

The rise and rise of fundamentalism.

A desired return to fundamentals is characteristic of most religious reforming movements. The reassessment, rediscovery or reaffirmation of source texts and formative history is often a way in which religions or variations within them seek to purify the faith.

In our globalised culture 'fundamentalism' is on the rise in world of Islam, Hinduism and certain types of evangelical Christianity. Commonalities amongst what are otherwise disparate groups can easily be discerned. A tendency to centre on moral and sexual ethics coupled with an exclusivist approach which brands other faiths and other varieties of faith expression within the same faith grouping as apostate or heretical are shared expressions. These can in some cases elicit in their followers extreme violence justified by a particular interpretation of the divine imperative not least in the scriptures of the faith. Daily newscasts are full of examples of such phenomena.

In a Christian context appeal can be made to the work of the Holy Spirit. The third person of the Trinity is of course implicit rather than explicit in scripture and the concept of Trinity itself had to wait (after many conflicting struggles) until the fourth century of the Christian era for precise theological definition.

Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit in Christianity implies the dynamic possibility of a changing perception of the nature and will of the unchanging God as his/her followers hone and shape their lives in response to prevailing circumstances. This is another fundamental truth and without it the Church would remain a fossilised and anachronistic body instead of the living presence of a risen Christ in his world today.

Consequently some parts of Christianity not least the Anglican Communion have visibly changed some practices. In this context one can cite the early 19<sup>th</sup> century emancipation of slaves, the late 20<sup>th</sup> century changing role of women and perhaps a hesitant acceptance in this century that same-sex attraction might not after all be sinful.

This suggests a kind of step-by-step evolutionary change towards a better of understanding of God not least as revealed in Jesus Christ. If this is the case the current religious framework, not least the Anglican one isn't fully conducive to a hasty conclusion. On the contrary Christianity, which is supposed to be an evangelistic faith, now has an extraordinarily negative public image fostered by the institutional Church that seems in thrall to its fundamentalist minorities.

In Western Europe and to a degree in the United States many traditional Christian religious denominations are experiencing precipitous decline and a haemorrhaging of membership, not least of young people. So the argument is often set 'liberal versus conservative' as to which will be most

effective in spreading the message of the faith? This question is of course loaded to guarantee only answers that support the adherents of one position or the other, a kind of theological impasse. Perhaps a better way forward is a return to fundamentals, especially in the scriptures, that can be agreed and otherwise to live with the differences ... a very Anglican solution but this is after all an Anglican based website.

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