rigid orthopraxis, the identification of a common enemy, anger, totalism, religious

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73 Ibid., 106.

74 Ibid., 107.

75 Ibid., 112.

fanaticism and extremism are indicators of the emergence of fundamentalism in religious traditions."[76]

2. Psychological Perspectives

Drawing from the studies of Hood, Hill, Hill, Williamson, Altemeyer, Riddell, Marger, the final observation of Vorster is: "Social prejudice, the "in-group" "out-group" paradigm, discrimination and social stratification, reconstruction of history, in-breeding, fear, the tendency to stereotype and the inclination to violence, are powerful ingredients of contemporary religious fundamentalism that become clear when examined from a psychological point of view."[77]

3. Political Perspectives

Vorster has this to say after his discussion of Anon, Jansen, Antoun: "Although deeply rooted in religion, fundamentalism is thus not only a religious phenomenon. It breeds religio-political ideologies that can unleash radical and violent political action to protect the ethnic identity of people experiencing a threat."

4. Sociological Perspectives

Having discussed the works of Maley and Coreno among others, Vorster concludes: "Religious fundamentalism is a radical reaction to change and the emergence of a perceived enemy that "threatens" the sanctity of old fashioned values, ideas and the safety of the traditions and customs of a community. Thus any community will expose a tendency to religious fundamentalism and its extreme ways in any given situation of change and uncertainty."[78]

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[76] Vorster, *Analytical Perspectives*, 11.

[77] Ibid., 13.

[78] Ibid., 17.

Vorster concludes his study of the research done by scholars on fundamentalism and examination of the different perspectives with a description of modern-day religious fundamentalism: "Religious fundamentalism is a pattern of reasoning that breeds radical ideologies by way of singling out certain fundamentals of a religion and elevates them to absolutes. These absolutes form the paradigm of the ideology that develops as reaction to what it fears as a threat to its own identity, and which reacts if necessary by way of radical and militant methods." He makes the following recommendation: "Any attempt to discuss the management of religious fundamentalism where it threatens to destabilise a society should pay attention to the trends suggested in this definition. Against this background serious attention should be paid to the characteristics, roots and outcomes of contemporary religious fundamentalism and its violations of human rights in order to propose positive and workable steps in the management of this destructive force in a human rights environment."[79]

In another article, Vorster expresses concern for the surge of fundamentalism which inhibits peace keeping and the maintenance of human rights in parts of the world. He identifies the core characteristics of fundamentalism which according to him need to be understood in order to manage this reality.[80] The core characteristics are:

1. The literalist use of religious texts.

"The "three religions of the Book" namely Christianity, Islam and Judaism have, in spite of deep-rooted differences in theology and ethics, one remarkable similarity. All three are prone to fundamentalism because of the danger of a literalist use of the respective scriptures. Scripturalism meets the need

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[79] Ibid.

[80] Jakobus Vorster, "Perspectives on the Core Characteristics of Religious Fundamentalism Today," in Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies 7/21 (2008):45.

for certainty and authority for many people and gives them confidence in their pursuits. The appeal of these fundamentalisms is great because of the use of proof-texts that are easy to understand and to follow. Nationalism and patriotism combined with self-centric ideals create dangerous forces where violence for the sake of furthering a holy agenda becomes a romantic and even sacral strategy of change. Therefore, the literalist use of scripture can be regarded as the most important characteristic of fundamentalism."[81]

2. Traditioning

"While scripturalism reaches back to the ancient roots and professes the will of God according to a literal and a-historical use of texts in order to highlight the core fundamentals of religion, traditioning is an attempt to provide further authority to these fundamentals by indicating their stand and value in the tradition of the particular religion. Fundamentalism in other world religions also elevates certain historical events, leaders and myths to absolutes that are then used to promote and strengthen the spirit of their movement today."[82]

3. Casuistic Ethics

"The term casuistry denotes the methodical process of bringing individual, real-life cases under the established norms of a discipline or a world-view or ethics. Casuistic ethics points to a legalistic ethical system that is not controlled by applying principles and norms in every new situation, but which provide a fixed recipe for moral conduct. Casuistic ethics aims to control life with moral laws and to deny the individual the right of freedom of choice when it comes to the management of their behaviour and conduct. Usually casuistic ethics enforces and

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[81] Ibid., 49.

[82] Ibid., 50.

outwardly fixed life style instead of promoting guiding moral principles and norms for humans to realise in their lifestyles. Casuistry is typical of fundamentalism. Just as fundamentalism elevates certain fundamentals to absolutes and interlaces its whole ideology around these absolutes, it promotes a legalistic lifestyle consisting of many outwardly ways of conduct, symbols and social structures. Their ethic is thus primary an ethic of law, which tends to be rather rigid because of the concreteness of legal regulations.

The rigid moralism in fundamentalism is explained by Riesebrodt as usually rotating around certain facets of human conduct,[83] such as:

• Gender relations. Fundamentalists all tend to idealise patriarchal structures in authority and morality. Males are valued as superior according to a creational order, and women should be submissive. This point of view results in many violations of the rights of women and girl children in many societies.

• Family relations. The strict patriarchal structures also dominate families and households. Fundamentalists tend to hold strong views on the necessity of discipline and will give preferentiality to corporal punishment and other forms of authoritarian disciplinary action.

• Sexuality. Islamic fundamentalism's casuistry is also evident in its strange and inconsistent sexual morality. Women will be punished more severely for sexual offences than men. Sexual offences by males are treated more leniently. They regard the liberal standards of the modern world as "westoxication".

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[83] Martin Riesebrodt, "Fundamentalism and the resurgence of religion," *Numen* 47 (2000):270.

• The application of law and order. Religious fundamentalists are very adamant campaigners for capital punishment. They propose death penalties for a number of crimes, and Islamic fundamentalists even approve of the deplorable practice of "honour killings" of female adulteresses.

In a culture of rigid moralism which results from casuistic ethics, there is no room for any form of pluralism, differences of opinions on morals, or diversity in conduct. Religious fundamentalism opposes cultural pluralism, religious diversity and multiparty politics. The casuistic character of its ideologies causes a reactionary approach to other ideas, movements and structures and an intolerant attitude to opposing views and people of other faiths and conviction. They are known for their prejudice when faced with anything new or alien to their own strict ideas and morals.[84]

4. Reactionary Nature, Prejudice and Intolerance

Religious fundamentalism is usually caused by fear of a perceived enemy. Fundamentalists define themselves by what they are against. The reactionary nature of religious fundamentalism can be discerned in its intolerance towards people with other ideas and beliefs. Fundamentalists are seldom willing to enter into an open debate with others. They rather tend to attach themselves with their own group and to demonise other perspectives. They would even campaign for disciplinary actions against people critical of their cause.[85]

5. Formation of the "in-group" and "inbreeding"

Another common denominator in religious fundamentalism is the consciousness of the tension between "us," the "in-group" and "them," the "out-group." With the

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[84] Ibid., 51.

[85] Ibid., 53.

"we-feeling" and solidarity in the group, a fundamentalist group can have the tendency to judge other groups by the standards and values of their own. Due to the prejudice and intolerance of the "in-group" mutual respect and collaboration become virtually impossible.

6. Reliance on Strong Leadership

The charismatic leader, able to motivate and encourage and willing to criticize and defend is important in fundamentalist movements. The "in-group" leader keeps the group intact with charismatic leadership, clear vision and strong discipline, and nurtures the "we-feeling." Studies of the various forms of religious fundamentalism reveal that religious fundamentalism relies on strong and charismatic leadership and flourishes as long as the cult leader or the institutional leader nurtures the absolutes of the group.[86]

7. Inclination to Violence

Demonization of the other in religious fundamentalism serves the justification of violence and the killing of innocent people. Acts of violence to promote the "sacred" cause in obedience to God is one of the core characteristics of religious fundamentalism. The notion of a sacred cause on the side of God declares the "other" as enemies of God and the use of violence as a legitimate course of action.

"Christian fundamentalism has limited its actions in the recent past to peaceful protest, but the ingredients of militancy are still part and parcel of its paraphernalia. Under the "right" circumstances it can spill over in actions of violence such as is proven by the attacks on abortion clinics in the US. Christian fundamentalism is known for its radical views when it comes to the execution of discipline on children, its promotion of capital

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[86] Ibid., 56.

punishment, its submission of women and its judgemental attitude in the cases of dissention of its own adherents. Raising suspicion, schism in churches and theological seminaries, establishment of radical political parties and pressure groups are part and parcel of its strategies."

Jewish fundamentalism also expresses the inclination to violent actions. This inclination becomes visible in their politics as they tend to support radical violent options than peaceful negotiation.

The use of violence has become nowadays one of the main characteristics of Islamic fundamentalism. *Jihad* which means a righteous or right cause before God and not military activity per se, is interpreted in Islamic fundamentalism as military action to protect the Islam rule and culture in times of oppression or military aggression against the Islamic countries. In this holy war, there is no place for the protection of human dignity and human rights.

With its inclination to violence, religious fundamentalism in whatever form does not respect human rights.

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

The process by which the term "fundamentalism" gained additional and new signification as well as significance beyond its original setting and how the concept broadened in extension and application to become a "convenient" term or label for varied religious phenomena and movements that exhibit similar characteristics are particularly instructive for our approach to fundamentalism. While there is great value and benefit in generalizations and defining common characteristics, I believe there is a need to go back to the historical origins of each and every movement and understand it in its own terms according to its worldview and particular contexts. In addressing the issues of fundamentalism, it would be helpful to

distinguish between Christian fundamentalism and fundamentalisms in other religions. Nonetheless, the common issues that need to be addressed have to do with respect for human dignity, human rights, women and youth.

Inasmuch as fundamentalist groups arose as a reaction to situations or realities which they perceived as threat to their self-identity and vision of society and the world, provoking fear, anxiety and insecurity, the tendency is to instil fear in others through strategies of violence and threats. Locke's observation is apropos:

> A frontal attack on fundamentalists merely confirms their anxiety. One must begin from reflection on the shared experience of living in a threatening world of constant change. We have all experienced this. How has it affected us personally? How has it affected our local Catholic Church? What has been our personal response and that of our people? From such reflections one can move on to consider other fundamentalists in our society. What threatens them? And how might we work with other people of good will to bring solace to them, and peace to our communities and nations?[87]

Neither does Rahman advocate confrontation. He summarizes his proposed remedial strategy in five points:[88]

1. We must proceed courageously and sort out such a common strategy on the basis of which a new era of peace can be initiated, like guarantee of sovereignty, freedom and geographical integrity of

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[87] Locke, *FABC Papers* 92m.

[88] Rahman, op. cit.

all the nations. Islam had put forwarded this principle to the globe in past. This principle can uproot the roots of imperialism

2. Pluralism is a threat for the global peace. It means the hegemony of one state or civilisation. Every nation-state has the right to maintain and preserve its own culture and value system.

3. All the burning issues be solved through dialogue. Use of power may be confined in the light of universal law and justice. Awareness against all sort of suppression is the need of the day. There is a need of differentiation between 'terrorism' and 'self determination'.

4. A just global judicial system can provide ground for global peace;

5. International cooperation on common issues can lead the globe towards just and peaceful distribution of wealth, happiness, solidarity and dignified life.

Rahman highlights dialogue as the only solution of peaceful existence. But, if openness to dialogue is precisely lacking in the fundamentalist mind-set, how can there be an open discourse that will enable participants to discuss and find solutions to common problems brought about by globalization?

The patriarchal and hierarchical orientation and gender bias of religious fundamentalist groups are matters of great concern.

"The emergence of state supported religious fundamentalism clearly has very serious implications for women. The contradictory tendencies at the level of government policies for women and development with the aim of drawing women into the labour market, and the attempts through legislation to restrict women's access to the public world are part of one process by which the interests of patriarchy and capital are ensured. Religious fundamentalism

as a state ideology thus provides the possibility of a coincidence of interests between patriarchy and the demands of the capitalist economy. This remains of course an uneasy coincidence but it would be a mistake to continue seeing the logic of the market as necessarily leading to a liberal ideology of women's work. An ideology of restriction even though large numbers of women are being drawn into work outside the home and therefore competing with men, can be a viable ideology of legitimation.[89] How can women's movement project an alternative culture for women in each country, how can regional perspective be formed for the process of democratisation and redefinition of man-woman relations?

Children and youth are most vulnerable to religious fundamentalism. Their process of development can be stunted or blocked when they are formed in a context of threat and fear of the other, when they are trained to accept without question what the leaders say about tradition, when they are taught only the absolutes and not the variables and when they are brought up in a totalizing male-dominated patriarchal environment. The phases of development to human maturity entail experiences of transitions and insecurity. Fundamentalist groups may become attractive to young people who are still forming and defining their identity and are in need of a sense of belonging and security which fundamentalist groups promise to provide. The youth, now exposed to modern values through technologies and the media, could also feel confused and disoriented with the many options presented to them. Living a life of continuous discernment of choices may be experienced as a burden and lead them to search for firm foundations of the faith of the fundamentalist groups who offer "easy answers to all sorts of complicated questions."[90] Some fundamentalist groups capitalize on the vulnerability of the young and recruit them quite early to become members. Parents would complain that

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[89] Amrita Chhachhi, "The State, Religious Fundamentalism and Women Trends in South Asia," 1988.

[90] De Schrijver, op. cit. 11.

their children were "stolen" from them by the movement. In several cases, children are born and reared in a fundamentalist environment and would not even think of themselves as fundamentalist until they interact with the "out-group." Another concern is the possibility of spiritual abuse being experienced by children raised up in an environment that threaten them with hell-fire if they do not live up to the expectations and standards of the fundamentalist group.

Some Christian fundamentalist groups are experiencing decrease in membership because their members shift or return to the mainline religion or denomination.[91] A fundamentalist who leaves the group may not necessarily return to a mainline religion or denomination. Some ex-fundamentalists continue their search outside traditional religions. There are fundamentalist groups that could not tolerate deconversion and resort to violence and killing of their former co-religionist. This reality is opening up an area of concern: who can journey with ex-fundamentalists in search of self-identity and God? How can the experience of ex-fundamentalists be helpful in dealing with the phenomenon of fundamentalism?[92] What new resources do we have?

The fundamentalist phenomena challenge us to look at our own faith-tradition, our vision, faith and practice, our strategies of religious formation, mission and engagement in social transformation. We need to orient and educate people especially women and youth in the proper interpretation and

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[91] Woods, *A Broken Mirror*, cites the case of the Baptist group in Vintar, Ilocos Sur in the Philippines.

[92] Raoul Adam, an ex-fundamentalist, wrote his thesis on fundamentalism using a structural development approach. Raoul Adam, Fundamentalism and Structural Development: A Conceptual Synthesis and Discussion of Implications for Religious Education, Master's Degree Thesis, College of Education, James Cook University, 2003.

use of Scripture, in the promotion of Christian and human values that lead to human flourishing.

II. RELATIVISM: A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING AND ITS IMPACT ON THE YOUTH IN ASIA
- Fr. Clarence Devadass, STD

Introduction

Relativism is thought of by many as a topic best left to be dealt with by academicians and those who are interested in the field of philosophy. This may be partially true but the effects of relativism are felt by everyone even though we do not use this term in our everyday vocabulary. For this reason then, Pope Benedict XVI has on several occasions called on the Church to combat relativism because of its adverse effects on society. What seems to be spreading rapidly in our society is a kind of moral relativism where in its extreme form manifests itself as there are no universal standards on what is right and wrong.

The word "relativism" has got two meanings according to the Webster's dictionary. Firstly, it is a *theory that knowledge is relative to the limited nature of the mind and the conditions of knowing*; secondly, it is a view that *ethical truths depend on the individuals and groups holding them*. According to the same dictionary, this word has been in use since 1865. It comes from the Latin origin, *relativus*, from *relatus*, perfect passive participle of *referre* ("to carry back, to ascribe"), from *re-* ("again") + *ferre* ("to bear or carry"). In other words, relativism simply implies reference to many, not to one: there is no universal truth, only many different truths. Professor Simon Blackburn (Professor of Philosophy at Cambridge University) defines relativism as "different opinions, no one authority, and as many 'truths' as there are people or societies or cultures advancing different ways of doing things."

Historical Development

Even though this word in its entirety has been around only for about 150 years, *relativism* was not a concept that fell from the skies. Traces of relativism have been in existence since the 5th century BC in Greek thought.[93] There are many "stories" that tell us how different personalities held on to their position and considered that as truth. For example, Protagoras of Abdera (c. 490–420 BC), is considered the first official voice of relativism when he proclaims: "man is the measure (*metron*) of all things (*chremata*): of the things which are that they are, and of the things which are not, that they are not."[94] Plato reports the dictum in *Theaetetus*, and Sextus Empiricus tells us that it was the opening passage of Protagoras' treatise *Truth (Al_theia).* Plato interprets Protagoras as meaning: "Each thing appears *(phainesthai)* to me, so it is for me, and as it appears to you, so it is for your - you and I each being a man."[95] Before Protagoras there was Heraclites with his doctrine of πάντα ρει (all things change), nothing remains the same, hence there are no absolutes.

In the Christian era, William of Ockham (14th Century) laid the foundations for *Nomenalism*. This philosophical position denies universals and admits only the existence of the particular, the individual existing thing. The similarities of things are not longer considered the common property of nature, hence general or universal abstract notions, laws or ideas are only 'names' or mental images.

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[93] Cf. Maria Baghramian, A Brief History of Relativism, URL http://www.ucd.ie/philosophy/staff/ mariabaghramian/Brief%20History.pdf, 3 February 2012 (Downloaded)

[94] Plato, Theaetetus, 152a1–3, in Complete Works, trans. M. J. Levett, rev. Myles Burnyeat, eds. John M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett, 1997).

[95] Ibid.

With David Hume (18th Century empiricist) this led to skepticism about the objective value of intellectual constructs. In the development of our own Catholic theology, we see how Ockham's reductionism disallowed pluralities without clear necessity. The weight of judgment was thrown onto the particular. He attributed absolute power to God *(potential absoluta)* making everything God created contingent, i.e., it could be its opposite should God so have desired.

In our present times, a reflection of 'nomenalism' can be found in the ethical theory called *Situation Ethics*. It goes to affirm that love is the determining principle for all moral decisions. It attempts to describe a middle position between an ethic based on moral absolutes (which it designates as 'legalism') and action that has no laws, rules or principles to guide it. The "problem" is that the 'love principle' is basically utilitarian – looking to accomplish the greater good for the greater number. It is an ethical principle that cannot avoid the position that the end justifies the means. The basic problem with situation ethics is that it brings in love without moral content and is therefore reducible to personal preference in the accomplishing of any action. Perhaps these two examples of the Protagorean dictum that "man is the measure of all things" fills in at least a small part of the history between the ancient and modern times as they attempt to trace the philosophical idea that is the heart of *relativism*.[96]

Types of Relativism

There are many types of relativism, or it would be more appropriate to say that relativism manifests itself in many

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[96] Michael J Cantley, The Dictatorship of Relativism, URL http://www.saintanthonyofpadua.org/Cantley/ relativism.htm, 7 February 2012 (Downloaded)

forms. Here I will attempt to enumerate some ways in which relativism has been described:

- Aesthetic relativism: Aesthetic relativism is the philosophical view that the judgement of beauty is relative to individuals, cultures, time periods and contexts, and that there are no universal criteria of beauty. As the maxim says, *beauty is in the eyes of its beholder*. For example, an art piece or a sculpture in the museum may appeal to one and not to the other.

- Cognitive Relativism: Cognitive relativism affirms that all truth is relative. This would mean that no system of determining truth is more valid than another system, and that there is no objective standard of truth to be found or claimed. It would, naturally, deny that there would be a God of absolute truth. It would also deny the belief that rational thought can discover and verify truth.[97]

- Individualistic Relativism (Subjectivism): Subjectivism is the philosophical theory that ascribes to the individual mind or subject and its sensations, ideas, attitudes, feelings, emotions, and beliefs a privileged or preeminent status in the world order and in our knowledge of that order. The subjectivist theory has been influential in several philosophical disciplines, especially the theory of knowledge and value theory.[98]

Closer to our era, academicians say that there are four (4) predominant schools of thought with regard to relativism. They

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[97] Matt Slick, Cognitive Relativism, URL http://carm.org/secular-movements/relativism/cognitive-relativism, 5 January 2012 (Downloaded).

[98] Unknown, Subjectivism, http://philosophos.hubpages.com/hub/subjectivism, 24 February 2012 (Downloaded).

are cultural relativism, conceptual relativism, social constructivism, and post modern relativism:[99]

Conceptual Relativism: Bruce Aune from the University of Massachusetts also talks about Conceptual relativism.[100] Conceptual relativism is the view that "different groups, e.g., those with very different languages or cultures, may have rather different central concepts and that this can lead their members to rather different conceptions of the world. Conceptual relativism can be quite global, applying to concepts across the board, but it also comes in more local versions that apply to more limited domains like ethics or science."[101]

> *Cultural relativism refers to the anthropological challenge of making sense of what is 'second nature' in the particular culture being studied. This principle was established in <u>anthropological</u> research by <u>Franz Boas</u>[102] in the early 20th century. The term infers that no culture is superior to another as all cultures are equal. It suggests that each culture must be valued in its own terms… "[M]oral problems are interpreted differently by different societies" and that "questions of right and wrong are relative to the particular culture in which the behaviour occurs". In essence, what we in the West may view as immoral or*

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[99] Maria Baghramian, A Brief History of Relativism, URL http://www.ucd.ie/philosophy/staff/ mariabaghramian/Brief%20History.pdf, 3 February 2012 (Downloaded).

[100] Bruce Aune, Conceptual Relativism, Philosophical Perspectives, 1, Metaphysics 1986, pgs 266 – 288.

[101] Swoyer, Chris, "Relativism", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2010 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2010/entries/relativism/, 10 March 2012 (Downloaded).

[102] Franz Boas (1858-1942) is considered both the founder of modern anthropology as well as the father of American Anthropology. It was Boas who gave modern anthropology its rigorous scientific methodology, patterned after the natural sciences, and it was Boas who originated the notion of "culture" as learned behaviors.

wrong may be a very significant way of life for other societies.[103]

- Conceptual relativism: Here, ontology is relativised to conceptual schemes, scientific paradigm, or categorical framework. The belief is that the word does not present itself in a readymade manner; we find ways of categorising and conceptualizing it.

- Social constructivism: Social constructivism has relativist consequences. It claims that different social forces lead to the construction of different words and there is no neutral ground for adjudicating between them.

- Postmodernism: This is probably the area in which we, as church, struggle with. Postmodernist mistrust claims to objectivity, denial of universal concepts of rationality and rejection of the role of universal truth and reason.

The Problem of Relativism

In his homily at the Mass for the election of the Roman Pontiff, which is now known as the "Dictatorship of Relativism Homily", Cardinal Ratzinger told his fellow electors... "Today, having a clear faith based on the Creed of the Church is often labelled as fundamentalism. Whereas relativism, that is, letting oneself be 'tossed here and there, carried about by every wind of doctrine' (cf. Eph 4:14), seems the only attitude that can cope with modern times. We are building a dictatorship of relativism that does not recognise anything as definitive and whose ultimate goal consists solely in one's own ego and desires."

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[103] Gracy Lou, What is Cultural Relativism and Why Do Anthropologists Value It? in Social Sciences (16 February 2011), http://socyberty.com/social-sciences/what-is-cultural-relativism-and-why-do-anthropologists-value-it, 15 December 2011 (Downloaded).

In his address to the *Ecclesial Congress of the Diocese of Rome*, on the "Anthropological Foundations of the Family", the Holy Father repeated his past concerns: "Today, a particularly insidious obstacle to the task of educating is the massive presence in our society and culture of that relativism which, recognizing nothing as definitive leaves as the ultimate criterion only the self with its desires. And under the semblance of freedom it becomes a prison for each one, for it separates people from one another, locking each person into his or her own 'ego.' With such a relativistic horizon, therefore, real education is not possible without the light of truth; sooner or later, every person is in fact condemned to doubting in the goodness of his or her own life and the relationships of which it consists, the validity of his or her commitment to build with others something in common."[104]

The problem of relativism is not just one that is affecting the Church but it would point more towards a problem in our society and culture. Pope Benedict in his spiritual reflection for this year's Good Friday service spoke about the growing concern over the rebellion against the Church dogma's which is being fanned by encroaching egoism, consumerism and individualism which have traces in the philosophy of relativism.

It is not my intention to discuss all possible form of relativism in this forum but to only limit myself to the problem at hand, which is the effects on youth today. When Pope Benedict used the words "dictatorship of relativism", the dictatorial nature of this is that "the only view permissible among reasonable people is the view that all subjective choices are equally valid….anyone who claims that there are objective truths and objective good /

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[104] Michael J Cantley, The Dictatorship of Relativism, URL http: //www.saintanthonyofpadua.org/Cantley/ relativism.htm, 15 February 2011 (Downloaded).

evil is intolerant."[105] What this means is that there can be no objective moral truths as long as we see things differently.

Keeping in line with the Church's concern, I will limit myself to only one aspect of relativism, that is, moral relativism. Before we delve into what is moral relativism, it may be good to keep in mind how a moral relativist looks at morality and moral objectivity. A moral relativist will define morality as individual, changeable, and subjective. What this means is that a moral relativist would see moral objectivity as something being imposed on the individual and because of its imposition, it causes guilt and shame…therefore it is wrong; different cultures have different ideas of morality and no one is more valid than the other; without moral subjectivism there can be no personal freedom. In short, moral relativism is the philosophical theory that morality is relative, that different moral truths hold for different people. Generally, it comes in two forms: ethical subjectivism and cultural relativism.

Ethical subjectivism holds that morality is relative to the individual; cultural relativism holds that it is relative to culture. Both deny the existence of moral absolutes, of objective moral truths.[106]

> *Moral relativism directly opposes ethnocentrism, which is the view that cultures can be judged based on the social and moral codes of another culture. An ethnocentric method of evaluation is justifiably discouraged in anthropological evaluations of societies because it passes judgments on others based on comparison to a foreign standard. This extrinsic standard of comparison may be completely unknown to the people of the scrutinized society, which demonstrates the unfairness and irrationality of this method of moral analysis. Therefore, a definite advantage of moral relativism is its consideration of the*

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105 Michael Novak, Culture in Crisis, National Review Online, 19 April 2005.

106 Unknown, Moral Relativism: Is Morality Relative to Individuals or Cultures?, http://www. moralrelativism.info, 15 February 2011 (Downloaded).

wide variety of situations in different societies around the world, both past and present. Moral relativism accounts for the fact that people in different cultures have different worldviews, lifestyles, educations, and traditions, which is a very positive aspect of this theory.[107]

Proponents of moral relativism argue that there can be no moral absolutes because there are situations that warrant lying and stealing and that is why there can be no moral absolutes. There are also situations that require a person to be tolerant of those whom we disagree – those who come from different backgrounds.

Relativism & Individual Rights

The question in the minds of most people today and including ourselves…. Is relativism on the rise? It may be too simplistic a question but nevertheless a relevant question because relativism shows itself in many guises. As we have seen earlier, there are many forms in which relativistic thought defines itself. One among the many reasons that relativism is so ingrained in society today is also due to the greater awareness on the rights of the individual.

We live in a time where we all want to be seen as politically correct. What this means is that we prefer to choose to accommodate people rather than confront or challenge issues that would be considered "objectional". Why is this so? We choose this so as to avoid extreme positions. In the past, the Church and State have always chosen extreme positions on matter pertaining to faith, morals, and law. This has drawn flak from so many quarters of society. In order to accommodate

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[107] Unknown, The Philosophical Issue Of Moral Relativism, http://www.essortment.com/philosophical-issue-moral-relativism-39692.html, 6 February 2012 (Downloaded).

greater participation, we may have compromised our position so that words like accommodate, tolerate, respect, rights can find a better grip on society and even accommodated in an acceptable manner with very little objection.

For example, "cultural relativism is the assertion that human values, far from being universal, vary a great deal according to different cultural perspectives. Some would apply this relativism to the promotion, protection, interpretation and application of human rights that could be interpreted differently within different cultural, ethnic and religious traditions. In other words, according to this view, human rights are culturally relative rather than universal."[108]

Perhaps the challenge of relativism that we are facing now must spur us to re-look at the very concept of individual rights. Does individual right mean that every single person has the right to act in a particular way and that it has to be accepted by all? Maybe this is the fallacious thought that many people have. In its strict sense, there can be no expression of an absolute right. Every right hinges on another right and that may be the right of the other person.

Refuting Relativism?

As we have been stating from the start, relativism is the philosophical position that all points of view are equally valid and that all truth is relative to the individual. However, if we take a closer look at this proposition, in itself there is contradiction. Many people who refute relativism are of the opinion that if all truth were relative, then the statement "All truth is relative" would be absolutely true. If it is absolutely

[108] Diana Ayton-Shenker, The Challenge of Human Rights and Cultural Diversity http://www.un.org/ rights/ dpi1627e.htm, 3 February 2012 (Downloaded).

true, then not all things are relative and the statement that "All truth is relative" is false.[109]

This would certainly open up a whole new discussion as the only conclusion that one can draw from this is that there are no absolute truths. Which means that the claim made by relativists that there are no absolute truths itself is an absolute. Therefore it is false in itself. What this leads to is that no one can believe in anything, as there are no absolutes in the world. Nothing is true, including relativism. In a strict sense then, even discussing the issue of relativism would prove futile because one cannot convince the other to believe in a reality that does not exist.

The philosophical position of relativism is that we only perceive different aspects of the same reality. If our perceptions are contradictory, can either perception be trusted? Is truth self-contradictory? If it were, then it wouldn't be true because it would be self-refuting. If something is self-refuting, then it isn't true. If it is true that we are perceiving different aspects of the same reality, then am I believing something that is false since I believe that your reality is not true? How then could they be the same reality? If you are saying that it is merely my perception that is not true, then relativism is refuted. If I believe something that is false, then relativism is not true since it holds that all views are equally valid. If my reality is that your reality is false, then both cannot be true. If both are not true, then one of us (or both) is in error. If one or both of us is in error, then relativism is not true.[110]

[109] Matt Slick, Refuting Relativism, http://carm.org/refuting-relativism, 3 February 2012 (Downloaded).

[110] Ibid.

In their book Relativism: *Feet Firmly Planted in Mid-Air*[111], authors Francis J. Beckwith and Gregory Koukl (1998) point out seven major flaws within relativism.[112]

1. *"Relativists cannot accuse others of wrongdoing".*
Because there is no such thing as objective truth, you cannot accuse someone else of wrongdoing because wrongdoing does not exist. There has to be some sort of moral standard across the board for something to be deemed not true. If someone violates another's standard of subjective truth they are still not "wrong" because they are not functioning on the same plain of truth; therefore, they are not wrong.

2. *"Relativists cannot complain about the problem of evil".*
Because there is no objective truth, evil in and of it cannot exist. The notion of "wrong" does not exist in a relativistic world; therefore, "evil" cannot be wrong. A relativist simply has to accept evil as someone else's subjective truth, not their own, but not wrong.

3. *"Relativists cannot place blame or accept praise".*
Because there is no standard of right or wrong, there can be no standard of better or worse. If someone cannot do something better or even do something right, they cannot be praised for it. Equally, if there is no universal standard and someone cannot be wrong, then no blame can be placed on anyone.

4. *"Relativists cannot make charges of unfairness of injustice".*
Because there is no standard of right or wrong, then injustice or unfairness cannot exist. In a relativistic culture "unfairness" is simply someone practicing his or her personal subjective truth. It is what is best and right for them, but it may have an adverse or "unfair" effect on someone else. However the relativist cannot charge

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[111] Beckwith, F. J., & Koukl, G. (1998). Relativism: Feet firmly planted in mid-air. Grand Rapids: Baker Books.

[112] Drew Richey, Combating Relativism in Youth Ministry: The Problem of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, http://letgodlead.us/2011/05/27/combating-relativism-in-youth-ministry-the-problem-of-moralistic-therapeutic-deism-by-drew-richey (2011), 5 January 2012 (Downloaded).

someone with unfairness or injustice because they were simply doing what was true for them.

5. "Relativists cannot improve their morality".
Because there is no standard of right and wrong, better or worse, relativists cannot improve themselves as people because the idea of improvement suggests that one thing is better than another which recognizes that there is some form of moral standard or objective truth.

6. "Relativists cannot hold meaningful moral discussions".
Because morality is subjective from individual to individual, there is no way to discuss morality because it is different for everyone. What is right for one person may not be right for someone else. There is no way to debate this issue. It simply is what it is.

7. "Relativists cannot promote the obligation of tolerance".
Because no one can be wrong when there is no standard of right and wrong, tolerance itself does not exist. For a person to tolerate something there has to be some recognition that it is wrong or at least worse than what they practice. Better and worse do not exist in a relativistic world.

Relativism and Pluralism

There are schools that believe that relativism and pluralism are closely connected. This has led to Christian fundamentalists condemning religious pluralism because of its association or is equated with relativism. It is true that when it is scrutinized under the microscope, one may be able to find some connection but there is a distinction and because we live in a situation that is religiously pluralistic, I think it is important that we do not confuse one idea from the other. In Asia, we need to ensure that that we do not ascribe pluralism to relativism. That would not just be an over simplification of the problem but also a confusion of two distinctly different concepts.

Pluralism is generally understood as the idea that there are multiple avenues to truth, multiple forms of truth, and multiple diverse cultural expressions operative at the same time. Whereas, relativism, as the lack of objective truth. The key difference is that in pluralism there is still the possibility of arriving at an objective truth even though the method or avenue in which truth is arrived at can be different. We know this for a fact because of our lived experience amongst peoples of different religion. We recognize the existence of truth in the different religious traditions and respect the truth and the different way of life. Though we may profess our faiths differently, there are many concepts and beliefs that we hold in common. For example, pro-life, sacredness of marriage, family values, justice, option for the poor, etc.

Pluralism offers Asia a great opportunity to engage in dialogue and avenues to work together for the building up of the Kingdom. Religious pluralism must not been seen as an obstacle that needs "sorting out" and often (for some groups) the sorting out means "Christianizing" the non baptized. What we are dealing with is the lack of objective truth and this is something that is being experienced by every religious tradition in one way or another.

The Impact of Relativism on the Youth Today

It would be almost impossible to measure the impact that the different forms of relativism have had on our youth today. There are neither in depth studies nor data that can substantiate that relativism has had either a positive or a negative impact on the youth. What we can rely on is human experience that has been largely obtained from our pastoral dealings with the young people of today. The impact has been subtle and we know that the most common form of relativism that impacts the young today is moral/ethical relativism.

Some schools of relativistic thought feel that *one advantage of ethical relativism is that it allows for a wide variety of cultures and practices. It also allows people to adapt ethically as the culture, knowledge, and technology change in society. This is good and a valid form of relativism.*[113] Even though there may be a positive side to relativism, there are enough indications to show that this new "culture" that we are experiencing is of great concern for the Church. For our purposes today, I have limited myself to highlighting five areas of concern that are connected to moral/ethical relativism. I am sure that you can attest to the fact that there are more areas of concern given the different situations that we come from across Asia. For the purpose of this discussion I will limit it to only five.

a) Quest for Independence

It may not be totally true to say that our youth today have embraced relativism *in toto*. It is my view that they may express traces of relativism in subtle ways especially in their ways of thinking and living without even realising that it is termed relativism. However, there are surveys that show our culture believes that truth is relative. Everyone has a point to make and the irony of it all is that each one believes that one's own perception is the truth. This is our problem.

The quest for independence has always been part of the growing process. From a young age of dependence and growing into teenage years of independence, the young person is always in search of his/her identity. This search and need for independence is connected to the need of asserting oneself in society. Therefore, the assertion of independence sometimes may lead us to find some traces of relativistic thought.

> *All teens go through similar phases -- the need for independence, a separate identity, testing authority. It's part of growing up; it's*

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[113] Sara Algoe, Ethical Relativism, http://saraalgoe.hubpages.com/hub/ Ethical-Relativism, 4 January 2012 (Downloaded).

also linked to developmental changes in the brain that will eventually help them become analytical adults.[114]

For example, a young person may feel that the way to be assertive is by insisting on one's point/position. Though this may have some truth in it, this can also lead the young mind to be narrow or close minded on the objectivity of truth.

b) Tolerance

Some schools of thought feel that "tolerance" may be a contributory cause for the rise of relativism. When we are asked to be tolerant, this does not only include personal actions, but also the thoughts of others. This means that we are asked to be inclusive with regard to the different thought processes and outcomes that we find in different people. Tolerance can sometimes influence objectivity. We teach our young to respect, to acceptance, to be inclusive, to be non confrontational, and to be assertive… but this can colour the "objectiveness" of truth and its consequences.

> *Relativists often defend their position by claiming they are more tolerant of other people and other cultures. In a multicultural society it is better to be tolerant rather than intolerant. Since the ethical relativist does not believe his moral beliefs and practices are any truer than the moral beliefs of others, he can be tolerant in a way that the ethical objectivist cannot. Hence, ethical relativism is preferable to ethical objectivism.*[115]

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[114] Jeanie Lerche Davis, Teenagers: Why Do They Rebel?, http://children.webmd.com/features/teenagers-why-do-they-rebel, 12 February 2012 (Downloaded).

[115] Augustine C., Arguments for Ethical Relativism and Objections, http://www.monachos.net/forum/ showthread.php?7829-Arguments-for-ethical-relativism-and-objections, 12 February 2012 (Down-loaded).

In a multiethnic society like Asia, tolerance certainly is a virtue that is constantly promoted. However, in the context of relativism, it is seen as a negative outcome.

c) Secularization

One cannot deny the fact that the wave of secularization that is spreading throughout the world rapidly. In almost every sphere of live secularization has made inroads. Our young people today are not spared of its influence. In relation to relativism, some schools advocate that secularization is one of the effects of relativism. The question whether secularization is the effect of relativism or vice versa, is like the chicken-egg question. We may not find the answer so easily.

Since relativism implies a certain search for the truth, one of the possible outcomes of that search can be secularization. Since relativists claim that there are no absolute truths, one of the first things to be thrown out the window will be organized /institutionalised religion. Charles Taylor in his book *A Secular Age*[116], said that *secularity consists in the falling off of religious belief and practice, in people turning away from God, and no longer going to Church.*

The rejection of religion would lead to a secularised society and in this kind of a society, every individual would be led to think that each one can decide for oneself what is good or evil. No other person can dictate norms or a code of conduct because each one is under the impression that what I believe is to be the truth. The youth today are much influenced by such a thought. This way of life seems attractive as there are no objective moral norms nor can anyone impose a sense of guilt as each one has the right to believe what one considers as truth.

d) Globalised Morality

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[116] Charles Taylor, A Secular Age, Harvard University Press, 2007.

The disadvantage of ethical relativism is that truth, right and wrong, and justice are all relative. Just because the group of people thinks that something is right does not make it so. Their peers today easily influence the young because of the need to feel accepted amongst them. The "peer" here does not only mean those with whom they have direct contact with but also with those with whom they are connected virtually. Facebook, Twitter, and other socials networking tools can easily influence the young in the way they think. It is amazing to notice the kind of comments posted by the young on a variety of issues. Reality shows that invade our televisions today are also ways that have impacted our young in the way they see reality objectively. The common maxim that we hear from the young today is… If others can do it, why can't we? This is a kind of globalised morality where the voice of the majority dominates the views of many.

e) Loss of Cultural Identity

The ease of gaining information and the possibility of travel & migration, moral values that are held by some cultures are lost because progress is sometimes associated with discarding what is of the past and embracing the new way of life. For example, cohabitation before marriage & pre marital sex is fast becoming (has become?) a trend in Asia. For many young people, the cultural value of chastity is no longer in the hierarchy of values. The relativistic idea that each one can choose what one considers good has caused many of the youth to think that it is the new way of life. There are other cultural values that have been discarded by the youth today seemingly in search of a better way of life and future.

Conclusion

The question on most of our minds would be, 'What is the cure for relativism?' As I began researching this topic, I asked myself, 'Is there a cure?' It would seem that we are down

sliding at such a rapid pace that it is almost impossible to apply the brakes. Pope Benedict XVI described relativism as the central problem for faith today. We realise that this is not just a problem that requires in-depth intellectual thought but a pastoral response as our concern is to seek ways to assist those whom we minister to be able to respond to the threat of relativism and not lose the sense of God who is all truth.

In John 18:38, Pilate turns to Jesus asking, "What is Truth?" This is precisely what relativists ask. It is our task than to reveal this truth and for us Jesus is the Truth (John 14:6). In the words of Blessed John Paul II in *Veritatis Splendor*, "Truth enlightens man's intelligence and shapes his freedom, leading him to know and love the Lord." It is almost impossible to curb the seeking mind because that is our very existence, as Descartes puts is *Cogito ergo sum*. However, it is possible to direct the seeking mind and as pastors of our flock, we can offer them the Absolute Truth, Jesus Christ. We need to present this Truth in a manner that is relevant to the lives of our youth. Here lies the challenge. Each of us come from within a particular context and we need to discern what is the best and most effective way of making Jesus alive in the splendour of truth that He offers us. It is a personal relationship that makes this Truth relevant so that He permeates every facet of our lives.

I do not want to end this presentation on a negative note, as if we are fighting a losing battle. Relativism is not part of the "axis of evil". Relativism also provides the Church with the challenge to re-look at itself, at concepts and practices that we have held on for centuries. The constant complain of the young people today that the teachings of the Church are "outdated". It is at a point in many parts of Asia that people, especially the young, who see the irrelevance of faith in their daily life. The dichotomy between the practised faith and the lived experience seems to be growing. We will hear more of this as one of our colleagues will later present relativism as one of the causes of the youth leaving the Church.

Therefore, relativism challenges us, pastors & theologians, to introspect more often that we would like without falling into developing a "feel good" theology but to develop a theology that points to the ultimate good. We in Asia, where there is a potpourri of religions and cultures, have much to offer the universal Church. I hope this short presentation will provide a platform for a lively discussion shortly and greater pastoral response/practice in the years to come.

III.   FUNDAMENTALISM AND RELATIVISM
- Dominic Veliath sdb

I. Understanding Fundamentalism

1.1. Fundamentalism - Etymology

There is a difference of opinion as to the etymological origins of the term "Fundamentalism". One trend of thought holds that it dates back to the beginnings of the XX century in the USA; and specifically to Curtis Lee Laws, a Baptist from North America, who seems to have used it for the first time in the editorial of *The Watchman Examiner*, a New York weekly published on 1st July 1920. He coined this neologism to designate those who were blindly attached to the great fundamentals of the Christian faith and vehemently opposed to what they considered, "modern interpretations" of the Bible. Another explanation, instead, holds that the term "Fundamentalism" is to be traced back to the publication of a series of twelve paperback books entitled: *The Fundamentals. A Testimony to the Truth* (1910 – 1915), which defended the 'fundamentals of the faith' against 'liberalism' or 'modernism'. Whatever the truth of its origins, both interpretations seem to concur that the word "Fundamentalism" was originally used to designate a particular trend in American Protestantism which, in the face of what it considered all modern and liberal adaptations of the Christian faith, sought to go back to the

biblical 'fundamentals', that is to say, to the fundamentals of faith which were interpreted in an extremely arbitrary way.

In succeeding decades, the so-called Fundamentalists were distinguished by their aggressive efforts to impose their creed upon the public and on denominational schools in the USA. Negatively, those who did not share their convictions tended to be ostracized, removed from offices in the churches and educational institutions; and State Legislatures were under pressure to pass laws prohibiting teaching the theory of evolution.

1.2. Allied Terms

1.2.1. Fanaticism

Related in significance and yet distinct from "Fundamentalism", are two other terms, viz., "Fanaticism" and "Communalism". "Fanaticism" traces its English derivation to a Latin word *fanum*, which in ancient times, was used to refer to priests during those moments when they were supposedly rapt by the divinity Subsequently - by the sixteenth century- however, this original meaning was expanded to connote forms of exaggerated exhibitionism, having no religious basis whatsoever. In the seventeenth century, immoderate adherents of the sects in England were called "fanatics". In course of time this term came to denote an obsessive zeal for any cause, whether religious, social or political. An in-depth study of the various forms of fanaticism highlights the fact that it tends to have three prominent components: (1) Most obvious among these is an extreme narrowness and rigidity of mindset. It is impossible for the fanatics to learn anything that would dislodge their fixed idea. The end which they select as supreme and the path they follow to arrive at that end are never open to question. (2) Another characteristic trait of fanatics is their unyielding determination to make the fixed idea triumph over all. They are men of fixation. A fanatic may intertwine himself with political parties and social forces in the destiny of what

they consider to be their religious struggle. (3) A still further quality no less characteristic to fanaticism is callousness to pain. The fanatics tend to become insensitive to human suffering to the point of cruelty.

1.2.2 - *Communalism*

Instead, "Communalism", in its original sense, can be traced back to the verb: "to commune" and referred to identification with somebody or some group. Communalism in the positive sense is commitment for the wellbeing of the community. It becomes communal in the negative sense when one discriminates others on account of effusive attachment to one's own community.

1. 3. The Physiognomy of Fundamentalism

Complex social and religious movements cannot be defined in a few words; often what is required is not a definition, but an extended description. In other words, rather than begin from a clear definition and use it as a basis for argument, one has to begin with a rather vague recognition of something and then work slowly towards an understanding of what that something is.

1.3.1. *Oppositionalism*

The fundamental theological feature of modern Fundamentalisms is "oppositionalism". Fundamentalism in any context takes form when members of unduly "conservative" or overly "traditionalist" movements experience threat. The foe "from without" or the compromises or traitor "from within" are perceived as fighting them. They fight back. "Fighting back" as a constitutive principle determines the shape of Fundamentalist methods, principles and substance, just as it does the shape of fundamentalist group formation and political strategy. They tend to set their agenda by what they feel or calculate demands

their resistance, by what they must contend against, by their aversions and antagonisms.

1.3.2. A Rigid Anti-Hermeneutical Stance

Secondly, Fundamentalism is rigidly anti-hermeneutical. Accompanying the assault on hermeneutics is a second aspect of Fundamentalism, viz., the tendency to identify and fuse and then reject, pluralism, on the one hand, and relativism on the other.

1.3.3. The Absence of Nuancing

These modes of thought, attitudes and systems are characterized by an exaggerated simplicity; and nuancing perspectives which differentiate to a great extent are largely excluded. This brings to the fore a third principle which distinguishes the Fundamentalist attitude which, is "clarity of statement". There is an attitude whereby a basic value or basic idea which must be protected in a perfectionist way; in addition, there is an anxiety about the loss of this value through compromise. Characteristic of this is a need for: anchoring, clear identification, perfectionism; simplicity.

1.3.4. A Specific Psychological Mindset

From a psychological point of view, Fundamentalism has, at times, been understood as a consequence of alienation. If one looks at Fundamentalism critically, one cannot avoid underscoring the fact as to how significant foundations are for human life. Human beings need foundations in order to be able to live creatively. This also holds good in a transpersonal sense. Communities, clans and peoples need their history, i.e. their traditions, rites and cults in order to be able to exist creatively and in a balanced way and to look to the future. This fundamental confidence is the most original way in which we human beings cope with the most disquieting problem of our existence, namely our mortality. In such a context, there is the

issue of "personal isolation", "social marginalization" "losing ethical and cultural roots" or more generally of the "loss of historical continuity" in this regard. Such experiences are matched by a desire for certainty, for a stable picture of the world. With this desire goes a longing for leader figures who know the right way and therefore have every right to require total subjection. So fundamentalism is understood as the attempt to overcome a deep existential anxiety and "weariness of conflict".

1.3.5. *The Social Face of Fundamentalism*

Fundamentalism can also have a social face which manifests itself as intolerance; and there are those who see it as primarily a social rather than a religious phenomenon. In the words of Rosario Narchison: "Historical studies of different religious communities clearly bear it out that tolerance and intolerance are a social, not religious phenomenon. A community tends to become tolerant or intolerant depending on its social conditions.

1.4. Opposition to What? A Gamut of Different Opinions

Since, as noted above, it is very difficult to begin with a clear and simple definition of Fundamentalism, Vincent Kundukulam insightfully observes: One person's fundamentalism is another person's normalcy. What may seem excessive to a non-believer could be very real to a believer.[117] Therefore, in a certain sense, it would not be unwarranted to hold that the term "Fundamentalism" has a significance which can be termed "analogous".

1.4.1. *Fundamentalism as a Reaction to Secularism, Modernism and Postmodernism*

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[117] See Vincent KUNDUKULAM, "Religious Fundamentalism – Denial of Religion", in *Jeevadhara* 23(September 2003), 197, 388

There are those who go back to the conflict between religious faith and human reason which formed the background to the emergence of the clarification of the fundamentals of Christianity in the Western context. Today this trend has strengthened itself in the context of the apparent failures of Science, Technology and Rationalism to deliver goods in solving human problems, especially the problem of *meaning* in human life. Our contemporary society was thus experiencing both a crisis in religion and its global resurgence. This resurgence was taking place in all varieties of social systems – from the technologically most advanced to the traditional societies. This retreat from secularization and the revival of religion was taking place, according to some social scientists, largely because Science, Technology and Rationality were failing to give meaning in both the personal and occupational lives of individuals and had failed to resolve some of the institutional problems of modern society. It had also failed to provide to a guide to man's quest for ultimate concern, accepting that man was by anthropological nature a religious animal. Individuals were realizing the infinite fragmentation that modern developments had caused in their lives and were striving to put these fragments back together again into a meaningful whole.

Furthermore, with the failure of Modernism and with the rise of nation-states in Asia and Africa after World War II, and the ever expanding communication system and migration of people from one cultural area to another have posed a new situation in the world scenario of today leading to the advent of Postmodernism. Postmodernists question all types of grand theories and generalizations. A coherent general understanding across cultural boundaries is seen as virtually impossible. Key analytic categories are not universally applicable. In the words of James Beckford, Postmodernity consists in a "willingness to abandon the search for over-arching myths, narratives or frameworks of knowledge".

However, while many social scientists believe that we have gone beyond modernism but does not specify where we are going. Post-modernism is navigation in chaos. The breakdown of traditional value complexes without its replacement by a secularized' ethos leads to moral ambiguity and value confusion. New religious movements represent a quest for new structures of meaning and values. Fundamentalism thrives in this situation.

1.4.2. Fundamentalism as Opposition to Globalization

Globalization tends to create a troubled relationship between what is native and what is international. The claim of the emergence of a global culture is accompanied by cries of alarm that local values and nation-states are suffering a sense of threat to identity. As a result, fundamentalist movements emerge to strengthen the identity of a nation and culture.

1.5. The Political Face of Fundamentalism

In the 1940s there were several nationalist struggles which resulted in the formation of many Nation States in Asia. To strengthen the identity of these nations, cultural, religious and ideological orientations are at work in Asia today.

The Asian cultures and religions which stress the importance of family, community, traditions and the society find it extremely difficult to cope with the new developments. There is also the fear that their religious values will either be undermined or destroyed by the forces of Westernization and globalization. The anxieties generated by this contradiction form the ground in which Communalism and Fundamentalism thrive in Asia.

An impression has been created that each country has its own religion and the Asian religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam are the religions of those countries in Asia where it is dominant. To strengthen the national identity and

the dominance in the world, religion has been made use. Hence there is a relationship between Nationalism and Fundamentalism. Religion is used as a political tool to strengthen the national identity. A religious perspective was fused with the political and social destiny of a nation.

Religious identity was also used as a protective shield against the onslaught of Globalization. The fear of extinction and the threat to survival both as a people and as a culture and the loss of distinctiveness in the rush to homogeneity resulted in the introduction of a comprehensive social system based upon religious principles which embraced law, policy, society, economy and culture. Thus Fundamentalism tended to be totalitarian in its practice and encompassed all areas of private and public life.

They also observed that Fundamentalism was driven by the affinity-identity passions of ethnic communities and religious groups often thirsting for self-esteem and dignity. Fundamentalism as seen above was an effort to 'neutralize the other' and establish one's own identity.

1.6. Religious Fundamentalism

Like other forms of Fundamentalism, Religious Fundamentalism too is not purely a religious phenomenon. It has deep socio-anthropological roots. It is also the expression of a serious cultural crisis born of the inability to face and handle the changing times and mores. It looks for some unchangeable absolutes (fundamentals) to hang on in a pathological quest for identity and security.

Religious Fundamentalism tends to have what may perhaps be called an "idolatrous" tendency. At times it tends to find refuge in the materiality of religious objects and texts which rejecting their symbolic significance. This type of scriptural and ritual literalism neglects if not rejects the ongoing revelation of God and his gracious guidance towards fullness of

life in the march of human culture and history. Religious Fundamentalism also often has a political agenda.

1.7. Summing up

Gathering the strands: In recent years, "Fundamentalism" has been used to describe any militantly "traditionalist" religious movement. In our day, the term 'Fundamentalism' has also been transferred to designate reactionary trends within all religions and also other sectors of reality.

II. Relativism – Introducing the Notion

2.1. A Terminological Clarification

At the very outset, there is need to make a distinction of paramount importance between "Plurality", "Relationality" and "Relativism". Plurality is intrinsic to the multi-dimensionality of human experience; Relationality refers to the "relatedness" of reality; Relativism, instead, maintains that the human being can only attain approximations, not the truth. In its core, this latter tends to be a negation of realism. "Relativism destroys the rich meaning of pluralism". [118] Relativism is a view which maintains that there are no absolute principles. Relativists are at times called skeptics, when they deny what appears true to one subject and false to another can be shown to be absolutely true or absolutely false.

2.2. Exaggerated Anthropocentricism

In the history of Ancient Greek philosophy, the relativistic stance was first made explicit by the Sophists. Chief among them was Protagoras of Abdera who enunciated the

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[118] *FABC Papers*, *Methodology*: *Asian Christian Theology. Doing Theology in Asia Today*, 5

paradigmatic principle: "Man is the measure of all things that are that they are, and that are not that they are not".

2.3. A "Double Truth"

One finds a different nuance in the Middle Ages in Western Europe. One of the milestones in the history of Western philosophy was the entry of the writings of Aristotle in the West. The discovery of the Greek philosophical universe was, for the West, truly an epoch-making event. However, by Aristotle, was meant the doctrine of Aristotle as interpreted by his various commentators. Generally speaking, two main interpretations of Aristotle attracted the masters of philosophy and theology up to about 1260-65, namely those of the Arab commentators: Avicenna and Averroes.

The influence of Averroes specifically raised a particular problem concerning the relationship between philosophy and theology. Averroes was of the opinion that philosophy should be kept apart from theology. As a consequence, since many Christian masters used Averroes as the best literal commentary of Aristotle at their disposal, their situation could be said to resemble that of a modern professor of history of philosophy trying to make his pupils understand a doctrine which he/she him/herself does not necessarily consider true. However, in the face of this, some theologians resented the fact that theologically false doctrines could be taught even with a view to this pedagogical end. The simplest answer to this reproach was that given by Richard Rufus: "If you ask us to teach Aristotle, all we can do is to explain the meaning of what he has said, and it is no wonder that he sometimes disagrees with Christian faith since he was a Muslim and a 'philosopher', not a Christian, not a theologian".[119]

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[119] Etienne GILSON, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, (London 1955), 388.

But yet another stance was possible and was sometimes held. A Master in Arts could think and say that the conclusions of Averroes, and consequently those of Aristotle, were philosophically correct. In other words, he could maintain that, so far as philosophy itself was concerned, the conclusions of Aristotle appeared to him as necessary rational conclusions. This again, implied, not opposition to theology, nor any inner doubt as to the absolute certitude of Christian faith, but it did imply the possibility of a conflict between philosophy and theology. Even if one did not add that the conclusions of reason were necessarily true, one still created a conflict between philosophy and theology, revelation and reason. Heterodox Aristotelianism or Averroism as it was variously called, maintained that philosophical conclusions could contradict the teaching of Christian revelation.[120] In a nutshell, the stance was: *By faith I can believe one truth; by reason I can prove the contrary.*

2.4. The Challenge of Postmodernity

Recent times have seen the rise to prominence of various doctrines which tend to devalue the issue of truth, eminently symbolized in the attitude called "post-modernity". What was considered a legitimate plurality of positions has yielded to an undifferentiated pluralism, based upon the assumption that all positions are equally valid, which is one of today's most widespread symptoms of the lack of confidence in truth, even assuming that truth reveals itself equally in different doctrines, even if they contradict one another. According to this understanding, everything tends to be reduced to opinion. While, on the one hand, philosophical thinking has succeeded in coming closer to the reality of human life and its forms of expression, it has also tended to pursue issues - existential, hermeneutical or linguistic - which ignore the radical question of the truth about personal existence, about being and about God. Hence, we see among the men and women of our time,

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[120] Cf. *ibid.*, 387 – 388.

and not just in some philosophers, attitudes of widespread distrust of the human being's great capacity for knowledge.[121]

Postmodernism is a complex phenomenon not easily susceptible to definition. As such, it represents more a mood than a movement with its impact felt both at the level of academia and also in (popular) culture at large.[122] Postmodernity tends to describe a socio-cultural ethos or phenomenon and Postmodernism represents an ideology or a philosophical view. Among the tenets which often characterize such a religio-cultural ethos are the following:[123] (1) *Not to glorify reason;* (2) *Not place one's faith in history;* (3) *Not to hope in progress;* (4) *Not to accept meta-narratives;* (5) *Not to concentrate on the self;* (6) *Not to be worried about values;* (7) *Not to believe in institutions;* (8) *Not to waste time thinking about God;* (9) *Not to live only to produce;* (10) *Not to seek uniformity. As a result, there results a destructive and nihilistic relativism and a splintering fragmentation.* [124] Here the stance seems to be: Both faith and reason are in the final analysis irrelevant.

It is to be observed that, although certain sections of the Asia media are aggressively propagating this postmodern culture and its attendant attitudes, the greater part of Asia barring select urban centres, does not seem to be overly affected by it at the moment, though its eventual impact on the continent is inevitable, given the fact that the world has become a global village.

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[121] See in this regard POPE JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio*, 6.

[122] Cf. M.P. GALLAGHER, *Clashing Symbols. An Introduction to Faith-and-Culture*, (London, 1997); GRENZ S. J., *A Primer on Postmodernism*, (Grand Rapids, 1996); VEITH E. G., *Guide to Contemporary Culture*, (Leicester, 1994).

[123] Cf. M.P. GALLAGHER, *Clashing Symbols. An Introduction to Faith-and-Culture*, (London, 1997); GRENZ S. J., *A Primer on Postmodernism*, (Grand Rapids, 1996).

[124] Cf. Cyril DESBRUSLAIS, "Sin and Some Contemporary Western Philosophers", *Jnanadeepa* 11 (July 2008)2, 33 – 39.

III. The Issues involved in Fundamentalism and Relativism

3.1. The Kairos of Vatican II

There has been a constant progress towards the unity of the human race which is due to the factors of our modern civilization, especially to the enormous technological advances and their effects in the economic, social, political, cultural, moral and religious spheres. This progress results in the fact that human beings of different cultures and religions are being brought together in close relationships; hence religious pluralism is on the increase within the existing political communities and even more in the developing ones. In such a situation, "in order that relationships of peace and harmony may be established and maintained within the whole of humankind, it is necessary that religious freedom be everywhere provided with an effective constitutional guarantee and that respect be shown for the high duty and right of man freely to lead his religious life in society". This inevitably raises certain issues which the Church has confronted in Vatican II, particularly as regards two focal points, viz. (1) The Issue of the Dignity of the Human Person, primarily dealt with by the Declaration *Dignitatis Humanae*; and (2) The new attitude which the Church has toward other religions

3.1.1. Anthropological Implications

In the pathbreaking Declaration of Vatican II on Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis Humanae*, a new concept of religious freedom is advocated; it is understood as an expression of personal dignity, and as an exercise of responsibility. In this regard, the document asserts: "Haec Vaticana Synodus declarat personam humanam ius habere ad libertatem religiosam". This is articulated in the following five important assertions which are full of implications:
(1) Every human being has a right to religious freedom because he is a person;

(2) The object of content of this right is freedom from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups or any human power;

3) This freedom from coercion has a double meaning: "in matters religious no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs"; within due limits no one "is to be restrained from acting in accordance with his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others";

(4) This right has its foundation in the dignity of the human person

(5) This is a right of the person which is to be recognized as a civil right in the constitutional law of the political society. "Hoc ius personae humanae ad libertatem religiosam in iuridica societatis ordinatione ita est agnoscendum ut ius civile evadat".

3.1.1.1 A Brief Historical Résumé of the Issue

This right has its foundation in the dignity of the human person. To explain why the prior attitude survived for so long in the history of the Church, there were several elements involved which were not questioned for a long time and indeed were held to be indisputable. Among these elements one must be mentioned, according to which: "rights are based directly on spiritual values", that is to say, on truth and goodness; hence, the oft-repeated, seemingly self-evident principle: "Truth has all the rights; error has no right". According to this view, only one who is in the truth has the right to profess it, because only truth can communicate this right; on the other hand, the man who is in error has no right to profess it for error cannot communicate any rights.

A second factor involved in this doctrine is a particular view of the common good and a corresponding view of the

duties of the State towards it. According to this view, the true religion is the most important element of the common good, because religious truth is a factor making for political unity and because this truth is the source of morality, which must react positively on all sectors of the community, especially on those of the temporal order.

These historical facts have certainly contributed to the decision of the Council Fathers of Vatican II to proclaim religious freedom as a right of the person *today*; but this right is based on the claim due to the dignity of the human persons.

Recent papal magisterial teaching has increasingly emphasized the dignity of the human person and pronounced this to possess inviolable rights in the economic, social, cultural, moral and religious spheres. The encyclical *Pacem in Terris* may be regarded as a synthesis of this teaching The post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* speaks of respecting the freedom of conscience in the task of evangelization. "It would certainly be an error to impose some thing on the consciences of our brethren".

Pope John Paul II in *Redemptor Hominis* affirms that "curtailment of religious freedom of individuals and communities I not only a painful experience but is above all an attack on man's very dignity, independently of the religion professed on the concept of the world which these individuals and communities have…In this case we are confronted with a radical injustice with regard to what is particularly deep within man, what is authentically human (RH, 17).

Pope John Paul II on the occasion of *World Day of Peace Message 1998*, observes: "Religious freedom, is an essential requirement of the dignity of every person, a cornerstone of the structure of human rights, and for this reason an irreplaceable facto in the good of individuals and of the whole society…the freedom of individuals and communities to profess and

practice their religion is an essential element for peaceful coexistence**".**

"Freedom from coercion" has two meanings: in the religious sphere no human being may be compelled to act against his/her conscience; and no one may be prevented from acting according to his conscience. Now freedom from coercion as a principle by which to order inter-human relationships is something good: it is actually a condition as well as a guarantee that human beings can act according to their nature - that is responsibly.

It is certainly true that, freedom from coercion in the religious sphere can be realized badly, if errors are professed and propagated. Hence it is necessary to regulate the exercise of this right according appropriate criteria. What is the criterion to be used by the government when it is bound to prevent the abuse of religious freedom? The freedom of the human being must be respected as far as possible and curtailed only when and in so far as necessary. The right to immunity from coercion remains; however, its exercise, however, may be prevented if the abuse leads to the overthrow of the public order and offends against the objective demands of truth and justice.

Since a right exists in a person, this means that all other persons are in duty bound to recognize and respect this right. This can create a problem, because, on the one hand, the subject of the right has the duty to actualize its content; but, on the other hand, no one can have the right to actualize an immoral object. "In the life of the People of God as it has made its pilgrim way through the vicissitudes of human history, there have at times appeared ways of acting which were less in accord with the spirit of the gospels and even opposed to it" (DH, 12). The Church has always, at least theoretically, recognized the right of human beings not to be forced to embrace Christianity, namely because the act of faith, though binding, can only be made freely. For several centuries, this right was not acknowledged by Christian society; this was

particularly the case if a human being's religion was not the true one or if he/she refused to accept the true religion. The right to religious freedom is based on the dignity of the human person, such as it is recognized in the light of revelation and through human reason itself.

3.1.2. *The Encounter of Religions*

Coming now to the second issue: The Catholic Church situates other Christian Churches, Ecclesial Communities and religions according to her self-understanding articulated in Vatican II:

- With respect to other Christian communities, the Second Vatican Council used the phrase "*subsistit in*" in order to try to harmonize two doctrinal affirmations: on the one hand, that the Church of Christ continues to exist fully only in the Catholic Church; and on the other hand that numerous elements of sanctification and truth do exist outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church whether in the Particular Churches or in the Ecclesial Communities that are not fully in communion with the Catholic Church (These values are furthermore understood as drawn from the Catholic Church). (Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 8).

- Consequently, as far as the so-called Non-Christian religions are concerned, it can be generally affirmed that, for Vatican II, the adherents of other religions are not saved *in spite of* their religions. But, to infer thereby that the documents of Vatican II affirm the salvific value of "non-Christian" religions *per se*, is a conclusion which the data do not seem to warrant. The restrained statement of the *International Theological Commission* on the issue seems to be more consonant to the mind of the Council in this regard: "Those which have not yet received or heard the gospel are oriented in different ways to the People of God and belonging to these different religions does not seem to be indifferent to the effects of this

orientation"[125]. On examining the Conciliar documents, we find a positive affirmation of the activity of the Holy Spirit within the religions and the cultures of persons of other faiths. However, this affirmation cannot be understood as a pluralism which grants equal status to other religions, nor as an inclusiveness which affirms structures outside Christianity, which are *per se*, salvific, even in a provisional sense.

IV. Dealing with Fundamentalism and Relativism from a Roman Catholic Perspective

4.1. Preliminaries

The way of dealing with Fundamentalism and Relativism, at least in part, falls within the purview of the science called "Pastoral Theology". In contradistinction to Speculative Theology, Pastoral Theology emerged from the need, not only for a systematic vision, but also for practical guidelines in realizing the mission of the Church. It trains its focus is on the concrete conditioning of the Church's activity by a particular situation at a given time. In other words, it treats of the principles that, as it were, guide the practical details of ecclesial action in mission. Consequently its thrust, viewed in philosophical terms, concerns neither the purely speculative field, nor on the other hand, the nitty-gritty of concrete pastoral praxis, but the sphere called: "speculative-practical.

4.2. Core Assertions of the Roman Catholic Stance

4.2.1. The Attainability of Truth and Total Commitment to the same Truth at all levels

In the light of the above, our Roman Catholic stance staunchly holds (against all forms of Relativism), that she is in the possession of the truth; and furthermore that the truth in its

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[125] INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, *Christianity and the World Religions*, 81.

different dimensions, be it the metaphysical, the moral or the epistemological level can be attained. Furthermore, the Roman Catholic stance commits itself firmly to the truth and firmly rejects any relativization in this regard. This is expressed in its staunch refusal to compromise with error or evil at any level or in any sphere of its activity.

4.2.2. *The Uniqueness of the Human Person as deserving of Respect*

The human person is to be viewed in the light of Revelation, Faith and Reason as as a centre of unique value; and therefore as one who on no account is to be instrumentalized or exploited

4.3. Challenges posed by the Asian Context   and   the   Roman Catholic Response

4.3.1. *Challenges posed by the Asian Context*

Paradoxically, three of the features which typify the Asian context, viz., religious plurality, ethno-cultural diversity and economic disparity are also the wellsprings of many of the problems that Asia on the religious, socio-economic and political level.

The Asian genius and ethos has long been characterized by a certain attitude of holism. This has manifested itself in the traditional coexistence of religions. Religious pluralism, despite occasional conflicts, had been a way of life, a praxis expressed in commitment, and devotion. There was a *mytho*s which sustained this acceptance; understanding by *mythos*, the collectivity of symbols presupposed and lived by a people. However, the transition from mythos to *logos*, to some extent, inevitable, has had its incidence on the coexistence of religions. One of its negative expressions has been the marked rise of religious fundamentalism in the Indian subcontinent, in recent times.

Ethnocentrism has become another crucial issue for Asia. Ethnic groups that enjoyed a protected existence and a high degree of autonomy, have begun to resent and resist the new situation in which they found themselves as part of newly-independent nations. These groups have at times had a perception that their freedom and cultural autonomy have been unduly curbed and that unreasonable demands are being made on them to share their natural resources. In some cases, intruding groups have not only exploited them in various ways, but have also threatened their traditional identity, the fabric of their social structure, their values and way of life. In short, some feel that the reality of the Nation-State has not acknowledged or respected the experiences or self-perceptions of the various ethnic groups and what they consider to be their legitimate due.

Economic disparity has been the bane of the continent. At times, poverty has been institutionalised and even received religious sanction. There have been moves to correct this imbalance; but at times these have been met with opposition. One observes an increasing number of instances where the repressed groups have begun to organize themselves assertively and demand their rights. And not infrequently, this process has been marked by tension, resistance and violence. And this issue has been compounded by the process of Globalization and its implications on the continent. The continent is moving fast on the road of industrial and technological progress. This brings with it many problems such as unemployment, competition and frustration.

4.3.2. Response to the Challenges posed by the Asian Context

With reference to the challenges mentioned above, the Catholic mindset often calls for a "Both x And" ("*Et* x *Et*") attitude and not: an "Either x Or" ("*Aut* x *Aut*") stance.

(a) As far as the plurality of religions is concerned, this changed mindset will involve assuming a stance which includes *BOTH an Integral Loyalty to One's Own Experience as a Catholic AND Respect for the person of Another faith. Loyalty without Respect would amount to Religious Fanaticism, whereas Respect for another without being loyal to one's own faith commitment would be compromise and savour of Syncretism and Relativism.*

(b) As far as the plurality of cultures is concerned, given the composite culture of many Asian nations, what is called for is a stance which includes *BOTH Rootedness in One's Own Culture (which is a God-given gift) AND an Openness towards the Culture of Another without any Taint of Superiority or Discrimination.*

(c) As far as the issue of evil is concerned, the mission of the Roman Catholic Church in Asia will call for a mode of existence which is able simultaneously *BOTH maintain a Stance of Prophetic Critique in the Face of Anything which goes counter to the Good News; AND yet Somehow love the "Enemy" – the one responsible for this state of affairs; to maintain dissent, to staunchly oppose evil and still, somehow embrace the perpetrators of evil.*

4.3.3. Involvement in the Dialogue of Life

The Asian context calls for a particular attitude, viz. the "Dialogue of Life". In 1984, the Secretariat for Non-Christians published a document entitled: *The Attitude of the church toward the Followers of Other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission*. The document mentions four principal forms of dialogue, among which there figures the *Dialogue of Life.* The *Instrumentum Laboris* of the Synod for Asia refers to the 'dialogue of life", which has characterized the relationship of the peoples of Asia who belong to different cultures and different faiths. This has been beautifully elaborated in an intervention by Archbishop Ignatius of Semarang (Indonesia) In Asia, people believe what they see. People value persons and relationships more than doctrines. In our work of evangelization, we experience how much people value persons

and relationships, especially those that embody respect, concern and compassion. Asian ethos of humanity is the first invitation to begin our mission. When we relate to people, especially people of other faiths, with basic confidence in our fellow humanity, we discover people's concerns, values, pains agonies, their love of peace and harmony of life and aspirations which they spontaneously share. It is here we discover their search for meaning, faith their values and yearnings. In this dialogue of life, we discern what God has been doing in them for ages before we encounter them. Hence in Asia, we need to begin with a discerned spiritual knowledge of what God has been doing. This we do in a dialogue of life".[126]

4.3.4. A Witnessing Spirituality

Furthermore, there is the need to make the implications of our Catholic faith a life-style. People in Asia, the home of the great contemplative traditions, want to see Christians as disciples of Jesus Christ, who reflect the person of the Master. This requires that those involved in the mission of the Church in Asia have the mark of God-realized persons.[127] . The implications of the Catholic faith in all its implications, has then to crystallize in a life-style. A charism which deals only with structures, theories, ideas and shuns life, avoids praxis is not only one-sided, since it leaves untouched entire aspects of reality, but in addition, tends to make the charism an ideology. A charism cannot be apprehended, understood, realized in a single sector, on in only one of its dimensions. This mission of doing theology or "theologizing" therefore calls for a transformed life-style.. In other words, the mission in all its implications has then to crystallize in a life-style both for the individual and the community.

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[126] Cf. *L'Osservatore Romano*, (13th May 1998), No. 19, 11.

[127] See in this regard, the intervention of Archbishop Daniel Acharuparambil of Verapoly during the Asian Synod, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, (29th April 1998), No. 26, 6].

IV. FUNDAMENTALISM AND RELATIVISM: WHY YOUNG PEOPLE ARE LEAVING THE CHURCH
- Rev. Fr. John JunYang Park

1. General Introduction

Evangelization is one of the most important and urgent tasks the Church faces in today's Asia, which still has a significantly large non-Christian population. To accomplish this mission, the role of young people is of crucial importance and the Church urgently needs to address the young and remind them of their responsibility in active evangelization.

Regarding the Asian youth, Pope John Paul II (1978-2005) states as follows: "The many complex problems which young people now face in the changing world of Asia impel the Church to remind the young of their responsibility for the future of society and the Church, and to encourage and support them at every step to ensure that they are ready to accept that responsibility. To them the Church offers the truth of the Gospel as a joyful and liberating mystery to be known, lived and shared, with conviction and courage. If young people are to be effective agents of mission, the Church needs to offer them suitable pastoral care" (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, n. 47).

But recently in Asia, we are witnessing the phenomenon of many young people leaving the Church, and this is seen as a red danger signal in some Asian countries, especially in East Asian countries such as South Korea. Why are these young people abandoning the Church? What are the main reasons behind this socio-religious phenomenon? How can the Church respond to these questions?

This essay will deal with fundamentalism and relativism as causes behind young people's desertion of the Church, and will attempt to present a theological and pastoral response to the problem.

2. Two Different Categories of Fundamentalism: Religious and Anti-Religious (Scientific) Fundamentalism

This essay deals with fundamentalism in two different categories: religious (Christian and non-Christian) and anti-religious (scientific) fundamentalism. What is the relationship between these two different categories of fundamentalism? One of the common factors between them is the dangerous influence they exercise over young people. In spite of their difference in affirming or negating the existence of God, both categories have powerful impact on the young, drawing them away from the Church and causing them to abandon their faith.

On the one hand, we can point out that young people are leaving the Church because religious fundamentalism often leave on them deeply negative impressions on religion itself. Therefore, ironically, we can say that there is no big difference between religious fundamentalism and atheism, since religious fundamentalists work against themselves and actually lead young people to turn their backs on religion itself by showing the same characteristics of antagonism and aggression they criticize in others instead of authentic religious values, such as peace, tolerance, mercy, and forgiveness. Antagonism, arrogance, aggressiveness, anger, hatred, and violence (verbal and physical) that fundamentalists reveal, the use of which they justify for their cause in various cases can in no way belong to true religious values.

Then, where does this aggressive mind-set come from? According to Karen Armstrong (1944-), a British scholar in religious studies, what lies beneath the fundamentalist mind-set is fear: "Every single fundamentalist movement that I have studied in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam is rooted in profound fear."[128] Since it is rooted in profound fear, "fundamentalism - be it Jewish, Christian, or Muslim - nearly always begins as a defensive movement".[129] And, fundamentalists easily become offensive because they claim that offense is the best defense: "Fundamentalism arises when a worldview feels it is in a danger, lashing out at its enemies

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[128] Karen Armstrong, *The Case for God*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009, p. 271.

[129] Karen Armstrong, *The Case for God*, p. 271.

when it fears its own future is threatened."[130] For the aggressive and violent cases of religious fundamentalists, we don't need any more concrete examples, since these are constantly being reported around the world.

On the other hand, we can find that "in recent years, religious fundamentalism and disputes over the relationship between faith and science have provoked a wave of publications known collectively *as the new atheism*".[131] This modern scientific atheism can be interpreted as a "new secular fundamentalism", as it also reveals the same arrogance and exclusiveness of "high degree of dogmatism" and "aggressive rhetorical style", based on "deep unsettling anxiety about the future".[132] Using the expressions adopted by various scholars, we may call it "militant science and the struggle for power" or "the assault of militant scientists on the Christian bastions of professional and academic life".[133] In fact, "the warfare of science and religion"[134] or "the war of the worldviews"[135] is already taking place.

The new atheism as a new kind of fundamentalism appeals to natural sciences as the sole basis of reliable truth. It is a view now widely known as 'scientism'; modern scientific method is the only rationally acceptable way of gaining knowledge of the real world. It thus rejects all religious beliefs as evidence-free superstition.[136] The intellectual foundation of the new atheism

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[130] Alister McGrath – Joanna Collicutt McGrath, *The Dawkins Delusion? Atheist Fundamentalism and the Denial of the Divine*, London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2007, p. 96.

[131] "The New Atheism", *America* 198/15 (May 5, 2008), 11.

[132] Alister McGrath – Joanna Collicutt McGrath, *The Dawkins Delusion? Atheist Fundamentalism and the Denial of the Divine*, p. 96.

[133] Tina Beattie, *The New Atheists: The Twilight of Reason and the War on Religion*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007, p. 21.

[134] Cf. Alister McGrath – Joanna Collicutt McGrath, *The Dawkins Delusion? Atheist Fundamentalism and the Denial of the Divine*, pp. 41-48.

[135] Cf. Francis S. Collins, *The Language of God*, New York: Free Press, 2006, pp. 33-54.

[136] Cf. Alister McGrath, "Bestseller Atheisms: The New Scientism", *Concilium* 2010/4, 12.

is the modern worldview known as 'scientific naturalism', a label first used by Thomas Henry Huxley (1825-1895) in the nineteenth century to emphasize the principle that science must never resort to supernatural explanations. However, scientific naturalism now goes far beyond what Huxley originally intended. Now it reveals a strongly materialist worldview, claiming that the natural world is literally all that exists and there is no supernatural dimension or divine creator.[137]

Karen Armstrong considers the scientism of the new atheists as a kind of fundamentalism when she says: "Typical of the fundamentalist mind-set is the belief that there is only one way of interpreting reality. For the new atheists, scientism alone can lead us to truth."[138] Alister McGrath (1953-), a British scientist and a theologian, uses the expression "anti-religious fundamentalism" in the same context.[139] And, responding to the most sensational book by Richard Dawkins (1941-) in 2006 *The God Delusion*,[140] McGrath explicitly uses the term "atheist fundamentalism" in the title of his book in 2007: *The Dawkins Delusion? Atheist Fundamentalism and the Denial of the Divine*. Moreover, only this April, Michael Welker (1947-), a German Protestant theologian, used the expression "scientific fundamentalism" during an interview with a Korean daily newspaper.[141]

In fact, Richard Dawkins himself implies paradoxically that he might be a fundamentalist when he claims that what he reveals in his writings is not a fundamentalist view but his passion for Darwinism: "It is all too easy to confuse fundamentalism with passion. I may well appear passionate

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[137] Cf. John F. Haught, "True Believers: Have the New Atheists Adopted a Faith of Their Own?", *America* 198/15 (May 5, 2008), 16.

[138] Karen Armstrong, *The Case for God*, p. 309.

[139] Cf. Alister McGrath, *Dawkins' God: Genes, Memes, and the Meaning of Life*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2007, p. 8.

[140] Cf. Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2008.

[141] Cf. http://news.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2012/04/05/ 2012040502956.html.

when I defend evolution against a fundamentalist creationist, but this is not because of a rival fundamentalism of my own,"[142] he says.

It seems reasonable that, as an evolutionary biologist, Dawkins should try to defend his science from the religious fundamentalists when he sees Darwinism threatened by creationism. Yet the crucial question is to what extent can his defense be justified and whether it goes too far.[143] We actually find Dawkins' books more full of aggression than the passion he claims.

I will now go on to discuss the scientific fundamentalism of the new atheists, as it is 'new'. Then, I will discuss the conflict between religious and scientific fundamentalism, which we can call "a clash of fundamentalisms",[144] and the impact of atheism on the youth leaving the Church.

3. Scientific Fundamentalism as the New Atheism: The Dawkins Syndrome

Now the new atheism based on scientism stands in direct contrast to the Christian fundamentalist campaigns that promise Hell for non-believers. Against these fundamentalist Christian movements, those who espouse scientific atheism do not hesitate to say the following: 'Stop worrying about the future and just enjoy your life since there is no God anywhere.'[145] For these new atheists, religion is considered intrinsically and characteristically irrational, dangerous, poisonous, and evil. Especially, Christianity represents an old way of explaining things that can be ignored in the modern scientific age. Its main function is to hinder scientific advancement and social progress.[146]

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[142] Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, p. 320.

[143] Cf. Marion Ledwig, "Book Review on Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*", *Religious Studies* 43(2007), 368.

[144] Cf. Alister McGrath – Joanna Collicutt McGrath, *The Dawkins Delusion? Atheist Fundamentalism and the Denial of the Divine*, pp. 48-51.

[145] Cf. "Editorial", *Concilium* 2010 (n. 4), 7.

[146] Cf. Alister McGrath, "Bestseller Atheisms: The New Scientism", 11-12.

Alister McGrath states that "the new atheism made its dramatic appearance over the period 2006-2007, topping bestseller charts and provoking a huge and often highly charged public debate over the rational basis of faith and the place of religion in contemporary life."[147] The belief that natural sciences have conclusively settled the debate between religion and atheism was developed by many scientific writers, most notably 'four horsemen of the apocalypse': Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris (1967-), Daniel Dennett (1942-), and Christopher Hitchens (1949-2011).[148]

Among them, Richard Dawkins is the most representative figure of the modern scientific atheism. He was the Professor of Public Understanding of Science at Oxford University from 1995 until 2008. As a popular scientific writer, he has a rare ability to explain difficult and complex theories of modern evolutionary biology with extreme lucidity to a new generation of readers. He outlines with compelling analogies and rhetorical flourishes the consequences of variation and natural selection. Dawkins successfully popularizes modern sociobiology, which Edward O. Wilson (1929-), an American biologist at Harvard University, had theorized in order to explore the connection between biology and sociology. This is a theory that aims at an evolutionary biological and materialistic approach for the interpretation of human culture as a whole.[149] In order to justify this kind of integration, Edward O. Wilson stresses the importance of a new symbolic key word 'consilience' which means the unity of knowledge.[150] From the scientific viewpoints, Dawkins has opened up debates which are both important and intrinsically interesting, such as the existence of God and the meaning of life. Grounded on

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[147] Alister McGrath, "Bestseller Atheisms: The New Scientism", 11.

[148] Cf. "Editorial", *Concilium* 2010 (n. 4), 7.

[149] Cf. John F. Haught, *Science and Religion: From Conflict to Conversation*, New York: Paulist Press, 1995, pp. 77-78.

[150] Cf. Eaward O. Wilson, *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998.

Darwinism, he extends his conclusions to religion in highly aggressive terms.[151]

In his first famous book published in 1976 *The Selfish Gene*[152] and in subsequent works such as *The Blind Watchmaker* (1986),[153] *River Out of Eden* (1995),[154] *Climbing Mount Improbable* (1996),[155] *The Devil's Chaplain* (2003),[156] *The God Delusion* (2006), *The Greatest Show on Earth* (2009),[157] and *The Magic of Reality* (2011),[158] Dawkins continuously criticizes religion and provocatively presents an atheist worldview. Dawkins' main points of attack on the nature of religion are based on a universal Darwinism, which applies Darwin's theory of evolution to the areas far beyond the biological realm. He sets out the implications of Darwin's theory on every aspect of life. According to him, even religions themselves evolve.[159] Dawkins thus asserts that Darwinism is not merely a scientific theory but a universal philosophy of life, a timeless principle, capable of being applied throughout the universe.

In *The Selfish Gene,* published one year after Edward O. Wilson's *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis* (1975), Dawkins thus presents a gene-centered view of evolution, and invents the new term and concept of the "meme" and introduces the new

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[151] Cf. Cf. Francis S. Collins, *The Language of God*, p. 163; Alister McGrath, *Dawkins' God: Genes, Memes, and the Meaning of Life*, pp. 1. 7.

[152] Cf. Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, ²1989.

[153] Cf. Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker: Why the Evidence of Evolution Reveals a Universe Without Design*, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, ³1996.

[154] Cf. Richard Dawkins, *River Out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life*, New York: Basic Books, 1995

[155] Cf. Richard Dawkins, *Climbing Mount Improbable*, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996.

[156] Cf. Richard Dawkins, *A Devil's Chaplain: Reflections on Hope, Lies, Science, and Love*, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003.

[157] Cf. Richard Dawkins, *The Greatest Show on Earth: The Evidence for Evolution*, New York: Free Press, 2009.

[158] Cf. Richard Dawkins, *The Magic of Reality: How We Know What's Really True*, New York: Free Press, 2011.

[159] Cf. Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, p. 234.

concept into the investigation of the history of ideas. He argues that there is a basic analogy between biological (genetic) and cultural evolution. Both involve a replicator, as genetic evolution actually requires a replicator. In this case, the replicator is the gene.[160] Cultural evolution too requires a replicator and in this case it is a hypothesized entity that can be called a 'meme'.[161] This theory of Dawkins can be said to be a 'memetic reductionism', which tries to explain all human phenomena in terms of the meme. For Dawkins, the idea of God is perhaps the supreme example of such a meme.[162] He thus presents "the God hypothesis"[163]. In other words, according to Dawkins, faith in the existence of God is a hypothesis.[164] People believe in God because they have been infected by a powerful meme, which has somehow 'leapt' into their brains. This idea is later developed in terms of the image

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[160] Cf. Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, pp. 191-192.

[161] Dawkins explains the meaning of 'meme' as follows: "We need a name for the new replicator, a noun that conveys the idea of a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of *imitation*. 'Mimeme' comes from a suitable Greek root (*mimesis* which means imitation), but I want a monosyllable that sounds a bit like 'gene'. I hope my classic friends will forgive me if I abbreviate mimeme to 'meme'. […] Examples of memes are tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches. Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation." Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, p. 192.

[162] Dawkins explains the idea of God as follows: "The survival value of the god meme in the meme pool results from its great psychological appeal. It provides a superficially plausible answer to deep and troubling questions about existence. It suggests that injustices in this world maybe rectified in the next. The 'everlasting arms' hold out a cushion against our own inadequacies which, like a doctor's placebo, is none the less effective for being imaginary. These are some of the reasons why the idea of God is copied so readily by successive generations of individual brains. God exists, if only in the form of a meme with high survival value, or infective power, in the environment provided by human culture." Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, p. 193.

[163] "The God Hypothesis" is also the title name of the second chapter of the book *The God Delusion*. Cf. Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, pp. 51-99.

[164] Cf. John F. Haught, *God and the New Atheism: A Critical Response to Dawkins, Harris, and Hitchens*, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008, p. 41.

of God as a 'virus'. The God-meme or God-virus is extremely good at infecting the human mind, and its survival is not a mark of its truth. In this sense, religion actually leads people not to God but to evil.[165]

In his book *The Blind Watchmaker* (1986), Dawkins attacks the Christian theory of 'watchmaker analogy', which argues for the existence of a supernatural creator based upon the complexity of living organisms. This theory came from the book of William Paley (1743-1805), archdeacon of Carlisle, *Natural Theology; Or Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity, Collected from the Appearances of Nature* published in 1802. Dawkins says that this is "the best-known exposition of the 'Argument from Design', always the most influential of the arguments for the existence of God".[166]

According to Paley, God had directly created the world in all its intricacy. Paley thus compares God to one of the mechanical geniuses of the Industrial Revolution. In a word, Paley's argument stresses the wisdom of God in creation.[167] On the contrary, Dawkins explains the evolutionary process as analogous to a 'blind' watchmaker. Dawkins says: "Natural selection is the blind watchmaker, blind because it does not see ahead, does not plan consequences, has no purpose in view. Yet the living results of natural selection overwhelmingly impress us with the appearance of design as if by a master watchmaker, impress us with the illusion of design and planning."[168]

In his most sensational book *The God Delusion* published in 2006, Dawkins claims that supernatural God does not exist and that religious faith is only a delusion based on false belief. Dawkins asserts that science has to replace the traditional realm of theology. He writes: "What expertise can theologians bring

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[165] Cf. Alister McGrath, "Bestseller Atheisms: The New Scientism", 14.

[166] Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker: Why the Evidence of Evolution Reveals a Universe Without Design*, p. 7.

[167] Cf. Alister McGrath, *Dawkins' God: Genes, Memes, and the Meaning of Life*, pp. 21. 63. 66.

[168] Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker: Why the Evidence of Evolution Reveals a Universe Without Design*, p. 29.

to deep cosmological questions that scientists cannot? […] Why are scientists so cravenly respectful towards the ambitions of theologians, over questions that theologians are certainly no more qualified to answer than scientists themselves? It is a tedious cliché (and, unlike many clichés, it isn't even true) that science concerns itself with *how* questions, but only theology is equipped to answer *why* questions. […] If science cannot answer some ultimate questions, what makes anybody think that religion can?"[169]

As of January 2010, the English-language version of *The God Delusion* has sold more than 2 million copies and has been translated into 31 languages around the world.[170] Besides his world famous books, Dawkins makes regular television and radio appearances, which have devastating impact on many people, especially on the young, turning them skeptical about religious belief and the Christian faith.

Dawkins shows antagonism and anger toward religion. According to Dawkins, faith is the principal vice of all religion since it is a kind of belief that isn't based on evidence. According to him, faith is one of the world's greatest evils, comparable to the smallpox virus but harder to eradicate. Thus, if we get rid of religion, the world will be a safer place.[171]

In conclusion, for Dawkins, all religions are fundamentalist or gateways to fundamentalism; he writes: "Fundamentalist religion is hell-bent on ruining the scientific education of countless thousands of innocent, well-meaning, eager young minds. Non-fundamentalist, 'sensible' religion may not be doing that. But it is making the world safe for fundamentalism by teaching children, from their earliest years, that unquestioning faith is a virtue."[172] Dawkins thus asserts that we should blame not only religious fundamentalism (extremism)

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[169] Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, pp. 79-80.

[170] Cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins

[171] Cf. Francis S. Collins, *The Language of God*, p. 163; Alister McGrath, *The Twilight of Atheism: The Rise and Fall of Disbelief in the Modern World*, New York: Doubleday, 2004, p. 95.

[172] Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, p. 323.

but also religion itself, since the teachings of 'moderate' religion, though not extremist in themselves, are open invitation to fundamentalist extremism.[173]

This so-called 'modern scientific' approach strikes a sympathetic cord in many secularists and atheists in the western world. And Dawkins' books are introduced and translated also in Asian countries, and in South Korea especially, where Christian fundamentalism is strong, it once created a huge sensation and provoked much controversy.

4. Stephen Hawking and His *The Grand Design*

In his latest book *The Grand Design* (2010), Stephen Hawking (1942-), the world famous theoretic physicist and cosmologist at Cambridge University, presents a worldview that is essentially atheist.[174] Whereas in his previous work, *A Brief History of Time* (1988),[175] Hawking spoke of God in a metaphorical sense, his latest book shows a clear sense of atheism.

In the first chapter of *The Grand Design*, titled "The Mystery of Being", Hawking begins with some very philosophical questions: "How can we understand the world in which we find ourselves? How does the universe behave? What is the nature of reality? Where did all this come from? Did the universe need a creator?"[176] These questions usually belong to the realm of philosophy and theology, but Hawking claims that scientists, rather than philosophers, should answer these questions: "Traditionally these are questions for philosophy, but philosophy is dead. Philosophy has not kept us with modern developments in science, particularly physics. Scientists have become the bearers of the torch of discovery in

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[173] Cf. Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, pp. 345-346.

[174] Cf. Stephen Hawking – Leonard Mlodinow, *The Grand Design*, New York: Bantam Books, 2010.

[175] Cf. Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time*, New York: Bantam Books, ²1996.

[176] Stephen Hawking – Leonard Mlodinow, *The Grand Design*, p. 5.

our quest for knowledge."[177] This seems to be an assertion that declares the death of philosophy and theology in the modern scientific era.

And Hawking goes a step further. At the end of the first chapter, Hawking promises that his book will answer the most important and radical question about the universe: "To understand the universe at the deepest level, we need to know not only *how* the universe behaves, but *why*. *Why is there something rather than nothing? Why do we exist? Why this particular set of laws and not some other?* This is the Ultimate Question of Life, the Universe, and Everything. We shall attempt to answer it in this book."[178]

Thus, beyond the first-cause argument for the existence of God and without invoking any divine beings, Hawking claims that it is possible to answer these questions solely in the realm of science. The most important point on the theme lies in his theory of the beginning of the universe without any hypothesis. Based upon 'M-theory',[179] Hawking asserts that it is not God the Creator but the universe that can create itself *ex nihilo* (out of nothing). In conclusion, Hawking explicitly states as follows: "The universe can and will create itself from nothing. Spontaneous creation is the reason there is something rather than nothing, why the universe exists, why we exist. It is not necessary to invoke God to light the blue touch paper and set the universe going."[180]

Certainly this caused some heated debates similar to the ones provoked by the Dawkins syndrome, although to a less aggressive degree. We can critically point out that Hawking's

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[177] *The Grand Design*, p. 5.

[178] *The Grand Design*, pp. 9-10.

[179] Hawking suggests that M-theory is not a theory in the usual sense but a whole family of different theories, each of which is a good description of observations only in some range of physical situations. According to M-theory, ours is not the only universe, but a great many universes (multiverse) were created out of nothing. These multiple universes arise naturally from physical law. Cf. *The Grand Design*, pp. 8-9.

[180] *The Grand Design*, p. 180.

final answer still remains on the level of *how* instead of *why*, failing to achieve what he promised in the first chapter.

5. The Influence of Fundamentalism on the Youth Leaving the Church

Most of the responses to these atheistic works emerged from various Christian groups around the world. In Asia also, particularly in a country like South Korea, the influence of atheists such as Dawkins and Hawking is significantly felt. The works of modern scientific atheists have found sympathetic response from many, since South Korea is a well-developed country in terms of science and technology. At the same time, there is in South Korea a strong stream of Christian fundamentalism.

This situation has naturally led to some conflict between these two fundamentalist streams. On the one hand, people who adhere to scientific atheist fundamentalism easily despise the Christian fundamentalist groups such as the Evangelical Movement. On the other hand, people who believe in Christian fundamentalism try to condemn the new atheist scientism without paying due consideration to the scientific dimension.

In the modern socio-cultural context of South Korea, the new atheist scientism can have a great appeal to young people whose lives are currently being overwhelmed by the information-technology of the modern scientific age. The young are easily ensnared by the brilliance of what today's visual culture has to offer and, with eyes glued to their computers, television, and iPads, they no longer look up toward heaven. In fact, the young people of the 'smart phone generation' are no longer interested in the metaphysical dimension. They are losing dreams and passions which are considered to be the unique characteristics of youth. They are being dominated by atheist pragmatism, materialism, and relativism based on scientism. For them there is no heaven, no transcendental dimension, and finally, no God. Dawkins' works have succeeded in persuading young people to think that science is necessarily atheistic and that through it the 'false' teachings of the Church on faith can be exposed.

As an example, Richard Dawkins himself mentions a successful case of his writings influencing a young person. He quotes a letter by Douglas Adams (1952-2001), an English writer and dramatist, as follows: "Sometimes around my early thirties I stumbled upon evolutionary biology, particularly in the form of Richard Dawkins's books *The Selfish Gene* and then *The Blind Watchmaker*, and suddenly (on, I think the second reading of *The Selfish Gene*) it all fell into place. It was a concept of such stunning simplicity, but it gave me, naturally to all of the infinite and baffling complexity of life. The awe it inspired in me made the awe that people talk about in respect of religious experience seem, frankly, silly beside it. I'd take the awe of understanding over the awe of ignorance any day".[181]

What is more, there is a certain cynical reaction to religious fundamentalism among the youth in Asia. Young people easily get tired of the wars around the world waged in the name of religion. The conflicts of interests involving secular politics and the economy which involve mostly Protestant fundamentalist groups, have deepened the generation's resentment toward religion. In this situation, young people might agree with Richard Dawkins who says "religion is evil", which is many steps beyond what Hans Küng (1928-) says in his search for a new world ethic: "No peace among the nations without peace among the religions"[182]. In a word, religious fundamentalism offers young people reasons to turn their backs on the Church, and the scientific atheist fundamentalism accelerates it in an irreversible way.

In fact, Richard Dawkins seems to be making very effective use of the current chaotic situations around the world regarding religious fundamentalism for his own atheist propaganda. "Imagine" how attractive the following statement in Richard Dawkins' book *The God Delusion* can appear to young people who are disgusted by conflicts and wars caused and propagated in the name of religion:

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[181] Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, pp. 141-142.

[182] Hans Küng, *Global Responsibility in Search of a New World Ethic*, John Bowden (tr.), New York: Crossroad, 1991, p. 138.

Imagine, with John Lennon, a world with no religion. Imagine no suicide bombers, no 9/11, no 7/7, no Crusades, no which-hunts, no Gunpowder Plot, no Indian partition, no Israeli/Palestinian wars, no Serb/Croat/Muslim massacres, no persecution of Jews as 'Christ-killers', no Northern Ireland 'troubles', no 'honor killings', no shiny suited bouffant-haired televangelists fleecing gullible people of their money ('God wants you to give till it hurts'). Imagine no Taliban to blow up ancient statues, no public beheadings of blasphemers, no flogging of female skin for the crime of showing an inch of it.[183]

6. Theological and Pastoral Response to Fundamentalism

What then can be the theological and pastoral response of the Church to the challenges of the new atheist fundamentalism? The most urgent task is to discern where distortions of faith by these new atheists that so infect young people occur and meet the legitimate criticisms offered by the youth who are leaving the Church.

On the one hand, theologians of the Asian Church should make an effort to acquire a better and deeper understanding of the modern social science and epistemology of postmodernism to cope with their influence on the culture of young people. We should be able to help young people to become aware that the writings of Dawkins and other atheist fundamentalists offer nothing better than what is offered by religious fundamentalism that they reject, in spite of their being packaged in an attractive scientific language. In fact, although the language is different, substantially, there is no big difference between religious and anti-religious fundamentalism.

In this sense, we can ask whether it would be possible for Dawkins and others to start from a *tabula rasa* (zero base) and still arrive at their atheist conclusions. Hermeneutically speaking, we can assume that they start from a negative pre-conception of religion, and use their scientific ideas as retrospective validation of their anti-religious views. From this

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[183] Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, pp. 23-24.

point of view, Alister McGrath analyzes the real origin of the extreme atheist mind of Richard Dawkins as follows: "I am troubled by the ferocity with which he asserts his atheism. One obvious potential answer is that the grounds of Dawkins' atheism lie elsewhere than his science, so that there is perhaps a strongly emotive aspect to his beliefs at this point."[184]

Therefore, we have to help young people understand that "materialist evolutionism cannot shed any light on the total movement of cosmic matter toward increasingly more complex forms of order".[185] In fact, viewing from the balanced Catholic philosophical and theological perspectives, "it is evident that recent attacks on religion do not issue from a profound knowledge of theology, history, philosophy and disciplined intellectual capacities".[186] The Catholic tradition walks a middle way between the religious positivism of fundamentalists and the scientism of the new atheists. We have to teach young people that true Christian faith based on balanced Christian theology can be the best response to the atheist polemics of the modern scientific world. As true Christian witnesses, we have to do our best in proclaiming the Gospel message and contextualizing its concrete meaning, and at the same time, we need to take a clear stand on moral and ethical issues related to developments in science and technology as well as to justice and human rights.[187]

At the same time, we must try to listen to why youth are leaving the Church. We should ask them why they are abandoning their faith and which aspects of the Church they are rejecting. Are we aware of their intellectual and spiritual needs? We must ask ourselves whether young people are leaving the Church due to *our* lack of understanding of something, or to *their* lack of proper understanding of the

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[184] Alister McGrath, *Dawkins' God: Genes, Memes, and the Meaning of Life*, p. 95.

[185] John F. Haught, *Science and Religion: From conflict to Conversation*, p. 66.

[186] Michael J. Buckley, "The Madman and the Crowd", *America* 198/15 (May 5, 2008), 29.

[187] Cf. Pradip Thomas, "Asia", in *The New Faith-Science Debate*, John M. Mangum (ed.), Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989, p. 151.

Christian faith. In this sense, Stephen J. Pope, a professor of theological ethics at Boston College, says as follows: "While the attacks of the new atheists reveal their ignorance of the Christian faith, their call for greater intellectual honesty within the Christian community is appropriate and ought to be heeded."[188]

In the same context, it would be worthwhile to reflect on the following statement by Richard R. Gaillardetz, a professor of Catholic studies at University of Toledo, on the same theme: "We must certainly defend the integrity and reasonableness of our deepest religious convictions, but an adequate Catholic response must go on beyond traditional apologetics; we must also ask ourselves whether there is anything in our Catholic Christian culture that invites these attacks and might be avoided without abandoning what is essential to our faith."[189]

In conclusion, we need to take seriously and reflect deeply on the phenomenon of the Asian youth leaving the Church because of religious and scientific fundamentalism. And we need to offer them an integrated and balanced view of the Christian faith, Asian religions, and modern science. We thus need to teach them a bilingual ability, an ability to be at ease with both religion and science in order that they can be true Christian witnesses in this modern scientific age. Especially, we have to find some 'mediating levels for a fruitful interaction between science and theology'.[190] In fact, reconciling science to our Christian faith is one of our most pressing missions today, because, as John Haught, an American theologian of Georgetown University, says: "Science and religion, different though they may be, share a common origin in the remote and mysterious fountainhead of a simple human desire to know.

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[188] Stephen J. Pope, "Called to Love", *America* 198/15 (May 5, 2008), 26.

[189] Richard R. Gaillardetz, "Catholicism and the New Atheism", *America* 198/15(May 5, 2008), 13.

[190] Cf. Jürgen Moltmann, *Science and Wisdom*, Margaret Kohl (tr.), London: SCM Press, 2003, p. 24.

Both science and religion ultimately flow out of the same 'radical' *eros* for truth that lies at the heart of our existence."[191]

7. Two Dimensions of Relativism

In Asia, it is reported that the number of young people in the Church are continuously decreasing. One of the main reasons for this socio-religious phenomenon is relativism and extreme individualism combined with materialism and Mammonism. From a relativistic viewpoint, it seems that there is no longer any absolute standard for ethical values.

In fact, Pope Benedict XVI (2005-), even before he was elected as Pope, warned against the relativistic views of morality and values which have gradually permeated into the culture of youth today. His critical and firm stance against 'dictatorship of relativism' in the social environment has been officially announced at different occasions for youth, such as the World Youth Day.[192]

Leaders of local churches are also deeply concerned about the youth who belong to Generation "Whatever" and the 'Culture of Nice'. Overwhelmed and paralyzed by a flood of new information and knowledge pouring through electronic devices like smart phones, young people have no time to reflect on deeper meanings of life, swerving away from the teachings not only of the Catholic Church but also of their Asian traditions and ethics. Statistics evidently shows that relativism,

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[191] John F. Haught, *Science and Religion: From Conflict to Conversation*, p.203.

[192] For example, see the following Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI on the occasion of the 23rd World Youth Day (2008) at Sydney, Australia (during the welcoming celebration by the young people on July 17, 2008): "There is also something sinister which stems from the fact that freedom and tolerance are so often separated from truth. This is fueled by the notion, widely held today, that there are no absolute truths to guide our lives. Relativism, by indiscriminately giving value to practically everything, has made 'experience' all-important." Retrieved from http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2008/july/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080717_barangaroo_en.html.

specifically in terms of moral values, is widespread among Catholic youth.[193]

In order to discuss relativism that causes youth to leave the Church for good, we should first deal with the matter of definition as the term 'relativism' is too broadly used. Put in a very simple way, there may be two dimensions of relativism: relativism as an epistemological (philosophical) stance and relativism as social and cultural ethos.

In the disciplines of philosophy and social science, relativism refers to a group of beliefs and worldviews that argue there is no absolute truth, and truth or reality is just socially and historically constructed knowledge relative to other things. Relativism as social and cultural ethos describes a wide range of socio-cultural phenomena such as moral relativism (moral disagreements), culture of complacence, and relative understanding of justice. It refers to an attitude of young people that anything can be justified as long as it is good for one's feelings.

To find the answers to the question, 'why are young people leaving the Church?' within this framework of relativism, we should adopt two different approaches. Some are leaving the Church because they have found a truth alternative to that of Christianity, thus denying the absolute and ultimate truth of the Christian faith. Others are leaving the Church as they are not sufficiently firmly rooted in the faith and thus are prone to drift to other secular values and ways of life to attain happiness, such as individualism, materialism, and Mammonism.

Of course, realities centering around relativism, particularly in the Catholic Church are so complicated and overlapping that distinction between the philosophical notion of relativism and socio-cultural notion of relativism is often blurred out. However, these separate approaches may hold out some practical benefits for pastoral purposes.

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[193] According to a recent Knights of Columbus/Marist poll, 82% of 18-29 year old Catholics see morals as 'relative'. Cf. http://www.zenit.org/ zarticle-28794?1=english.

8. Theological Reflections on Young Religious Asians Leaving the Church: The Case of Su-Jin

The Case of Su-Jin: *Su-Jin (a pseudonym) was born in a Catholic family in South Korea. Her parents are pious Catholics. Her brother used to be a Salesian monk, now working for young people as a professional psychiatrist. A few years ago, she joined a Buddhist group called 'Jung To' (淨土會: Congregation of Pure Land Buddhism). Asked "What made you decide to convert to Buddhism?" she answered, "As a Catholic, I always felt something was missing. One day, I was on a bus and on the radio was a Buddhist monk giving a talk. I felt that what he was saying might contain truth. So I ordered the entire set of tapes for his lectures."*

Asia is the spring-well of the greatest religious teachings in human history. Most young people in Asia are, by nature, raised in the midst of a colorful rainbow of different perspectives and worldview on life and truth. This religio-cultural richness obviously has positive aspects to offer as well as poses challenges from religious pluralism. Seen from a historical point of view, Catholics in many Asian countries, who had to live through the harsh times of persecution, learnt the wisdom of co-existence and inclusiveness, how to live with a true Christian identity among other dominant religions, such as Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Hinduism, and so forth. For example, Catholics in South Korea are generally respected as they are not hostile to other religious communities, nor even to doctrines of other religious teachings, specifically, Buddhism.

However, the same reality may become problematic when young Catholics are exposed to other religious teachings and moral values without any spiritual guidance and practice in theological reflections. What is worse is that many of them don't have in-depth understanding of what they confess to believe. It may cause some young people who are thirsty for religious truth to leave the Church like Su-Jin. We do not doubt that God will hold out his loving and caring hands to young people, even to Su-Jin, though she has now left the Church to become a Buddhist. But it should be sadly pointed out and seriously asked why young people like Su-Jin have failed to

discover the truth of life, the loving presence of Jesus Christ, and the gift of trust and hope in the Church into which they were born and received through baptism. It would also be sad if young people like Su-Jin are not able to find any religious and spiritual support, guidance, and help from the Church.

In the context of Asian culture where many traditional religious values are interwoven and mingled in one place, it is in practice not a good approach to claim emphatically that 'the only truth is in the Church', denying all other values and the teachings of other religious traditions. In this sense, Pope John Paul II recommends a 'pedagogical approach' to non-Christians in proclaiming Jesus Christ in Asia: "The presentation of Jesus Christ as the only Savior needs to follow a *pedagogy* which will introduce people step by step to the full appropriation of the mystery. Clearly, the initial evangelization of non-Christians and the continuing proclamation of Jesus to believers will have to be different in their approach. In initial proclamation, for example, 'the presentation of Jesus Christ could come as the fulfillment of the yearning expressed in the mythologies and folklore of the Asian peoples'. In general, narrative methods akin to Asian cultural forms are to be preferred" (Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, n. 20).

Thus, in Asia, it has become an imperative task to meet the threats of religious pluralism with some carefully thought-out counter-measures. We have to understand the cultural and social uniqueness of the Asian Church. The term 'Catholic' literally means both 'universal' and 'inclusive'. Understanding the pluralistic context of Asia and being open to other cultural values doesn't necessarily mean that we are falling into a false pitfall of religious relativism. And at the same time, being alert about moral laxity and relativistic worldview doesn't necessarily mean that we are stuck in absolutism and fundamentalism.

Avoiding and overcoming two polemical ideas about relativism, we should go further and deeper into living out Jesus' teaching: "You must love your neighbor as yourself" (Mk 12:31). But the question of *how* is a great challenge to all the

members of the Asian Church, especially to bishops, pastors, and theologians.

9. A Suggestion: Looking for a Solution in History

For those early believers in this part of the world, the choice of becoming Christian was a brave and deliberate one, made in the face of oppression and persecution from the authorities, misunderstanding and mistreatment from other members of society, even from families and friends. They considered traditionally inherited values and religious teachings as *relative*, accepting as *absolute* only Jesus as the only Savior in person, the teachings of the Holy Bible, and doctrines of the Catholic Church. One way to overcome the recent issue of relativism regarding young people leaving the Church is to look into the reasons why our predecessors in faith in Asian countries turned to God and the Catholic Church, and to reactivate and re-arm the Church ministry with the essential joy and delight of living in Christian faith in the presence of the risen Lord, something which our ancestors chose to do at the cost of every other thing, even of their very lives.

For instance, the first Korean group of convert Catholics, many of whom are now officially canonized Saints, were great scholars of Neo-Confucianism as well, but they became pious and ardent Catholics, witnessing their faith by surrendering their life. They studied Chinese books containing Catholic teachings, such as the book in Chinese (天主實義) written by Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), very seriously and discovered the truth and love of God in them. How did those young philosophers of Confucian idealism come to accept the doctrines of Christian faith which were probably completely new to them? To them, the teachings of the Church and its doctrines were not merely what you vaguely know and accept without serious reflection. One way out from the swamp of relativism may be found in the heritage of the Catholic faith in the Asian Church.

10. Banal Relativism in Young People's Way of Life: Culture of "Whatever"

Subway, the most popular means of commuting in Seoul, is filled with young people peering into a small screen of their smart phone with ear phones stuck in their ears. The atmosphere is simply 'I don't care'. These young Korean university graduates who usually get paid the minimum wage from their part time jobs and temporary contracts pay almost 60 US dollars per month to use those smart phones besides the cost of the device itself.

Contrary to the social image of the 1970s-1980s in which the values of justice, peace, human dignity and human rights were major issues among young people, today's young boys and girls pursue individualism, consumerism, and provisional sense of justice and happiness, instead of more serious issues their parents' generation cared about. What makes things worse is the economic crisis and low employment rate which is forcing young people to acquire a very narrow, limited, and relative view of life and the world. Surviving in a tough competitive world and snatching at momentary fun and happiness is more important to them.

Reverence for life and human dignity is also being undermined. This is evident in high suicide rate, abortion, indiscriminate biological research in recent years. Asian traditions which have been norms of life for hundreds of years, such as respecting elders and sharing with community, are being rejected by the young, and adults simply don't know how to deal with these outrageous youngsters. It has become very difficult to discuss moralistic views and justice among young people since the issues of morality and values now seem to be subjective and belong to individuals. 'What is right?' is a question which leads nowhere with today's youth. To them, what actually matters is how good, satisfied, and secure he/she may feel. Some of the most twisted forms of relativism may be Mammonism, materialism, extreme individualism, and school violence.

There is a huge implicit consensus among young people that money is everything. For instance, young people in South Korea are so obsessed with appearance that cosmetic surgeries,

luxury bags, jewelry and clothes in fashion are the main themes of almost every day talk. Superficial beauty which shows off wealth and power has become the idol of young people. Therefore, individualism is getting stronger and stronger, and it is difficult to discuss such things as common good and people living in community. And, recently, school violence, such as bullying, has frequently been reported as top news in newspapers and media. Students wield violence not only on their classmates but also on their teachers just because they get 'pissed off'. This year, the South Korean government decided to intervene to stop school violence.

What has happened to these young people? We don't know the exact reasons for such behavior, but perhaps they feel that there are no true values to which they can turn and hold on. What if we put it in this way? Is this relative worldview of young people, including various forms of materialism and individualism, an expression of their desolation, despair, and suffering?

11. Question of Faith: How to Go about Relativism as Socio-Cultural Ethos

There is no doubt that young people in the Church are also affected by this ethos of relativism and materialism. They too are part of youth culture. Young Catholics, whether they are active practicing ones or not, are immersed in today's socio-cultural trend. After hearing Mass, young students and young adult professionals are likely to go to a trendy coffee shop and talk; they will probably talk about every topic on earth except religion. Socialization is a positive and natural part of youth ministry. However, it may be that there is something crucial missing in the community of young people in the Church. Relativism as socio-cultural ethos may not draw young Catholics out of the Church right away. They may remain in the Church as before. However, it may cause a split in their identity and plant in their hearts some potential seeds that will eventually make them leave their faith and Church.

This leads to the following questions. What does it mean for young people to be Christians, specifically, Catholics? How do

they accept and define their faith in their lives? What can we, as a community, do for young Asians in the Church? It is said that young Christians these days are likely to define their faith in a 'cool' way. They may believe that God does exist. They may also confess Trinity and other major doctrines of Christianity. However, they seem to think God is not particularly involved in their personal lives. And the central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.[194]

12. Pastoral Response: Bringing Faith to Life and Life to Faith

In order to overcome relativism as socio-cultural ethos, we should rethink youth ministry and catechism. We should be able to invite young people to 'bring their life to faith and faith into their life',[195] the dialectical practice of theology. So when we build up formation programs and catechetic courses, theological dynamics has to be part of it. It doesn't necessarily mean that we should teach theology to young people. It means we should help them grow their faith and identity as Catholics. Religious education should go beyond only transmitting or repeating doctrines of the Church. More dynamic action such as regular Bible study, prayer meetings, and practicing *Lectio Divina* may be one good idea.

Personal encounter is significant in Catholic religious education. Of course, developing good modules of formation and materials is important. But young people will be more deeply inspired through talking to some people who truly,

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[194] In this sense, the term 'Moralistic Therapeutic Deism' is now widely being used. It was first introduced by some sociologists such as Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton in order to describe what they consider to be the common religious beliefs among young Americans, who believe in several moral statues not exclusive to any of the major world religions. They try to be spiritual but not particularly religious, and show a kind of spiritual syncretism. Cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moralistic_therapeutic_deism; Christian Smith with Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, pp. 77-83. 118-171.

[195] Cf. Thomas H. Groome, *What Makes Us Catholic: Eight Gifts for Life,* San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2002, p. 35.

humbly, and genuinely live out, at least struggle to live out, their faith and find joy and peace in the divine love of God under personal circumstances. Automatically, it brings us to the question of what we are as Catholics. Young people may be reflections of what we are. Perhaps it is we, adults, are the ones who are seriously affected by relativistic views on many life issues. In the eyes of young people, we may not seem to live joyfully and meaningfully in the light of Gospel in our daily lives, being too preoccupied with pursuing secular success and security. So it is time for us to be awake and pray together as pastors, teachers, parents, and leaders of the Church.

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132b. Word of God in the Life & Mission of the Church, 5th FABC-OE & CBF Asia-Oceania Biblical Congress and Bishops' Institute for the Biblical Apostolate (BIBA) III by FABC Office of Evangelization in collaboration with The Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF)

133. On Being Human in the Changing Realities of Asia by Fr. Vimal Tirimanna, CSsR, FABC Office of Theological Concerns

134. Mary Truly A Woman of Our Times, East Asia Bishops' Institute on Lay Apostolate, (BILA) on Women II by FABC Office of Laity and Family, 2010