

Who is the Real Enemy?

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Since September 11th, I am at war. I feel like I'm at war. I want to be at war. I'm told I'm at war every day in pictures of a God awful desert, and nasty looking men who look like they want to eat me. Being at war, I want to fight, but I don't know who to fight. There is no obvious enemy near me and I think I'm too old to join the military. I don't own a gun and want to buy one. I'm also afraid I will shoot the Fedex driver. Afghanistan reminds me of Vietnam without trees. I see us moving from bombing to special forces to ground troops to a limited war of attrition we can't win. Then, I think it's the Chinese who are behind this. I heard on PBS radio that two Chinese military strategists published a book in the past two years in which dreadful terrorist action was proposed as the way to combat United States power and influence. Or maybe it's the North Koreans and they are using Muslims as their agents. I worry about widespread pestilence and danger to my children and friends. Then, I think of a future like the movie "Mad Max" in which the world has been wasted and hordes of mutants brutalize each other except for one good looking blonde and Mel Gibson who are the hope for the future, maybe.

I'm at war. But against who? Who is the real enemy? Osama Bin Ladin isn't enough. How many times would we have to kill him to end this? The same goes for Saddam Hussein or any of the other thousands of terrorists we know and don't know. I'm all for suppressing these people and their supporters, any way we can. I'm also for taking responsibility for alleviating the conditions that cause them to be this way wherever that is possible. And I think evil really exists, and these people are today's hopeless version.

If we could identify the actual enemy, maybe we could eventually transform or at least, suppress it. After thousands of years of humanity coupled with far too much violence, the question is "Who is the real enemy?"

The enemy, I propose, is Fundamentalism in any and all of its forms. Any system of beliefs and any people who are not inclusive of different beliefs and different people are Fundamentalist. After World War Two, Gordon Allport, a professor at Harvard College wrote a book, "The Nature of Prejudice" in which he said that all prejudice was the same. Prejudice, as he stated it, can mean avoiding someone, talking against them, restricting their freedom of movement, concentrating them, or finally killing them. But it was all the same phenomenon. Fundamentalism and prejudice are the same. While most Fundamentalists don't kill anybody, they all make other points of view wrong and their own right. They never suspend their assumptions and listen to other points of view. They don't "have" their beliefs. They belong to their beliefs. Fundamentalists always have perfectly logical arguments to justify their beliefs and are not open to more inclusive logics. Any particular Fundamentalism seems crazy if you don't believe

it, and has the power of the Word of God as experienced from inside. Fundamentalism is a major cause of today's violence in obvious and not obvious ways.

To consider winning a war against Fundamentalism is far more daunting than defeating the Taliban. Fundamentalist believers are everywhere, and it seems part of what it means to be human. But Fundamentalism is the enemy worth defeating, the source of violence in all of its forms, gentle to vicious. Like everybody else, I have lots of Fundamentalist experience. In my life, it's all been about belief that protects it's own, and denies the goodness and humanity of anyone that disagrees with it. It's important to recognize Fundamentalism in all of it's forms in order to wage a war against it. Fundamentalism is a deep pool with countless expressions. Through history, all great religions in their external and internal operations, and every political and economic system, have been grist for a Fundamentalist, non inclusive, mill. Elitism, Sexism, Racism, Militarism, Communism, Fascism and Nationalism and indigenous tribalism are Fundamentalist and exclusionary, as well. When it comes to ones' own Fundamentalism, this condition is transparent and accepted. And it is seen as an unpleasant and inevitable part of the human condition elsewhere. It's like air.

And I affirm that spirituality, profound respect for life, and the awesome, sacred mystery of the universe are not, and should not be denied. I'm not making the case for coercive secularism here. I'm saying that the enemy is Fundamentalism.

I have a Fundamentalist acquaintance. Her religion is right, others are wrong, she and her fellow believers are going to heaven, and the rest of are to stay around in eternal torture and regret for not having seen the truth in the first place. Should she be shot, imprisoned, put in stocks in the local supermarket? I don't think so. Still, she adds to hostility and resistance in the world, all in the name of God's love.

I have a long list of violence inducing Fundamentalisms. Here are but a few.

Jewish Fundamentalism

As a Jew growing up in a Boston neighborhood, I grew up thinking I was one of God's chosen people, that somehow we had the edge on intelligence, humor and ambition, and that the rest of the world was our enemy in some vague or direct way. A Rabbi told me that his job was to do good work with Jewish souls. When I asked him about the rest, he drifted to another subject. Until I learned for myself that the world is full of worthy souls, and most of the "chosen" people I know are not Jewish, this Fundamentalism led me to follow Allport's described path of avoidance, talking against, and exclusivity. Anything you resist persists. The more you resist if, the stronger the resistance gets. Fundamentalism creates enemies by denying the value of those who are not on the inside.

Christian Fundamentalism

In his inaugural address, President George W. Bush, called the United States a Christian nation. What about the rest of us George? Native Americans, Muslims, Agnostics, Jews, Atheists, Theists, Buddhists. What a huge statement of exclusion! Fundamental Christianity, as I listen to it's ministries on the radio, is absolutely certain of the truth of it's view of God, heaven, salvation and the definition of a good life. This exclusionary view is responsible for much of today's violence by making non believers so wrong that they must be crazy, evil or misguided. In the name of God's love, Fundamental Christianity makes war. American Christians went to Afghanistan to preach their word of God. They were imprisoned because they violated Fundamentalist laws in that country. Then, they were freed and returned to the U.S. for which we are all grateful.

In the television media coverage of true joy and gratitude for their release, the rhetoric about the true God and the virtue of their own cause was as Fundamentalist and violence inducing as anything to which they had been subjected. Thankfully, these are not violent people. What's violent, by degrees, is the reaction of others to their Fundamentalism.

Muslim Fundamentalism

This one speaks for itself. Mass murder, Suicide bombings, Jihad against all non Muslims. A non Fundamentalist Arab columnist, Hazem Saghiyeh, in his commentary in Viewpoint October 15, wrote that the Arab world has a certain fixation on the past? Commenting on this in a letter to the editor of Time Magazine, November 5, Amin Kavar wrote, we have not established a free press, trade unions, and civil society necessary for debating matters related to the common good...." The latter perspective on his own people is responsible, inclusive, and rests on an optimistic view of possibility for Arabs. The Fundamentalist exclusionary view, expressed in violence and murder by religious and political terrorists only creates a future that looks like the past, with people getting even with each other, forever.

Peacenik Fundamentalism

There's nothing like a good peacenik to make me want to fight somebody. Hermann Hesse said that in every truth, the opposite is equally true. In the movie, "Mars Attacks", Jack Nicholson, the President of the United States, with a simpy, smiling expression, said "why can't we all just get along" and the Mars General, weeping, then melts him into a green puddle. Yes, Peace with Justice is, and ought to be, the committed basis for human relationships. And, in everything from divorce to international relations, you have to be at least willing to make war to be able to make peace with justice. History shows this over and over again. Peakeniks are Fundamentalists embracing only one side of a paradox. In pressing their point with absolutism, they weaken the positive aspects of own argument, and strengthen the case for the use of force.

Conservative Fundamentalism

I believe in fiscal responsibility and family values. I think Bill Clinton might have been tidier in his domestic behavior. I think that corporations have rights. I love the United States and I will fight for it. In practice, Fundamental Conservatism however, always makes such ideas more important than people. Rush Limbaugh is my hero here. He is intelligent, knowledgeable, thorough, accurate, relevant and cruel. He is able to represent compassion, but never seems to feel it, except as diluted by intellect. Somebody told me that for a Fundamentalist Conservative, the heart is not a vital organ. The exception happens during an undeniable and awful human crisis like September 11th. Compassionate conservatism is an oxymoron. Fundamental conservatism is top dog racism and sexism. It's a kind of metastasis of right brain, linear, convergent control oriented, bottom-line mentality. Fundamental conservatism is an evolutionary hole in the ground. It is a Tom Delay, white man's view of freedom. It excludes minorities and women except for rich Texas blondes, politic black people and careerist Hispanics. It is money masquerading as intelligence.

Poverty and Wealth Based Fundamentalism

Rich or poor, it's better to have money. Except, a lot of poor people think they are better than people who have money. This is also Fundamentalist exclusion, as is its opposite, rich people thinking they are better than poor people. Both involve justification of one's own point of view, making sure one does not "lose" regardless of circumstance, avoidance of the domination of people that supposedly "have," (or don't) and reinforcing a sense of impossibility and irresponsibility for one's own situation. Exclusion creates negative opinion creates resistance creates enemies. I have another relative who thinks that his poverty stricken small town is a kind of Camelot compared to big cities with all their corruption, wanton life styles and general excess. Fundamentalism is to live life on a postage stamp, as if it were the whole world.

Corporate Fundamentalism

The more a corporation grows, the more Fundamentalist it gets, the more rules, the more monitoring of the rules. The more rules, the less that employees are inclusive of their customers' needs and experience. The more rules, the less higher-ups care about employees' needs and experience. I know a successful health spa that works hard to put customer satisfaction first but, as it grows, has increasing numbers of rules for employees while customers have almost no rules at all. The employees are less and less motivated, often leave for greener fields and complain directly to guests. Meanwhile the spa's prices keep going up. Throughout history, contribution to others is the only long term, viable context for an individual or a corporation. I have had an American Express card for almost forty years. Recently, they started limiting my ability to use both cards if I was one or two dollars in arrears with either one. I just cancelled my expensive Platinum card and will soon cancel my Green card. Like all Fundamentalists, the morons forgot what made them successful. Love feels like love, not a set of self-serving rules,

Style Based Fundamentalism

Some people believe that, in any situation, performance and getting results are most important. Others believe that relationships matter more than anything else. Still others believe that spirituality is most important, while others believe that quality of thinking makes the most difference. While each of these aspects of life is always present, a Fundamentalist, non inclusive, orientation to any one suppresses the others. Each carries with it its own set of realities, conversations and sets of rules. Each seems to provide a decisive context, a set of fundamental commitments and basic meanings held in the background that brings a certain coherence to a person or an organization. I know spiritual people who deride performance driven corporate people and demean intellectual activity as irrelevant to a good life. I have friends who are so convinced that salvation comes from good relationships that they see little value in intellectual and results oriented activity. And I know performance driven business people and engineers who suppress or fake their own genuineness in relationships they need for the success they want. By degrees all fail because they ignore the fact that a healthy company and a full life require all of these when they are needed.

So, I declare a hundred a hundred year war on Fundamentalism and invite others to join me. I'll start by admitting my own Fundamentalist beliefs and making fun of them wherever I can. Then, I'll stop sleeping on airplanes so I can keep an eye on my fellow passengers. I'll tell my representatives in Congress what I want, and write letters to the editor. I'll stop avoiding Dialogue with my Fundamentalist friends and practice telling my truth in a compassionate and serious way. I'll create a training program called Fundamentalism for Fundamentalists and invite everyone. I'll support my government to destroy the Taliban and others like them. I'll acknowledge what's wrong and cruel about United States policies without giving up my love and commitment to my country and to maintaining our standard of living. I'll remember with my native American friends that today is a good day to die and what whatever time I've had here has been a miracle. I'll study Islam and appreciate what's wonderful about it. I'll enlist others to declare their own war on Fundamentalism and accept that this will take a hundred years.

I won't believe in any belief, however good, that sets itself above others, refuses to allow the viability of other points of view, that considers itself to be the only way that God can be expressed and that induces violence.