Media Development

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IN THE NEXT ISSUE
Mass media in the Middle East and representations of the Middle East in the media will be the focus of the 2/2007 issue of Media Development.
EDITORIAL

In 2007 the Creation Museum will open in Kentucky, USA, dedicated to the proposition that the account given in the Book of Genesis is literally correct. It aims to persuade visitors using a combination of animatronic models, tableaux (presumably less than vivants), and a Disneyesque rendition of the Bible story.

It will be the Bible story as ‘truth’ — apart from the dinosaurs, which strangely enough are missing from the biblical narrative. That absence has presented Creationists with a conundrum: justifying the existence of dinosaur bones in a world less than 6,000 years old.

In stark contrast, scientists say that fossils and sophisticated dating technologies show that the Earth is more than four billion years old, the first dinosaurs appeared around 200 million years ago, and they died out well before our first human ancestors came on the scene.

John Morris, president of the Institute for Creation Research in San Diego, an organization that promotes creationism, said that the museum affirms the doubts that many people have about the notion that humans evolved from lower forms of life. ‘Americans just aren’t gullible enough to believe that they came from a fish.’

This is, of course, a fundamentalist worldview: defined by one participant at a recent WACC-sponsored conference on ‘Fundamentalism and the media’ held at the University of Colorado at Boulder, USA, 10-12 October 2006, as a ‘strategy for dealing with uncertainty’.

Of course, we have to distinguish between the absolute need for freedom of expression and the mandatory imposition of controversial beliefs. People have the right to believe in angels provided that such a belief does no harm to others.

It is the negative impact of fundamentalist beliefs that gives rise to concern. Not the use of a medium per se, but the use to which that medium is put. Not the building of a museum, but the construction of a cathedral of ignorance. By accepted standards of truth-telling, it is fakery writ large.

In his book Faith in Fakes, Umberto Eco points out that ‘to speak of things that one wants to connote as real, these things must seem real. The “completely real” becomes identified with the “completely fake”. Absolute unreality is offered as real presence.’ Fakery is harmless when recognized as such. But there is a grave danger that fakery masquerading as truth and publicly mediated acquires credibility as ‘real presence’.

Eco also warns that, ‘On entering his cathedrals of iconic reassurance, the visitor will remain uncertain whether his final destiny is hell or heaven, and so will consume new promises.’ It is an open question as to what promises of heaven or hell fundamentalists offer and how communicators should respond.

Notes
How do fundamentalists shape media agendas?

Stewart M. Hoover and Nadia Kaneva

The religion we see in the media today seems increasingly polarized and embroiled in emerging fronts of conflict and struggle. The media are also quick to tell us that the religious impulse most responsible for this polarization is the impulse to ‘fundamentalism’. The origins of this term can be traced to U.S. Protestantism at the turn of the 20th century, but the fundamentalist idea has shown a protean tendency to expression in a variety of religious and cultural locations.

After public repudiation in the early 20th century, U.S. fundamentalism regrouped and resurfaced, both in its original form, and in the broader movement known as ‘Evangelicalism’. Perhaps due to the global influence of American media and American culture, the term fundamentalism gained broad currency as a designation used to describe tendencies that seem to have become a feature of late modernity. This use has been particularly common in journalistic and media discourses, where simple and evocative labels are basic to conventions of treatment and coverage.

Some may still argue today that the fundamentalist label should only be applied in its original Protestant context, but that battle has long since been lost in the public and media spheres, where fundamentalism is a category used to describe a wide range of phenomena and movements around the world. For example, a different fundamentalism emerged in the world media arena during the 1978-79 Iran hostage crisis. Of course, this was also a major turning point in the West’s understanding of Islam and of the place of religion in the 20th and 21st century.

Prior to 1979, it was easy for political and social authorities in the industrialized West to assume that religion was a fading dimension of public life. The Islamic Revolution in Iran, however, was a wake-up call to those who held that assumption and introduced a decades-long reappraisal of a seeming religious resurgence worldwide. Without a doubt, the place of fundamentalisms within this resurgence has been central. Thus, in the years since 1979, media coverage has had to contend with the increasingly complicated role of fundamentalist movements in local, national, and global conflicts.

Can fundamentalisms exist without the media? Despite the success of fundamentalist groups in attracting media attention, their complicated relationship to public communication remains little understood and understudied by scholars of both religion and media. This problem presents itself as an important area of inquiry deserving of greater attention. On one level, questions may be raised about the ways in which fundamentalisms use the media and the ways in which media cover fundamentalisms. On a deeper level, we might also ask whether fundamentalisms might actually be a function of the media age – in other words, we might question whether fundamentalisms could exist without the media.

The International Conference on Fundamentalism and the Media, held at the University of Colorado at Boulder on October 10-12, 2006, was conceived as an effort to bring scholarly and professional attention to this web of issues and stimulate interest in further research in that area. In his keynote address, Scott Appleby of The University of Notre Dame offered an excellent summation of the conference focus: ‘What concerns us […] is the fundamentalists’ intriguing adoption and adaptation of the most powerful products of techno-scientific modernity, not least modern means of communication.’
The conference was jointly sponsored by the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) and the Center for Media, Religion, and Culture (CMRC) within the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Colorado at Boulder. The three-day forum brought together over 80 religion and media scholars, media professionals, and members of the religious community. Participants attended a number of plenary addresses, delivered by a selection of prominent scholars of religion and the media.

Headlining the list of internationally renowned experts was keynote speaker Scott Appleby who, between 1988 and 1993, co-directed the Fundamentalism Project of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, which resulted in the definitive work on fundamentalism that he co-edited with Martin Marty. Other noted speakers included Annabelle Sreberny of London University’s School of African and Oriental Studies, whose work focuses on the Middle East and Iran in particular, Pradip Thomas of Queensland University in Brisbane, Australia, who spoke about issues in South Asia, Ogbu Kalu of Chicago’s McCormick School of Theology, who focused on West Africa, and Steve Rabey of Colorado’s Fuller Theological Seminary, who discussed American Evangelicalism, among others.

Along with a report from WACC’s Latin American consultation on fundamentalism, presented by Adán Medrano and Dennis Smith of the NARA and WACC-LAC organizations, the plenaries explored problems of religious fundamentalisms in the Middle East, Asia, Africa, Latin America, and North America.

The broad geographical and conceptual focus of the conference was intended to accomplish two main goals. First, it was intended to acknowledge the position that there is no single...
form of fundamentalism and that no religion is inherently more or less prone to fundamentalist tendencies. Second, as conference planners we were committed to creating intellectual and social spaces for productive conversations between the academic, religious, and journalistic communities. In this sense, the conference was intended as an invitation to future collaboration. It aimed to unsettle a number of binary divisions whose rigidity inhibits broader understandings about religion and the media.

These oppositions include essentialist distinctions between East and West, North and South, developed world and two-thirds world, as well as between religious and spiritual traditions. As an academic forum, the conference also crossed boundaries between a number of disciplines, including religious studies, media studies, area studies, communications, history, geography, languages, and cultural studies. Each of these was represented in the papers and plenaries, generating many opportunities for debate and reflection. Finally, the conference self-consciously attempted to identify points of contact where academic scholarship and professional and public discourse can inform each other.

An important element of the conference was the advance screening of *Knocking: Faith and Fundamentalism Meet at the Front Door*, a new documentary to be aired on U.S. public television in the spring of 2007. The film considers a specific religion – the Jehovah’s Witnesses – placing it in historical and social context. In particularly moving scenes, *Knocking* looks at how this religious movement, often thought of as an expression of the most closed and marginal tendencies of fundamentalist faiths, has actually been involved in important, even liberatory social action in history. As all good media can, *Knocking* also humanizes the Witnesses.

The co-producers and directors of the film, Joel Engardio and Tom Shepard, were in attendance and engaged in conversation with a panel of conference participants who had been invited to make formal responses. This discussion and the ensuing broader interactions with the full-house audience revealed fascinating questions both about the subject and the form of the film.

Some audience members struggled to reconcile their personal impressions of the Jehovah’s Witnesses movement with the overall positive portrayal in the film. This enabled a deeper discussion of the role that media can play in either supporting or contesting religious traditions, and of the extent to which media frames condition our impressions of the religious world. The opportunity to think concretely about a specific case of religious mediation added an inestimable depth to the conference’s consideration of its subject.

**Persistence of religion**

Several areas of broad consensus emerged from the great diversity of voices and experiences represented at the conference. It was agreed that the scholarly tendency to see religion as a residual and fading dimension of public life under a regime of secularization is misguided. What might have once been viewed as anachronistic is now understood to be deeply active in history and, as such, warrants greater attention.

Recent academic work has been rushing to catch up with the persistence of religion and its emergence in the most modern or post-modern of contexts: the media. As religion finds its way in late modernity, it must contend with the media. The diverse range of conference papers demonstrated that there are a variety of ways that this contention takes place. There is the way that religions and religious movements themselves use media. There is the related but also distinct question of the historical mediation of religion and the changes that emerging forms of communication bring about in that mediation. There is the way that religion is represented in global media, both in journalistic and in entertainment forms. There is the way that religious symbols and ideas have become iconic tropes in media discourse.

There is also the role that the media have assumed in what we might call new ‘civil religions’ of nationalism, identity, and meaning. There is the fundamental role that media play in representing ‘us’ to ‘them’ and ‘them’ to ‘us’, that is, the role of media in religious understanding. And there is the way that media are
active in establishing and maintaining global ethnoscapes in an era of global commerce and migration. Other ways are emerging, will continue to emerge, and will demand study and interpretation.

Another theme that persisted throughout the conference was related to the problems of defining and classifying fundamentalisms. Definitional debates, however, converged around a consensus understanding best expressed in Scott Appleby’s notion that fundamentalism is ‘a tendency, a pattern, a habit of mind rather than something that is definite and self-contained.’ This understanding, in turn, encouraged a pluralistic approach among conference participants who agreed that fundamentalisms are inevitably situated within specific socio-historical, political, and cultural circumstances and are best examined in those terms.

At the same time, it was widely acknowledged that there are common trends among various fundamentalist movements that should be recognized. In his keynote address Appleby pointed out five such common ideological traits, including reactivity, selectivity, absolutism, dualism, and millennialism. Further, he observed the mutuality between fundamentalists and the media. Fundamentalist movements, he argued, use media, respond to media, are represented in media, and really could not exist without media. As Appleby put it, ‘fundamentalists are “framers” of the highest order; they know instinctively… how to identify, select, portray, project and enhance the drama inherent in their religious/supernaturalist worldview.’

Appleby’s observations, in a sense, tied together the diversity of conference discussions. As the gathered scholars, media professionals and religious leaders interacted, they were concerned to understand the sources, meanings, and implications of fundamentalists’ attempts to shape media agendas. These concerns extended beyond academic analysis and involved the civic and humanistic positions held by conference participants. The questions asked were not simply about what could be learned about fundamentalisms but also about what should be feared or greeted sanguinely about the work fundamentalists do in society.

Early in the conference, Steve Rabey summarized this sentiment well when he commented that, ‘today, many young people around the world are becoming accidental fundamentalists, some of whom seek to save the world through violence. One of the challenges I have been wrestling with is the question: How do we engage them in positive ways so that they see signs of life outside their theological/cultural enclaves?’

For all of its breadth, there were some significant gaps in the conference coverage, something that should be addressed as the discourse progresses. Perhaps as a function of the particular moment in history, there was a notable tendency toward focusing on Christianity and Islam as themes among the papers. Having a conversation that brought attention to these two faiths was in itself an important accomplishment. There was, indeed, something historic about the fact that experts in these two religious traditions and their workings in a variety of global contexts were gathered together to consider the interactions between religion and the media. At the same time, other religious traditions, such as Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Sikhism, and other perspectives, such as those of women and minority groups, were represented less prominently.

In spite of its gaps, the conference could be seen as an indicator of the current state of affairs in research on fundamentalist movements as they interface with the media. One notable tendency was the number of studies that focused on analyzing the content of various media as they attempt to cover religious fundamentalisms. Such studies are important in documenting prevailing attitudes in public discourse. However, the analyses of content alone can tell little about the ways in which fundamentalist movements act strategically to set the media agenda or take advantage of it.

To generate insights about these processes it is necessary to conduct ethnographic and culturally informed work. This is a particularly difficult task for researchers because fundamentalist groups are typically tightly closed to outsiders. It is, perhaps, in this direction that the collaboration between academy and the religious communities can help to create opportunities for greater access and understanding.
Stewart M. Hoover earned his PhD in mass communication at the University of Pennsylvania and also holds an M.A. in ethics. His research interests are in reception studies of media audiences and the related cultural implications. He has focused on studies of media and religion, looking first at the phenomenon of televangelism, and later at the cultural and discursive construction of religion by the press. He is the author of *The Electronic Giant* (Brethren Press, 1979), *Mass Media Religion: The Social Sources of the Electronic Church* (Sage, 1988) and *Religion in the News: Faith and Journalism in American Public Discourse* (Sage, 1998) and co-editor of *Religious Television: Controversies and Conclusions* (Ablex, 1990; with Robert Ableman) and *Rethinking Media, Religion, and Culture* (Sage, 1997; with Knut Lundby). Currently at the University of Colorado, he is a Professor in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication and a Professor Adjoint of Religious Studies and American Studies.

Nadia Kaneva studied at the American University in Bulgaria (Bachelor of Arts, Journalism and Mass Communication, 1997), at S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communication, Syracuse University (Master of Arts, Advertising, 1999) and is currently a Doctoral Candidate, Communication. Expected Graduation in May 2007. School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Colorado at Boulder, USA. Her primary research agenda draws on critical theories of culture and communication and explores collective identities and memories in different contexts. My current work examines changing notions of national identity in post-communist Eastern Europe and stems from a broader interest in nation branding and public diplomacy as tools of power in the context of globalization and European integration. A secondary area of interest concerns identity and community in virtual environments and online games.

WACC is extremely grateful to the University of Colorado at Boulder, USA, and its Center for Media, Religion and Culture for hosting and sponsoring the international conference on ‘Fundamentalism and the Media’, 10-12 October 2006. In particular, WACC would like to thank Professor Paul Voakes, Dean, School of Journalism and Mass Communication, Professor G.P. ‘Bud’ Peterson, Chancellor of the University of Colorado at Boulder, and Professor Stewart M. Hoover, Director, Center for Media, Religion, and Culture, and Professor Adjoint of Religious Studies and American Studies.

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**From ‘bumkins’ to Baghdad: Fumbling with fundamentalism**

**Steve Rabey**

In 2004, religion scholar Stephen Prothero wrote a review in *The New York Times Book Review* of James Ault’s book *Spirit and Flesh: Life in a Fundamentalist Baptist Church*. In the review Prothero claimed that when it comes to American religion, ‘the last acceptable prejudice is anti-fundamentalism’. That assertion may be debatable, but I think many would agree with Prothero’s lament that, ‘Fundamentalism has been scoffed at more than it has been studied.’

There are still plenty of people who scoff at fundamentalism, including some journalists and pundits, as the following two examples from 2006 press reports suggest:

‘Putting the mental into funda’ (a September headline in the *Irish Independent* about anti-gay activist Stephen Green).

‘...aside from some fundamentalist leaders, even people who loved *The Passion* seem deeply dismayed [by Mel Gibson’s recent drunken, anti-Semitic outburst]’ (a news report in *Entertainment Weekly*).

But today more than ever, such attitudes seem not only shortsighted but downright dangerous. Sure, some people still associate fundamentalism with an image of backwoodsly, back-
wards and backward-looking American Christians. But such imagery fails to provide an accurate picture of the origins of fundamentalism nearly a century ago. It also fails to make sense of the growing power and influence of fundamentalist movements in most major faith traditions around the globe today.

I am a ‘recovering fundamentalist’ who has written about religion for both the mainstream and Christian media for more than a quarter century. And no doubt, there are those who feel my recovery remains far from complete!

For the last 20 years I have lived and worked in Colorado Springs, a city that I (and others) have described as the ‘Vatican’ of American evangelicalism. (The analogy is far from perfect, but the city is the place Focus on the Family and dozens of other big, international, evangelical ‘parachurch’ organizations call home.)

I have continually struggled with how to cover fundamentalism in my own reporting and writing. I have also seen the term ‘fundamentalist’ used and abused by many other writers over the years. In this article I will try to clarify portions of the historical record while offering some suggestions for addressing fundamentalism more appropriately in the future.

Coming to terms
The Associated Press Stylebook 2005 counsels caution when using the word ‘fundamentalist’:

‘The word gained usage in an 20th century fundamentalist-modernist controversy within Protestantism. In recent years, however, fundamentalist has to a large extent taken on pejorative connotations….In general do not use fundamentalist unless a group applies the word to itself.’

And more recently, the Religion Newswriters Association’s excellent booklet, ‘Reporting on Religion: A primer on Journalism’s Best Beat’, urges reporters to exercise caution:

‘BE CAREFUL WITH LABELS. Many – including pro-life, liberal, and fundamentalist – are loaded. Characterize beliefs with specifics rather than giving them general labels. Also, allow people to characterize their own beliefs, but be wary of allowing them to explain opposing views.’

Unfortunately, some writers merely echo the rhetoric of gay activist (and personal friend) Mel White, who issued this characterization in a fundraising appeal for his activist group, Soulforce:

‘The fundamentalist Christian leader, Dr James Dobson, founder and chairman of Focus on the Family, has become the primary source of misinformation about homosexuality and homosexuals in this country and around the world….With your help we can continue putting pressure on those with a ‘Fundamentalist Agenda.’

Some of the relatively few journalistically appropriate uses of the word have been found in news reports about Warren Jeffs, the leader of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; and in the Christian press, where leaders such as Charles Colson have explicitly embraced the label, at least in part.

And thankfully, when The New York Times covered recent protests in Amish country staged by Fred Phelps and his notorious ‘God Hates Fags’ crew from the independent Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, Kansas, editors had the insight to avoid the convenient ‘fundamentalist’ lingo and use the more appropriate adjective ‘fringe’ instead.

One of the best uses of the term I have seen in recent months came from a singles ad in a September issue of London’s The Times, which read: ‘Christian fundamentalist, protestant, seeks tall white lady, 50-70, non-smoker. Not into drinking or dancing. You must live alone and want marriage.’

Origins of a movement
Today, many of us struggle to stay on top of developments in our changing world, including globalization, regular changes in the technology we use in our daily life, and scientific breakthroughs about both disease and the very nature of human life itself.

If you ever feel dizzy, perhaps you can
understand the feelings of ‘culture shock’ and social dislocation experienced by the first people in the world to embrace the name ‘fundamentalist’.

In the late 19th century, a series of destabilizing social transformations (like industrialization) and wrenching cultural conflicts (like the debates over higher criticism of the Bible and evolution) that threatened America’s former Christian hegemony. So severe were the challenges of the modern age that historian Sydney Ahlstrom said they represented ‘the most fundamental controversy to wrack the churches since the Reformation.’

Charles Darwin’s Origin of Species was merely one of many troubling challenges to orthodox Christian assumptions. Higher Criticism subjected scripture to scholarly investigation, leading many to question the reliability of the Bible and its God. Protestant Liberalism gained a foothold in many denominations and seminaries. The science of geology wreaked havoc on long-accepted notions about both human and cosmic origins. Psychology and sociology subjected human behavior to unprecedented scientific scrutiny. And new religious movements like Spiritualism, Transcendentalism, Unitarianism, Christian Science and Mormonism introduced religious diversity on an unprecedented scale.

Immigration and industrialization unleashed drastic social changes. There was an influx of Catholic and Orthodox Christians, as well as Asians and European Jews. Many of these newcomers flocked to America’s growing urban centers, where they fueled the industrial revolution and created unique cultural enclaves. Urban despair and poverty helped inspire a mainline Protestant “Social Gospel” movement which often placed greater emphasis on meeting people’s physical needs than on securing religious conversions.

Increasingly, some believers felt a deeper appreciation of the words of the old revival hymn: ‘This world is not my home.’ And the popular Scofield Reference Bible led many to believe that human history was in its final ‘dispensation’ and the end of the world was near.

Some conservative Christians responded to cultural change by redoubling their efforts to promote personal spirituality and morality, such as organizing more evangelistic crusades, promoting temperance, and lobbying for the passage of Sunday ‘blue laws’. Meanwhile, other believers came to fear that modernist ideas and institutions were eroding the very foundations of Christian faith. In 1910, some of these defenders of the faith published the first in a series of books entitled The Fundamentals, which would serve as a rallying cry for the emerging fundamentalist movement. The Fundamentals booklets featured articles by scholars (that’s Jeffery L. Sheler’s term, not mine, in his recent Believers: A Journey Into Evangelical America) like B. B. Warfield and were edited by Rueben A. Torrey and others. Twelve booklets were published between 1910 and 1915, and all are still in print (and available on the Internet). They covered everything from biblical inerrancy to personal testimonials about the efficacy of prayer in ninety loosely organized articles.

Though well-reasoned and polite in tone,
the books did little to change culture, so defenders of the faith began building their own new institutions.

In 1919, some 6,000 conservative Christians gathered for the inaugural meeting of the World Christian Fundamentals Association, created to counter the more liberal Federal Council of Churches, which was founded in 1908. In 1920, a group of Northern Baptists called ‘The Fundamentalist Fellowship’ became the first to claim the name ‘fundamentalist’ for themselves.

As the fundamentalist movement gathered strength it sought to translate its ideas into action by taking greater control of Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Congregational and Episcopalian denominations.

After these denominational efforts failed, separatist fundamentalists engaged in a flurry of institution building, founding many independent Bible colleges, publishing houses, and mission agencies that would create the foundation of America’s present, massive evangelical subculture. In the long run, however, the self-defeating belligerence of leaders like Bob Jones, Sr., founder of an influential college, and John R. Rice, editor of a newspaper called The Sword of the Lord, led not to greater influence, but instead to increasing isolation.

The divisions within the fundamentalist ranks resulted in the creation of two competing organizations: the more activist (and now irrelevant) American Council of Christian Churches, founded in 1941 by Carl McIntire; and the more moderate National Association of Evangelicals, which was founded in 1942 and positioned itself between the contrasting extremes of liberal Protestants and conservative fundamentalists.

Assessing the impact of America’s first fundamentalists

Although the movement didn’t achieve many of its stated goals, it correctly perceived that profound changes were afoot in the world, and some of its leaders made a valiant effort to call America and its churches back to their earlier biblical moorings. Even more important, the movement left a legacy of institutions and networks that would help later evangelicals achieve even greater impact and influence.

Still, there’s much to criticize about American fundamentalism, and evangelicals have been among the harshest critics, beginning with Carl F. H. Henry’s 1947 book, The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism (reissued by Eerdmans in 2003). Henry criticized his brethren for condemning the evils of Communism while ignoring the evils of Capitalism, and wrote, ‘Whereas once the redemptive gospel was a world-changing message, now it was narrowed to a world-resisting message.’

More recently other evangelicals have criticized fundamentalist failings:

- Historian George Marsden has called fundamentalism ‘militantly anti-modernist Protestant evangelicalism.’
- Joel Carpenter describes it as ‘a crabbed and parochial mutation of Protestant orthodoxy’, and talks about the movement’s ‘cultural alienation, sectarian behavior, and intellectual stagnation.’
- Edward John Carnell, who had been raised a fundamentalist, later received degrees from Harvard University and Boston University and served as president of Fuller Theological Seminary. His critiques of the movement written during the 1950s and 1960s called fundamentalism ‘orthodoxy gone cultic’ and described the movement’s creed as, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. don’t smoke, don’t go to movies...and you will be saved.’
- And Richard Mouw, the current Fuller provost, has frequently written about fundamentalism’s tangled legacy.

Mouw and Carpenter both criticize fundamentalism for its many flaws, but they also acknowledge its accomplishments. In The Smell of Sawdust, Mouw mourns the fact that fundamentalism has left the evangelical movement with three common defects: anti-intellectualism, otherworldliness, and a separatistic spirit. But things are not that simple:

‘Anti-intellectualism is a genuine danger, but so is a highly intellectualized packaging of Christianity. Otherworldliness is a threat to the Christian community, but so is a thoroughgoing this-worldliness. Ecclesiastical
separatism is to be avoided, but we must also be on our guard against a vague inclusivism in our understanding of Christian unity.’

Carpenter issues the following warning in *Revive Us Again*: ‘All Christian communities are profoundly shaped by their cultural situation, and revisionists who chide a prior generation for not seeing its own foibles and limitations should know that some day their descendants will say the same of them.’


Kenneth Kantzer, a former editor of *Christian Today*, discussed this problem in a 1996 interview for the magazine’s 40th anniversary edition. ‘Most fundamentalists believed that the life of the mind was important’, he said, ‘but they didn’t know what to do about it.’

In recent years, some of these anti-intellectual tendencies have been reversed, as Wolfe and others have noted. And at the same time, many writers have praised the logistical brilliance of both Christian fundamentalists like anti-abortion activist Randall Terry and Muslim fundamentalists who carried out the 9/11 attacks on America.

**So, who’s fundy?**

The term ‘fundamentalism’ is so problematic that scholars, including those who worked with The Fundamentalism Project (see below), have only reluctantly continued to use it. The following scholars have made important contributions in recent years.

Jeffrey Hadden has identified four types of fundamentalism: theological; political; cultural; global. Hadden and Anson Shupe gave us one of the best definitions of fundamentalism: ‘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.’

Both the Fundamentalism Project and author Malise Ruthven have explored ‘family resemblances’ among theologically unrelated groups.

My own definition would borrow the following concepts from the Fundamentalism Project:

- The importance of a wholehearted religious idealism;
- A belief that Truth (with a capital T) has not only been revealed but can be accurately grasped (at least by some male leaders) and effectively applied to contemporary problems;
- A robust counterculturalism that may seem inscrutable to outsiders but provides the only source of meaning for insiders;
- An innate sense of the reality of good and evil as well as the crucial role of the True Believers in the cosmic battle;
- A selective appropriation of aspects of religious tradition.

**A better way**

As helpful as these tools are, I still think one of the most helpful approaches comes from Scott Appleby, who sees fundamentalism ‘as a tendency, a pattern, a habit of mind rather than something that is definite and self-contained.’ The beauty of Appleby’s approach became apparent to me as I interviewed him for the *Colorado Springs Gazette* in 1994. People have been quick to apply the term ‘fundamentalist’ to many of the evangelical parachurch organizations headquartered in the Springs, but Appleby told me that most of the time the term does not fit. Discussing Focus on the Family, Appleby said: ‘If you look at fundamentalism as a tendency rather than a definition, you can ask that question in terms of when Focus does certain things and when it does not. Most of the time, I would say they are not.’

Although Focus is a $100 million-plus organization, most of its most controversial positions and newsworthy ‘culture war’ sound bites emerge from one of its relatively small departments: its Public Policy division. ‘This organizational division allows Focus to play good
cop/bad cop’, said Appleby. ‘This way, one side of the ministry can win ground by appealing to the mainstream, while the other side can engage in absolutist rhetoric and condemnations.’

As for me, I have tried to use the word ‘fundamentalist’ as seldom as possible in my own writing because I find that it typically generates more heat than light, leaving readers confused. And when I am trying to assess the theological position of people I meet or cover, I have increasingly tried to think of fundamentalism as a tendency that most of us engage in from time to time rather than seeing it as an iron clad category into which I can proudly pigeon-hole believers I consider less intelligent or less spiritual than myself.

Resources

The Fundamentals (1910-1915).

J. Gresham Machen, Christianity & Liberalism (1923).


Steve Rabey is an adjunct professor with Fuller Seminary of Colorado Springs, and freelance writer/editor/consultant who has written more than 20 books and more than 2,000 articles for publications including The New York Times and Christianity Today. A version of this article was presented at the International Conference on Fundamentalism and the Media in October, 2006. And portions of the article were adapted from ‘Fightin’ Fundies’, a chapter in Milestones: 50 Events of the 20th Century That Shaped Evangelicals in America by Steve Rabey and Monte (OP, but available at www.rabey.us).

Media, politics and fundamentalism in Latin America

Dennis Smith

In 2006 the Latin America region of the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC-AL) held a series of meetings on ‘Communication, Politics and Religious Fundamentalisms’. The conferences were held in collaboration with the Catholic University ‘San Pablo’ of La Paz, Bolivia, the Methodist University of São Paulo, Brazil, the Central American Evangelical Center for Pastoral Studies in Guatemala City, Guatemala and the Methodist Seminary in Santiago, Chile.

In all of the above conferences, speakers made the obligatory references to the U.S roots of religious fundamentalism. In a broader context, we understood fundamentalisms to be social movements that embrace unconditional truths expressed by authoritarian leaders who validate their position through charismatic religious, economic or political discourse.

Fundamentalisms are strategies for dealing with uncertainty and ambiguity, especially for communities that consider themselves disenfranchised or persecuted and that seek to build their identity and a sense of self-affirmation in moments of profound and rapid social change.

We began with the premise, succinctly stated by Chilean sociologist Arturo Chacón, that fundamentalism is a product of modernity. More specifically, fundamentalism is a product of the
deep cultural changes and social dislocation produced by modernization and industrialization.

In our discussion we came to realize that most people demonstrate fundamentalist behaviors at one time or another, reacting with fear, disgust or intolerance to other persons or groups. We found this important because, in Latin America, where the rule of law is precarious, where violence is endemic, and where many people feel alienated from traditional social and political structures, fundamentalisms become another survival strategy, but a strategy that undercuts a sense of citizenship, of active participation in the exercise of power for the common good. Fundamentalisms can encourage intolerance and the negation of the other.

We understood that there is a qualitative difference between isolated individuals demonstrating intolerance and fundamentalism as a social system. To build a fundamentalist movement requires power. A radio or television program, political office, or a pulpit can provide a charismatic individual with a powerful platform from which intolerance can be multiplied.

Brazilian sociologist Saulo Baptista describes fundamentalism as a system of representations whose leaders elaborate a discourse that responds to the fractured sensibilities of the faithful in a post-modern world. Baptista has observed that fundamentalist discourse can fulfill people’s need for order and meaning in a world that offers neither.

Baptista also asks whether the academy’s protestations against the intolerance of fundamentalism does not reveal the implicit intolerance of liberal democracy that reserves for itself a monopoly on the right to blaspheme against all that does not fit within liberal ideology.

Violeta Rocha, a Nicaraguan Pentecostal theologian who is Rector of the Latin American Biblical University in Costa Rica, notes that fundamentalism is flourishing in a consumer culture, a culture of desire in which individuals want to feel satisfaction. This moment in history makes people especially susceptible to the blandishments of prosperity theology, the notion that God wants God’s children to be healthy and wealthy, and if one isn’t, it is either because one lacks faith, or is living in sin. In this cultural milieu, divine blessing has become more linked to material prosperity, than to such intangibles as a sense of personal well-being, consolation or forgiveness.

Both Rocha and Baptista described how, in a materialist, consumer culture, individuals can become disconnected from their identities and their traditions. Traditional religion as a path to the numinous, can lose its centrality in a community’s life when forced to compete with the concrete immediacy of consumerist gratification. In the words of the Spanish pastoral theologian Juan José Tamayo, ‘God has carved out a space in the midst of billions of inhabitants who have been progressively dishabited by a culture that pretends to abolish the mystery of things’ (Tamayo, 2004:51-53).

We are witnessing the materialization of mystery.

We also posited that fundamentalism strengthens male attempts to control women’s bodies, be it through the prohibition of abortion, the negation of female sexual pleasure, or...
macho social norms that propose to keep women pregnant and barefoot in the kitchen. While we found abundant anecdotal evidence to support the link between fundamentalism and patriarchy, we also recalled that many Pentecostal groups, despite their sexist discourse, end up providing unprecedented social spaces where women have found their voices and begun to exercise control over their lives. Where else can women in Latin America stand up in public and pour out their souls in vibrant and eloquent testimony? Where else can women find a community of support to help them challenge their partner’s debilitating alcoholism or domestic violence?

Indeed, Richard Shaull and Waldo Cesar found in their study of neopentecostal groups in the slums of Rio de Janeiro that women leaders in some local congregations, despite their formal affiliation with megachurches whose leaders own media empires and control voting blocks in Congress, were creatively engaged in battling gang violence, creating jobs, and building self-esteem (Shaull, Cesar: 2001). However, these examples of agency exercised by women tend to be individual or local in nature, and do not threaten patriarchal institutions.

**Fundamentalism and spirit-filled religion**

In recent decades we have witnessed the irruption of charismatic religion in Latin America as TV preachers and neopentecostal megachurches have become major players on the regional stage. Simultaneously, we have seen deeply-rooted traditional movements such as Afro-Brazilian religions, Mayan spirituality and Kardecist Spiritism come out from the shadows to compete for the public allegiance of the faithful.

Chacón also argues that such myths are always cloaked in violence. Deeply rooted in the Latin American psyche is an understanding that God cannot be domesticated, and that our profound longing for a personal encounter with transcendence is fraught both with mystery and with danger.

In our conferences Violeta Rocha argued forcefully that all Pentecostals are not fundamentalists and that not all fundamentalists are Pentecostals. Many adherents to Spirit-filled religion, because of their faith commitments, are deeply engaged in social justice issues and have been for the last century. If Pentecostals don’t identify themselves publicly with progressive political causes it may be because of the secular and explicitly anti-religious discourse of the political left.

**Brazil: A case study**

Baptista looks specifically at Brazil, a country of 186 million people of whom 15% are Protestants of one form or another. About 7 million are traditional Protestants or evangelicals, while at least 20 million are Pentecostals or Neo-pentecostals. Brazil is experiencing an explosion of Spirit-based religion. Baptista cites research documenting that Brazil has the second largest population of practicing Protestants in the world, second only to the United States.

Baptista also emphasizes that fundamentalism is neither reactionary nor nostalgic. Fundamentalists, even if they employ the rhetoric of nostalgia, are proposing a return to the future, a utopia that has never existed. In Latin America, religious and political fundamentalisms have been able to build upon modernity’s unfulfilled promises by offering their own visions of a brave new world.

Baptista notes that fundamentalism enthusiastically embraces cutting edge technology. They employ strategic planning, modern organizational theories, new information technologies and the full range of the electronic media – all in service to their utopian vision.

Fleshing out that utopian vision can be a challenge. Historically, Latin American fundamentalism has been rooted in the sensationalist eschatology of dispensationalism as imported from the United States. Back in the 1980s the
fundamentalist media agenda was set by U.S. televangelists like Jimmy Swaggart and Rex Humbard.

As prosperity theology began to take hold in the 1990s, Latin America’s religious entrepreneurs began to validate their ministries by proclaiming themselves prophets or apostles, who claim privileged access to divine revelation. When so many apostles are promising material success here and now, end time prophecies become somewhat passé.

Unlike other Latin American countries, some Brazilian Neopentecostal religious leaders have proved their ability to deliver the vote in elections. Edir Macedo, the head of Brazil’s Universal Church of the Kingdom of God and owner of the TV Record television network, cut a deal with Lula that allowed Macedo to designate Lula’s vice-presidential candidate in the previous elections. Baptista described to me how big landowners, known in Brazil as Colonels, have positioned themselves as regional leaders in Pentecostal and Neopentecostal churches. From this position they came to exercise influence in regional and national politics.

When fundamentalist leaders become so mundane as to define their vision as prosperity now, and to craft shifting political alliances of convenience, such short-sighted tactics would seem to undermine their long-term credibility and effectiveness. The most recent election results from Brazil would seem to support this hypothesis: More than half the 513 congressional representatives were re-elected on Oct 1, but only 15 of the 60 members of the evangelical caucus were re-elected. Adelor Vieira, the head of the caucus, was re-elected despite being implicated in a financial scandal. It is not yet clear how many representatives will choose to join the evangelical caucus in the new congress.

Building engaged citizens?
Can people of faith who seek to build citizenship and work for peace and social justice relate to people who seek God in neopentecostal megachurches?

My own work at Cedepca, a small ecumenical training center in Guatemala City, tends to suggest the importance of creating safe spaces where people who are imbued with the dis-

course of prosperity theology can consider more inclusive alternatives. Language is key. If one seeks to unpack how and where God is present in today’s world, and what are our responsibilities as people of faith when confronted with human need, neopentecostals will not respond positively to partisan leftist discourse. Most of us on staff at Cedepca are able to engage such seekers because we come from conservative evangelical backgrounds; we speak the language of faith and participate actively in local churches.

A non-sectarian approach rooted in our common humanity is also key. I have observed that many Latin Americans have embarked on a personal spiritual pilgrimage that has taken them from traditional Catholicism through traditional Protestantism into Neopentecostalism and then out the back door, thoroughly disillusioned with organized religion.

Current statistics suggest that more than 14% of Guatemalans, a profoundly religious people, no longer identify with any religious institution. One is left with the impression that many Latin Americans feel themselves to be adrift in an ethical void and that religion, instead of providing a touchstone, a moral community, has become, for some, just another consumer product for individual consumption.

As people of faith, can we propose a common ethical agenda? In our discussions I turned to that classic Christian apologist C.S. Lewis who, in The Abolition of Man, suggests that the core teachings of diverse religious traditions can be summarized under the rubric of the Tao. Key elements would include:

- The law of general beneficence: all people should work generally for the good of all humankind and for all of creation. Then, the law of special beneficence: all people should work especially for the well-being of their family and their community.
- Each person should respect their mother, their father and their ancestors.
- Each person should respect their children and their posterity.
- The practice of justice applies to all human behavior, from the practice of sexuality to the rule of law: No to deceit, no to imposition by
force, no to falsehood, no to theft, yes to structures of justice that are effective, just and transparent.
● Each person should practice good faith and veracity.
● Each person should practice mercy.
● Each person should practice generosity.

As professional communicators we also recalled that WACC has given us useful benchmarks we can apply to our discourse and practice. We call these benchmarks the Christian Principles of Communication. They were first drafted 20 years ago by Michael Traber, who passed away in 2006:

● Communication affirms transcendence: when we communicate with other people we affirm that God is present in our world and God desires abundant life for all of Creation.
● Communication builds participation.
● Communication builds community.
● Communication promotes freedom.
● Communication promotes human culture, celebrating diversity and defending the right to be different.
● Communication is prophetic; it should proclaim justice and speak truth to power.

This summary is drawn from the following papers: Las raíces del fundamentalismo by Arturo Chacón; Fundamentalismos, comunicación y cultura by Violeta Rocha; Fundamentalismos, comunicación y globalización: Desafíos pastorales by Dennis Smith; and Fundamentalismo e identidades no campo evangélico brasileiro by Saulo Baptista.

Bibliography

From the pulpit to the studio:
Islam’s internal battle

Nabil Echchaibi

In February 2006, when Wafa Sultan, a Syrian-American activist in Southern California who advocates secularism in Muslim countries, defiantly told an Islamic sheikh on a widely popular Al-Jazeera news show ‘to shut up and listen, it’s my turn’, she knew she was making history on Arab television. Never before has the authority of Islam represented on this show by a conservative sheikh from Cairo’s famed Al-Azhar University been challenged in a similarly brazen way by another Muslim, and much less so by a woman.

Sultan’s caustic comments on Al-Jazeera, in which she describes the difference between radical Islam and modernity as ‘a clash between a mentality that belongs to the Middle Ages and another that belongs to the 21st century’, may be an extreme example of dissent, but her defiance mirrors a rising disenchantment in the Muslim world with the official gatekeepers of Islam. The Internet and satellite television are full of emerging Muslim voices who are seeking to redefine their faith away from the ghastly headlines of Islamic radicalism.

Today, decisions whether to wear the veil, grow a beard, eat halal meat, date before marriage, or get a mortgage loan with interest, can be influenced more by cyber discussions and popular shows on 24-hour Islamic channels conducted by charismatic hosts than by the eru-
dite religious authorities of Al-Azhar in Egypt or the Wahhabi clerics of Saudi Arabia.

Internet websites like Islamicity.com allow visitors not only to conduct sophisticated searches within the Quran, but also search for marriage partners in an extensive database that returns glossy pictures and lavish descriptions of ‘marriage-minded Muslim singles’. You can also find elaborate recipes using halal ingredients, shop for an iPod that comes with the entire Quran and its English translation, buy alcohol-free perfume, or listen to R&B and hip-hop songs with Islamic lyrics.

On satellite Islamic television the staid, bearded and turbaned sheikh has been replaced by young, stylish beardless men and colorfully-veiled women, most of whom were formerly unveiled Egyptian film stars. The boring half-hour advice show by the government-ordained sheikh is ceding way to a sophisticated line of value-laden entertainment programming that ranges from engaging talk shows, cooking shows inspired by the prophet Muhammad’s culinary habits, sleek game shows, intricate soap operas, to reality television contests where young entrepreneurs devise plans without a budget to help charitable causes from Darfur to Kosovo.

New Age Islam

Welcome to New Age Islam. Here the feeling and experience of religiosity are more important than critical spirituality. Here the formulation of the religious message; more than its content, creates meaning. Here the Quran is performed; not only recited. New Age Islam is a generally peaceful face of Islam deliberately designed to fend off the lure of Al Qaeda’s indiscriminate radicalism and fight the old guard’s futile intellectualism.

Since 9/11 a heightened scrutiny of Islam by the West has compelled ordinary Muslims everywhere to define what falls within and outside of ‘pure’ Islam. More than ever before, Muslims are called to task to explain and justify topical concepts like Jihad, halal, fatwa, and cultural traditions in Islamic countries and among Muslim immigrants in western countries like female circumcision, arranged marriages, or honor crimes.

This individual input on what Islam means has leveled the playing fields of religious authority as Islamic theologians compete poorly with superstar television preachers and Internet bloggers with minimal or no theological background. This erosion of authority is also creating an unprecedented environment whereby the Islamic laity, boosted by improved literacy, is no longer content with the role of the passive quiet audience. Some have responded to this call for participation by joining Bin Laden’s camps of terror, but scores of Muslims are peacefully learning how to liberate their faith from extremist ideologies and seam its teachings with modernity.

Much like the Internet, satellite Islamic television channels like Iqra’ (Read) and Al-Resalah (The Message) have been the laboratory in which the new Islam has emerged and evolved. The fact that satellite television is bound, by virtue of its audience of millions of viewers, to compete for market share, forces channels, even the overwhelmingly religious ones to provide a space for alternative voices to emerge and widen the range of social and cultural topics on which Islam is brought to bear. As a result, the direction and style of Islamic discourse is undoubtedly changing because it is increasingly pressured to account for what is said in alternative venues and engage the mutating socio-cultural universe of the Arab world.

Modeled after American televangelism and religious entertainment, Islamic broadcasting seeks a simpler, more moderate message that rebukes radicalism and makes religion cool. This is a far cry from the customary calls of divine retribution Muslims have grown to hear from fulminating sheikhs at the mosque and on television.

New ideas, new programmes

The architects of the new Islam are younger preachers with more business skills than religious knowledge. Some of Iqra’s hit shows were produced by Ahmed Abu Haiba, a 38-year-old who believes Islam could benefit greatly from the ways in which American evangelists have embraced modern media and mass culture to popularize religion.
A similar belief is shared by the general manager of the latest Islamic channel Al-Resalah, Tareq Al-Suwaydan, a 46-year-old Kuwaiti television celebrity and a motivational speaker who teaches young Muslims how to become effective business leaders. During his 17 years in the United States as a student, Al-Suwaydan was heavily influenced by Western entrepreneurial literature on self-improvement such as Steven Covey’s *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* and religious literature such as Norman Peale’s work on the power of positive thinking and faith. Upon his return to Kuwait, he adapted this literature by making Islam a success formula for spiritual self-fulfillment and material achievement.

Through Al-Resalah, a private channel dubbed as the first Islamic entertainment television, Al-Suwaydan hopes to make the medium the message. Islam, he says, is not supposed to be dull and irrelevant. Islamic values of self-piety, hard work, filial piety, helping the poor can be embedded more effectively in reality TV shows, soap operas, game shows, cartoons, and even music videos. It is a marriage of tradition and modernity.

Since its launch in March 2006, Al-Resalah has generated both praise and criticism in the Muslim world. Some see its thin line between religion and secular content bordering on heresy; others believe it is the only way to derail mounting forces of extremism in the region. Just like its on-screen graphics and studio sets, Al-Resalah’s programs are innovative and edgier. Its shows expose some delicate realities like children and women abuse, drug and alcohol addiction, divorce, corruption, and romance. Some shows feature veiled women as hosts, and although they are stereotypically assigned to discuss topics related to the family, some of these women issue fatwas, a function long reserved for male Islamic sheikhs.

More than the other dozen 24-hour religious channels, Al-Resalah hopes to compete with popular secular channels like Saudi-owned MBC and Rotana which feature expensive film and soap opera productions as well as music videos from some of the most well-known artists in the Arab world. Al-Resalah’s owner, Saudi billionaire Walid bin Talal, is presumably eager to spend millions of dollars to make Islamic programming look as appealing and catchy as the sleek and racy Arab Superstar or Arab Star Academy, two music talent contests similar to American Idol that drew millions of votes every week from across the Arab world.

**Revolutionizing Islamic broadcasting**

Al-Resalah’s first day broadcast featured a song by Sami Yusuf, perhaps Islam’s first superstar. Yusuf, a 26-year-old British singer of Azeri origins, had been a sensation before the launch of Al-Resalah, but the channel used his upbeat western-influenced rhythms and enthralling Islamic lyrics as an indicator of its intention to revolutionize Islamic broadcasting. Yusuf’s songs range from joyful praise of the Prophet Mohammed to riveting pleas to revive the Ummah, the global community of Muslims, in the face of humiliating failures in Lebanon, Palestine, Kosovo, Bosnia, and Iraq.

His lyrics can be equally biting when he chastises Islamic extremists for committing ‘atrocities in the name of the divine’. Much like the New Age Muslims, Yusuf, who sold more than 1.5 million copies of his first two albums, is comfortable with his religious identity and eager to embrace modernity, even when that means interacting with and adopting Western culture. His sophisticated use of music videos and his moderate Islamic message represent a new balance for Muslim youth who feel equally estranged by the moral bankruptcy of pop culture and the excessive austerity of religious extremism.

Yusuf owes much of his fame to Amr Khaled, the pioneering figure of New Age Islam on television. Khaled, a 39-year-old former accountant from Egypt, has become through his show, Sunaa al-Hayat (*LifeMakers*), a veritable sensation, a media phenomenon both in the Middle East and among the Muslim diaspora in the West. His sermons, which can be found on television, on DVD and video tapes in libraries and outside mosques, and on his popular website, sound more like motivational speeches than religious advice sessions.

His use of colloquial Egyptian Arabic – most Islamic sheikhs use classical Arabic – his age, and his modern look (jeans and polo shirts, or
stylish open-collar suits, clean shaven with a carefully-trimmed mustache) make him accessible to a disillusioned young Muslim audience. His Islam sounds exceedingly fresh as he tells them change becomes reality not by controlling thought, but by accepting individual accountability and ‘breaking the chain of negativity’.

Khaled’s show LifeMakers is an elaborate 12-step project with three phases that combine a series of devotional speeches with the realization of social reform projects helping with poverty, unemployment, health, and small businesses. When he told his viewers in one of the early episodes to submit practical reform ideas to his website, he received more than 350,000 ideas from 35 countries including the UK, France, Italy, and the US.

His faith-based social initiative is working too. A number of LifeMakers clubs have been created by loyal fans around the world as grassroots organizations dedicated to local individual and social reform. His calls to raise money for the poor are met with generous donations and dedicated volunteers who collect clothes, food, medicines, and offer computer literacy courses for free. Positive faith that translates in effective action, he says, is a viable alternative to radicalism and government inaction.

Khaled’s detractors on the religious side accuse him of reducing a serious religious message to a soundbite. The old guard of Islam’s authority refers to his preaching style as superficial, air-conditioned, and self-serving, but Khaled insists young Muslims need concrete reformers who would guide them; not simply tradition relayers who would flood them with Quranic recitations. So far, the audience seems to favor his style and he has plenty of evidence to support it: his website is one of the most visited on the Internet with millions of hits monthly; his shows compete with the most popular entertainment programs; and his lectures around the world are quickly sold out.

Other critics of Khaled are afraid his tele-vangelism and this entire trend of New Age Islam is nothing but a form of religious populism that will produce no tangible reforms in Islam. Yet, some emerging scholars, like Reza Aslan, see in the erosion of Islamic authority by common Muslims the first traces of an Islamic reformation, a grassroots clash between the voices of moderation and those of dogmatic extremism.

The Internet and television to Islam may as well be, as Aslan says, what the printing press was to the Christian Reformation. The fact that individual bloggers, television personalities, and artists with minimal theological background also get to shape their faith is an indication the fight to define Islam will be long and brutal. Bin Laden’s radicalism and other forms of Islamic puritanism may have obscured the more silent and less spectacular march of moderate Islam, but not for long.

But as the gates of interpretation open up in the Islamic world, it is still unclear what kind of Islam will emerge in the future. Some of New Age Islam is still conservative, and for those hoping for genuine reforms, it remains rather timid. But in the face of extremist barbarism, conservative reform seems more and more appealing to Muslims across the globe.

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Women, news and fundamentalism

Sheila J. Gibbons

The rising influence of fundamentalist religious and political leaders around the world is a staple of discussion in mainstream media and the alternative press, in online chats on web sites operated by NGO activists and bloggers, and in media controlled by fundamentalists themselves. Among all these entities there are wide disparities in how often and how candidly they explain how fundamentalism is affecting the lives of women and girls.

Of particular concern is how traditional daily journalism, with its pyramid of editors and beat reporters, is being flattened in the name of corporate cost-cutting. With that diminution of resources and experience we can expect to lose much of the journalistic enterprise that has ferreted out poignant stories of women whose lives have been limited by religious and cultural conservatism.

At the same time traditional journalism is faltering, faith-based conservative groups are establishing and acquiring their own media holdings, the better to propound their doctrines and build audiences for their messages. The result is fewer platforms for reporting, objectively, on the consequences of fundamentalism that force women and girls into second-class personhood.

Fundamentalism as news about women

Of course, there have been times when fundamentalism’s impact on women made big headlines. Here are just two examples: when the U.S. invaded Afghanistan in October 2001 and gave, as one of its reasons for doing so, the liberation of Afghan women and girls from the tyrannical Taliban then in control of the country; and more recently, in November 2006, when the leader of a fundamentalist sect practicing polygamy was charged in the U.S. state of Utah with rape as an accomplice for forcing a 14-year-old to marry her 19-year-old first cousin.

The latter case confronts the practice of marrying underage girls to older men, common in this group, the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Its members believe that ‘plural’ marriage guarantees exaltation in heaven. FLDS teachings also require a woman to submit herself to the will of a husband without question.

The virtual enslavement of women by the Taliban and the FLDS – organizations vastly different in scale, in nations thousands of miles apart – has been possible because these two groups have many elements in common: iron rule by patriarchs; a God-surrogate or surrogates controlling every aspect of women’s lives; isolation of women from education, from civic life, and from travel.

Yet news coverage of these suffocating conditions for women occurs in a virtual vacuum, lacking the context that would show that this betrayal of the human spirit is a persistent phenomenon with severe social consequences not limited to Afghanistan or several closed communities in Utah and Arizona.

Daily news coverage is usually event-driven, and never more so than in an intensely visual age in which the availability of images influences story prominence and placement. However, much of what happens to women via fundamentalism can’t be readily photographed or videotaped.

Those stories require a different kind of storytelling, in which words are more compelling than images. Fortunately, there are journalists telling these stories with compassion and skill, but there are not nearly enough of those journalists nor enough of those stories.

There also are not enough editors and reporters probing for the gender angle in coverage of health, war, education, public policy, civic participation, and crime. The third annual
Global Media Monitoring Project’s report, released in February 2006, found that only 10% of all stories in the global spot check of media in 76 countries focused specifically on women. News about gender inequality represented just 4% of stories.1

With that performance, it’s easy to see why the news media are not delivering the full story of fundamentalism’s impact on women around the world.

**Critiquing news coverage**

I am sympathetic to reporters and editors struggling to make decisions about how to use dwindling newsroom resources. However, the media’s overall inattention to women’s plight in fundamentalist-dominated cultures and communities, and the gradual mainstreaming of fundamentalism into broader culture – such as when pharmacists refuse to fill prescriptions for contraceptives on religious grounds – needs to change. If it doesn’t, we will have an underinformed populace excusing oppressive fundamentalist practices as simply the local exercise of religion or the exotic norms of faraway cultures, rather than violations of human rights.

Even though we need more stories about these inequities, it’s not just the quantity of news reports that matters, but the comprehensiveness of their content. That means reporters should draw upon diverse sources and provide enough context for the reader to ‘connect the dots’ and draw an informed conclusion from the information provided.

*St. Louis Post-Dispatch* reporter Tim Townsend produced an article on the U. S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ recent reaffirmation of that church’s stance that artificial contraception is immoral, even for husbands and wives. Townsend quoted bishops, academics, theologians, and Catholic documents on the subject. In *The Washington Post*’s edited version of Townsend’s story, published Nov. 22, 2006, not a single woman was quoted. However, in a version of his article published by the *San Jose Mercury News*, two women – both employees of the Catholic Church – were quoted.2

In none of the various other published versions of Townsend’s story that I read were ordinary Catholic women, or women who disagree with the bishops’ positions, quoted. No reproductive health care providers were quoted. By omitting comment from those who would be most personally affected by the bishops’ action and from secular family planning experts, Townsend’s piece flunked the diversity of sources and ‘connect-the-dots’ tests, and made women’s stake in this matter seem smaller than that of the church hierarchy.

In contrast, a few days later *The Washington Post* produced a story that did everything right. ‘Nicaragua’s Total Ban on Abortion Spurs Critics’ ran on Page One, bylined by N. C. Aizenman of the *Post’s* foreign service.3 Aizenman described the quandary of a five-months pregnant woman who arrived at a Managua hospital with a fever and abdominal pain. Two days later she was dead, and accusations are flying that a law passed a week before she died that eliminated any exceptions for abortion played a part in her death.

Aizenman’s story included quotes from women’s advocates, the hospital administration, the Catholic archdiocese which had lobbied for the legislation, the nation’s OB-GYN society, and the dead woman’s family. It also cited pertinent information from the country’s health ministry. It was a 360-degree reporting job that in my view was complete and fair to all involved.

**Missing vital coverage**

The saga of fundamentalist Warren Jeffs’ polygamous sect and the legal case against him were recounted in many press and broadcast reports as his Nov. 21 hearing on rape charges approached and then occurred. Most of the coverage focused on the star witness’ testimony of the marriage Jeffs forced her into when she was 14. But none of the stories I read broadened the perspective to also consider the common practice of forced marriages of girls to older men in the world’s poorest nations (which the United Nations says means the girls cannot complete their education and are at greater risk of being exploited and contracting sexual infections, including the HIV virus that causes AIDS).4
Rather, the Jeffs case is being reported as if Utah is the only place that the forced marriage of girls occurs. It’s an approach that echoes what journalist-researcher Ammu Joseph found in her analysis of news coverage of rape in India, in which the greatest attention is paid to victims (and offenders) from the middle or upper classes, ‘while crimes against the poor, the powerless and the distant tend to receive little, if any, media and public attention.’

After the Islamic fundamentalist Taliban assumed control of Afghanistan in 1996, they began forcing Afghan women and girls into tighter and darker corners of society, depriving them of employment, health care, and schooling. But the world’s media didn’t turn a bright light on these practices until October 2001, when the United States and other Western countries invaded Afghanistan in search of al Qaeda operatives. ‘The oppression of Afghan women by fundamentalist groups was barely addressed by the corporate media until it proved rhetorically useful for U.S. elites to argue for military intervention as a means to liberate the women of that country,’ argued scholars Carol A. Stabile and Deepa Kumar.

Several months after the invasion, in March 2002, U.S. first lady Laura Bush gave a sunny report on the future for Afghan women and girls on International Women’s Day to an audience at the United Nations. Subsequent press reports focused on the positives in Mrs. Bush’s speech: Afghan women starting bakeries, their daughters returning to reopened schools, American schoolchildren collecting money to buy books for Afghan students. However, by December of that year, Human Rights Watch said that Afghan females had suffered mounting abuses, harassment and restrictions of their fundamental human rights during 2002.

According to the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan, the incidence of rape and forced marriage is on the rise again, and most women continue to wear the burqa out of fear for their safety. ‘The level of everyday violence in Afghanistan is something we would find it hard to imagine,’ the RAWA web site says. ‘The “war on terrorism” has removed the Taliban, but it has not removed religious fundamentalism, which is the main cause of all our miseries. It will require a very different approach indeed for those evils to be eliminated... And in fact, by reinstalling the warlords in power in Afghanistan, the U.S. is ultimately replacing one fundamentalist regime with another.’

Womankind Worldwide says: ‘It cannot be said that the status of Afghan women has changed significantly in the last five years.’ An Oxfam report released Nov, 27, 2006, said that only one in five girls attend primary school, the ratio reaching one in 20 at secondary school level.

The point about exchanging one set of oppressors for another has not gone unreported in the world’s media. But the continuing crisis for Afghanistan’s women and girls has received much less notice than the early optimistic and, as it turns out, exaggerated reports of their liberation did. An exception is the excellent Nov. 28, 2006 report by Natasha Walter of The Guardian, (‘We are just watching things get worse’) which compares women’s situation in Afghanistan today with five years ago.

Many stories waiting to be told
These are but a few examples of recent reporting on the intersection of gender and fundamentalism. Many others can be explored: the re-emergence of the long-banned practice of sati (widow immolation) in India, female feticide in India and China, feminine genital mutilation (also known as female circumcision) in Africa.

It’s also important that journalists track fundamentalist trends in mainline religious denominations, such as the Southern Baptist Convention. The second largest religious body in the United States (after Roman Catholics), the SBC requires a married female member ‘to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband,’ and bars women from being pastors.

In this form of fundamentalism (which obviously is not limited to the Southern Baptists or to Christians) subordination of women to men is formalized, not only curbing the full expression of their spiritual selves but also implying that they are ill-suited to any role that would elevate them to a position of authority over a
male. That – and the considerable influence proponents of such a philosophy have in politics, especially in the United States – is a story worth following.

To the extent that journalism fails to ‘connect the dots’ between fundamentalism and societies made fragile by denying women equal rights, we will be disadvantaged in a quest to achieve politically stable environments in which all can thrive.

Notes
4. UN joins in 16-day campaign to fight violence against women, Nov. 24, 2006,
11. Natasha Walter, ‘We are just watching things get worse,’ The Guardian, Nov. 28, 2006,
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Christian fundamentalism and the media in South India

Pradip N. Thomas

The turn towards Hindu nationalism in India has been a subject of academic study for over two decades. Events such as the pogroms (February-April 2002), against Muslims in Gujarat immediately after the Godhra killings in February 2002, the murder of the Australian-born evangelist Graham Staines (January 1999) and the destruction of the Babri Masjid (December 1992) received international and national media coverage.

In the three instances mentioned above, members belonging to the Sangh Parivar, the family of right-wing Hindu organisations who gave ideological succour and people-support for the previous Hindu nationalist, Bharatiya Janatha Party (BJP) government in India, have either been charged with aiding and abetting violence against minorities or are in the process of being charged for the offences. The rise of Islamic fundamentalism, including recent events such as the railway bombings in Mumbai (July 2006), has also received coverage in the national and international media and become part of global academic discourses involved in either understanding, supporting or contesting the ‘war against terror’.

Christians in India have generally had a positive image in the media and the national imaginary given their involvement in education at school and college levels, in health care and national development. As a relatively small minority (2.4% of the population), their pres-
ence or expressions, have traditionally not been a cause for concern, or viewed as a threat to majoritarian identities and futures. This stands in contrast to Muslims who at close to 10% of the population are significantly present in most parts of India, are involved in the very trades and professions that lower and middle class Hindus are either involved in or covet, and whose involvement in bloodletting during the Partition of India, presence in neighbouring Pakistan and in disputes over Kashmir, have made them a suspect population among the Hindu nationalists in particular.

Their ideologues have made determined efforts, offline and online, to de-legitimise and problematise the Muslim Indian binary. Evelyn Kallen (1998: 7) describes the ways in which this ‘invalidation’ is constructed via a sequence of three main stages:

‘Invalidation myth (prejudice): definition of target group as inferior and/or dangerous. 
Invalidation ideology: development of theory of vilification and provision of supporting arguments and “evidence “ to “justify” denial of fundamental human rights. 
Platform for action: incitement to hatred and harm (discriminatory action); denial of human rights.’

Christian fundamentalism in India

Even to suggest that there is a relationship between the media and Christian Fundamentalism in Chennai, South India, might seem odd to readers of Media Development, whose prior knowledge of the subject is perhaps limited to the influence of the religious right-wing on the Bush administration or/and the rise and fall of tele-evangelists such as Jimmy Swaggart and in the recent past, the evangelist Ted Haggard, the president of the 30 million member National Association of Evangelicals in the USA.

Some readers will have knowledge of the relationship between the media, politics and religion in Brazil – the Tele Rede network in Brazil owned by Edir Macedo and his Universal Church of the Reign of God, and the ex-President of Zambia, Frederick Chiluba’s brand of politicised, conservative Christianity. But Christian fundamentalism in India has rarely figured as an academic project except the study by Lionel Caplan (1987) ‘Fundamentalism as a Counter-Culture: Protestants in Urban South India’, and in the recent past, the investigative writing by Edna Fernandes (2006) ‘Holy Warriors: A Journey into the Heart of Christian Fundamentalism’.

The latter has sections on Christian Fundamentalists in two states in India, Goa and Nagaland, and indicates that there are contested issues arising from the practices of conservative Christianity in India. There is, in the online world, a vast amount of information on the activities of Christian groups in India on web-sites supported by the Hindu right-wing and concerned secular groups with www.Christiansagainstaggression.org being the most informative site that monitors the activities of Christian mission in India.

While Muslims remain the major target for Hindu nationalists, the rise of muscular Hinduism between 1980-2005, and in particular, their involvement in government, led to the creation of national projects and spaces directed towards the interrogation of religious minorities inclusive of Christians, that were earnestly pursued by various groups within the Sangh Parivar, particularly by diaspora Hindus based the USA.

The ex-Minister of Divestment, Communication and Information Technology in India, Arun Shourie’s (1994, 2000) critiques of Christian mission lent this project academic respectability. Shourie’s trenchant account of historical and contemporary Christian mission, in particular Catholic mission, is difficult to contest given that education and health were and are used by a variety of Christian denominations, as entry points for Christian conversion. The ‘rice Christian’ and of late the ‘tsunami Christian’ is a reality in India.

While the historical churches in India, in particular the Syrian Orthodox, have been chary of embarking on any aggressive form of Christian expansionism, some post-colonial churches – Catholic and Protestant – certainly have taken seriously the Biblical injunction to proclaim the Word and to ‘make all nations Christian’. While the traditions of mainstream
Christian mission, for the most part, continue to be carried out within the larger framework of respect for religious pluralism and secularism and the constitutional framework of respect for faith communities, the exponential growth of Pentecostal and in particular neo-Pentecostal churches in India over the last two decades has been accompanied by altogether more aggressive projects of Christian mission.

These churches, para-churches, house churches, Christian associations and networks that can be counted in the thousands all over India share a number of characteristics:

- They are independent of the mainstream Christian churches in India.
- In terms of numbers they can vary from a handful of members who belong to a house church to an Assemblies of God mega-church that has tens of thousands of members.
- These churches are involved in catering to niche groups – the urban poor, youth, the new rich.
- They are not accountable to a synod or to a larger authority, and as a result there is little or no oversight on how moneys are spent.
- They receive large amounts of foreign contributions.
- Many are family-based and run.
- While there are differences in style and approach, these churches share certain ‘fundamentals’ – Biblical inerrancy, the need to be ‘born again’, salvation for the elect, etc.
- Many are involved in media ministries including Christian broadcasting.

**Why Chennai?**

I chose Chennai for my study because of a familiarity with the city of my birth but also because the various denominations representa-
tive of Protestant Christianity have had a significant historical presence in the state of Tamilnadu. The Church of South India, the first expression of the ecumenical movement, was established in Madras in 1948. The Pentecostals have been around for decades (Burgess: 2001), so has Christian broadcasting and this city today is considered the fastest growing hub of Christianity in South Asia.

1) According to the 2001 census, 5.2% (3.8 million) of the 62 million people in Tamilnadu are Christian. This figure, along with figures for the whole of India that suggests a decline in Christian numbers between 1991 and 2001 (2.4 to 2.3%) is contested.

2) Southern Tamilnadu was the first mission field in India to be actively wooed by Protestant missionaries starting with the Tranquebar Mission that was established by the Royal Danish Missionaries represented by two Germans Bartolomaus Ziegenbalg and Heinrich Plutschau in July 1706 (Hudson: 2000).

3) In terms of Christian revival, the first recorded outpourings of the Spirit, manifestation of tongues and other gifts was reported in 1860 at a mission in Tirunelveli in Tamilnadu (Hedlund: 2001).

4) It has had a strong presence of Pentecostal churches and conservative forms of Christianity that led to the religions scholar Lionel Caplan (1987) to write the first academic work on Christian fundamentalism in India.

5) Tamilnadu had a strong anti-Brahmin movement and traditions of tolerance that still remain. While North India and Central India have witnessed a rise in anti-Christian feeling during the last two decades, the South has remained relatively free of attacks on Christians. The repeal of the anti-Conversion laws by the government of Tamilnadu promulgated in 2002 and withdrawn in 2005 is an indication of the religious dynamics that continue to favour minority communities unlike in North and West India where the conflict between Christians and Hindus have become a lot sharper.

Christianity in contemporary Chennai
The changing nature of Christianity in India during the last two decades is, to some extent, a reflection of the changing nature of needs and expectations of people living in the context of accentuated forms of economic globalisation. While India remains predominantly agricultural country, economic liberalisation, the discourse of Hindu nationalism, the success of the IT economy and the media revolution have contributed to the strengthening of an urban identity and to the re-creation of the image of a new, self-assured and self-confident nation.

While there is no denying the successes of the Indian economy, its obverse, including the adverse consequences of globalisation, has not made the news to the extent that it should. The death of agriculture has led to migration to already over-crowded cities, Structural Adjustment Policies have led to the gradual withdrawal of government support for rural development, starvation-related deaths are now commonplace, and divides between the rich and poor have become extraordinarily pronounced in cities such as Mumbai and Bangalore.

New migrants to the cities formed the bulk of the congregations of the early Pentecostal churches in Chennai. This trend has continued although it is now complemented by settled congregations catering to the needs of the urban upper and middle classes. Chennai and its suburbs alone have upwards of 2500 churches – consisting of indigenous churches, house churches and a variety of Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches which, according to some observers, makes it the fastest growing hub of Christianity in South Asia.

Numbers can of course be disputed – but the sheer numbers of churches listed in church directories available in Christian bookshops point to their growing presence. Raj & Selvasingh (2004: 10) have observed that, ‘Chennai is privileged to have the highest number of churches of all the cities in South Asia.’ In 1994 there were about 1,400 churches in Chennai…in 1999…1864 churches…small churches (formed) ‘by the influence of the Pentecostals.’ Mega churches include the New Life AOG church in Saidapet, Chennai with its 35,000 members and 10,000 at a sitting services.

The clearest evidence, however, of church
growth in Chennai is the *Chennai Christian Directory* (2000) which lists 3000 churches and parachurch organizations in this city inclusive of the Beulah Church (8 churches), End Time Zion (14 churches), Maranatha Full Gospel Church (27 churches), Moving Jesus Mission (3 churches), Pillar of Fire Mission (6 churches), the Village Evangelism of Indian Mission (5 churches), Indigenous Churches (645), Assemblies of God (120) among very many other churches in Chennai. This directory also lists 46 Bible colleges, 23 Christian media centres, 122 Christian magazines in English and Tamil and 114 church planting missions. There is every reason to believe that there has been a further growth in these sectors of late.

**Bourdieu in Chennai**

In order to make sense of this reality, I employed concepts from the French social theorist Pierre Bourdieu – field, habitus, distinction, symbolic capital – to try and get to grips with this contestation. In a sense it is not a visible, obvious, in your face kind of contestation – but is a much more measured contestation represented in other ways by mainstream accommodations with new forms of worship, the communication of a specific all India Christian identity often by leaders of the new churches, the presence of these new churches in every nook and corner of Chennai – posters, rallies, conventions, coverage in the media, the post-colonial presence of missionaries from the West and the strong presence of Christian broadcasting, both transnational and domestic.

One of the interesting features of the new church is their spatial presence in Chennai, their embrace of the official city and the unintended cities, the rural in the urban, their being part of and catering to a globalising Chennai and Chennaites (Prakash: 2002, Manokaran: 2005). There is a real sense in which Pentecostalism intrinsically is a religion that was made to travel, for it is part of the flows of the global, as at home in a crowded market area as in a gleaming Mall (Dempster et.al: 1999, Cox: 1996).

Mendieta (2001:20), observes that ‘...religion appears as a resource of images, concepts, traditions and practices that can allow individuals and communities to deal with a world that is changing around them,’ in the midst of places and shopping, leisure and recreation, production and consumption, an observation that captures the new church in changing Chennai. The cell church movement in India is an organic expression of church growth in the era of globalisation. Since church planting and the harvesting of souls are fundamental objectives of the new churches, members belonging to tightly knit cell churches are required to facilitate a viral replication of these cells.

A number of these new churches may be called indigenous churches responding to the fulfilment of local needs although as many are influenced by the Health and Wealth Gospel linked to the Faith movement. Stephen Hunt in a perceptive essay on the Health and Wealth Gospel, observes that the success of this model relates to its value-addedness:

‘...Pentecostalism serves to develop attributes, motivations and personalities adapted to the exigencies of the de-regulated global market. ...it has integrated the urban masses into a developing economy through the protestant work ethic and active citizenship...At the same time, the mobile new professionals and the educated in mega-cities carry a work ethic that results from a strict Pentecostal upbringing...The explanation for the success of the Faith movement is that it can adapt itself to such complexities. This makes it a global “winner”’ (Hunt, 2000: 344).

Bourdieu’s analysis of the role played by culture in social domination and the specific concepts he invokes to study the links between ideational and material power can be applied to understanding a variety of societal fields, including that of religion. Bourdieu’s project of *constructivist structuralism* attempted to bridge the differences between the objective and the subjective, between agency and structure, between cultural idealism and historical materialism and was an attempt to theorise the mutually constitutive connectivities between social structures and actors.

Bourdieu, like Weber, Durkheim and Marx,
was of the opinion that religion was a declining institution. While Bourdieu did not value religion as anything more than an aspect of false consciousness and his interest in religion is not as developed as that of his other concerns including art and culture, a number of his key concepts, inclusive of ‘belief’, ‘distinction’, ‘field’ and ‘habitus’ are derived from his readings of Max Weber or based on his observations of the culture of Catholicism in France (Dianteill: 2003).

Bourdieu’s relatively unknown study, *Genesis and Structures of the Religious Field* (1991: 9) is the only work that I have come across in English that is explicitly concerned with the relationship between the religious field, symbolic capital and religious power.

**The cultivation of ‘distinction’**

Bourdieu’s emphasis on the cultural basis for ‘distinction’ seems particularly apt to understanding mediated forms of Christianity in India today. There is a nation-wide platform (televisual) for the mediation of ‘distinctiveness’ – and it is being mobilised to create distinctions between the old and the new, the old church and the new church, new doctrine as opposed to old doctrine, new sources of Biblical authority and the validity of interpretations, new understandings of the qualities of a pastor to the legitimisation of the objectives of Christian ministry and the individual’s relationship with God.

This distinctiveness is not only reflected in the personal grooming and rhetorical styles adopted by evangelists and tele-evangelists but his/her complete symbolic repertoire. Tele-evangelists, such as Benny Hinn and others, in an

Pradip Thomas (below left) discussing his paper with Annabelle Sreberny of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, UK. Photo: George Conklin.
elemental sense have reclaimed a belief in religion as fundamentally about using magical powers to effect healing, restoration and reconciliation. In Weber’s way of thinking, magic was the basis for early forms of religion that depended on a magician’s coercion of the divine for human ends.

The advent of organised religion led to the superseding of magic and the magician and to the establishment of an extensive metaphysics of religion. As Weber (1963: 30) has pointed out, ‘The full development of both a metaphysical rationalisation and a religious ethic requires an independent and professionally trained priesthood, permanently occupied with the cult and with the practical problems involved in the cure of souls.’

However, despite the institutionalisation of organised religion, reliance on magic as the basis for delivery from the chains of the devil has remained a potent sub-text in all the major religions and in the many religious cultures and traditions found throughout the world.

Mainstream Protestant Christianity’s overt rationalisation of its faith, its denial of alternative, popular expressions of healing and its inability to deal with the ‘unexplainable’ – has been exposed as wanting and out of touch, particularly so in the context of the rise of tele-evangelists, who have, by their reliance on magic, contributed to what one might call the ‘re-enchantment’ of Christianity.

One can argue that ‘healing’ is among the most distinctive features shared by the tele-evangelists and neo-Pentecostal preachers and this makes their ministry different from that followed by other ministries. Healing connects to the spirit world, to malevolent forces that play a significant role in the lives of people living in globalised contexts throughout the world. The recognition of evil in the world of the everyday allows for a continuation of belief in the presence of evil – the principalities and powers that are graphically described in the language of the Bible.

It also connects to the belief in the supernatural that remains a residual element in the lives of Hindu converts to Christianity. The power to heal is a powerful draw and especially so in a globalised world where access to healing is mediated by professionals. In the Indian context, there has always been space for faith-based healing and healers although Christian evangelists are responsible for making faith healing a public spectacle.

In Bourdieu’s way of thinking, these elements of distinctiveness are implicated in a politics of power that works through a ‘misrecognition of (their) material interests’ (Swartz, 1996: 3). Tele-evangelists such as Benny Hinn, Kenneth Copeland, Sarah and Peter Hughes, Sam Chelladurai, Brother Dhinakaran and others, communicate themselves as persons chosen by God to do God’s command, often through a highly personalised repertoire of unique, oftentimes idiosyncratic, symbolic capital that is communicated via expressive styles and methods of audience identification.

This disconnect is powerfully visible in the living histories of numerous evangelists and tele-evangelists in India today whose self-interest has been made invisible by many layers of mediated pietistic purposefulness. Television has been used to cultivate ‘disinterestedness’ as for instance Benny Hinn’s frequent confirmations that God is the healer not him or the more disingenuous advertisements on God TV fronted by Indians who claim that the funds are required solely for the greater glory of God’s ministry and plan for India.

This misrecognition is reflected in what is a common sub-text shared among many Christians and people of other faith in India that Benny Hinn, and other tele-evangelists, whatever their shortcomings, are God’s representatives on earth. They have been blessed. There is a misrecognition of the real connections between the other-worldly metaphysics of these preachers and the very real-world materiality of their ministries.

What Weber and Bourdieu have tried to stress are the correspondences between the exercise of ritual power as an exercise of material power.

**Christian television in Chennai**

There are five avenues for Christian television in India. 1) The occasional space on the national broadcaster *Doordarshan* for Christian programmes; 2) Transnational satellite channels...
including GOD TV, CBN, TBN, MiracleNet, and Daystar TV that are available on cable; 3) Christian programming on a variety of secular cable channels available throughout the country on Raj TV, Zee TV, Vijay TV and numerous other channels; 4) stand alone indigenous Christian cable channels such as Blessing TV, Angel TV, Shalom TV, Jeevan TV and others; 5) Web-based telecasting for instance Jesus Calls’ ‘Num.TV’. Webcasting remains an evolving reality in India with limited audiences.

Status of Christian TV in Chennai

During the research that I conducted in Chennai, it became clear that among English speaking middle classes, GOD TV and Daystar TV, were the two transnational Christian channels that had audiences in Chennai. However, these audiences remain small. While GODTV maintains that it is available in 216 major and minor cities in India – from Aizawl, Mizoram in North East India to Trivandrum, Kerala which is located close to the tip of South India, with a total audience reach of 21 million, the Nielsen-owned audience rating company TAM Media Research India’s February 2006 viewing figures for GOD TV reveal that it has a total reach of 3.9 (4.6%) million homes out of an all India wide market of 85 million cabled homes.

GOD TV’s audience figures for Chennai of 150,000 viewers (3.53%) out of an estimated 4.2 million cabled homes is not exactly flattering. Daystar’s TV Chennai figures of 270,000 viewers is only marginally better. A third transnational channel, MiracleTV, whose offices are situated in Chennai, fared even worse on TAM ratings. While they have no presence in Chennai, their all-India reach for the said period was 600,000 (0.7%).

A number of Christians involved in this industry were of the opinion that for the purpose of ‘reaching the unreached’, a stand-alone Christian channel’s chances of recruiting audiences was severely limited by the fact that 1) there literally are hundreds of channels vying for audiences; 2) in a primarily ‘Hindu’ country, a channel dedicated to furthering the project of Global Christianity had limitations; and 3) English-only programmes have restricted reach.

It is for this reason that many independent Christian producers such as Good News TV and Jesus Calls produce Indian-language based programmes for premier local channels. While Jesus Calls programmes are available on GOD TV in English five days a week, the bulk of their programmes are on a host of local channels in local languages, Sahara One TV, Star Vijay, Win TV, Raj TV, Surya TV, Asianet TV, Namma Cable, Alpha Bengali, ETV-2 and others. This makes sense for Raj TV’s February 2006 viewership figures for Chennai was 3.6 million (85.3%) of the cable audience in Chennai.

GOD TV in Chennai

GOD TV was established by a UK-based South African couple, Rory and Wendy Alec in 1995. In 2004, they moved their broadcast office to Israel and today it is a 24-hour, global channel available throughout the world. As their tag line states, ‘broadcasting from the Holy Land to the ends of the earth’. With seven separate feeds, carried on 12 satellites, plus a further three non-contracted satellites, the GOD Channel is currently broadcast around the world to 275 million people in more than 200 nations and territories. As the founders exult in Armageddon-speak (2005: 20), ‘The darkness across the heavenlies of Britain and Europe had been pierced and the first bastion taken – the years 1995-2005 were to be a death blow to the devil’s hold on the media, opening up the airways for the Gospel and sending the forces of darkness reeling.’

Endorsed by Pat Robertson, Joyce Meyer, Crefilo Dollar, Dhinakaran, Benny Hinn and other ‘healing’ and ‘prosperity’ evangelists, the GOD Channel is a slick, Christian channel that features 21 ministries of recognised tele-evangelists including Kenneth & Gloria Copeland, Jesse Duplantis, Billy Graham, Benny Hinn and others, praise and worship programmes that include Christian rock and gospel (Dream On TV) and the Australia-based Hillsong TV, magazine programmes, news and current affairs programmes, counselling programmes, celebrity interviews, review of the arts and programmes for children including the Bed Bug Bible Gang and the Story Keepers.
There are a handful of Indian evangelists on the God Channel including Sam Chelladurai (Apostolic Fellowship Tabernacle, Chennai), Paul Thangiah (Full Gospel Assembly of God, Bangalore) and Dhinakaran (Jesus Calls, Chennai). But the majority are US-based. Apart from these Indian evangelists the only Indian presence is the regular evening solicitation for funds presented by Indians. As one Regional Director explains:

‘As more channels crop up and crowd the limited bandwidth in India, cable operators have hiked prices and are unwilling to negotiate...Our needs are great....thank you for your assurance of partnering us on a monthly basis.’

Further research opportunities
This article highlights fragments from a study of Christian Fundamentalism and the Media in Chennai currently being written up by the author. The Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal turn in India offers a plethora of research opportunities. There is a need to understand India as a conduit for global-local flows of Pentecostalism and neo-Pentecostalism, the presence of new Christianity in globalising India, the Christian religious commodity circuit in India, meaning-making and the consumption of mediated religious products, the political economy of Christian media production, the contested nature of Christianity in India, and last but not least, the politics of Christian separatism.

Equally importantly and against the tendency for churches to establish their own broadcasting outlets, there is an urgent need to establish the presence of inter-faith cable and satellite television in India.

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References
Columbusday, hate speech, and American Indians

Tink Tinker

Every year one to two thousand people line the streets in Denver, USA, to protest the annual columbusday parade, to oppose what is a blatant celebration of five hundred years of genocide in the Americas. A federal holiday only since 1971, columbusday seems to have become a quintessential U.S. holiday, yet one that commemorates a murderer, slave-trader and thief as the all-American hero.

The so-called parade on this day amounts to no more than a ‘convoy of conquest’, a parade of semis with empty flatbeds, empty limos, and motorcycle gangs, rolling through a gauntlet of protesters who far outnumber the paraders and make up the only audience for this unashamed racist outburst. The real shame, of course, is not the pathetic attempt at a parade. There are ugly racists everywhere, and the USA’s concept of civil liberties reserves to all Americans the right to racist speech.

The shame is that the body politic and the press have failed to raise their own voice of protest. For nearly two decades a huge alliance of Denver metro area citizens (some 80 different local organizations) has pressed a public education about the murderous and on-going legacy of Columbus. Yet neither the city nor the state has seen fit to step in with their own moral condemnation of this holiday to genocide.

The press has generally declined to engage the issues in any meaningful dialogue, preferring the standard, defensive knee-jerk response, rooted in the denial of any possible wrongdoing on the part of the European invaders of these continents. Rather, the press uses the holiday excuse to solicit an extra heavy dose of full-page advertisements for ‘columbus day’ sales all over the metro area. Genocide, the perfect excuse to indulge the glutinous religion of american consumerism!

The real shame is not that columbusday parades are acts of hate speech. The shame is that columbusday gives voice to state sanctioned hate speech.

A modern religious fundamentalism

For a number of years there was one regular banner that spanned the width of the street. It seemed to speak for the parade organizers just as it decidedly named one of the reasons for protest. ‘He [Columbus] brought Christ to the Americas!’ The pious colonialist sentiment shrieked its message in four-feet high letters. It was a pernicious reminder to all Indian people present that our conquest and the loss of our lands, our economies, our self-sufficiency, and our way of life was as much a religious conquest as it was military and political.

The banner, like the columbusday holiday itself, was both a trope to the larger public sentiment of the settler population of the U.S. and a convenient lie steeped in denial. It presses a modern religious fundamentalism that continues to see its religion (and its socio-political systems) as superior to, for instance, the religious traditions of the peoples that were native to this continent—all of which are consigned to the euro-western tropic categories of animism, primitive polytheism, pagan idolatry, and the diabolic.

Of course, calling this holiday an exercise in religious fundamentalism begs the question as to what we might consider to be fundamentalism. Presumably no one any longer confines fundamentalism to that late 19th century american christian movement that invented the name. They created the name as a positive self-affirmation of their strict adherence to a narrow set of doctrines.

The shift to a new meaning is especially
apparent, however, since September 2001 when fundamentalism came to be an adjective (or abjective) describing Islam as a negative trope and slogan, coined by U.S. political speakers and gleefully propagated by the corporate U.S. press — with little regard for the breadth and complexity of Islam in actuality.

Given this contemporary usage, we might define fundamentalism this way: the reckless sense that a more or less narrowly defined faith or belief system is both the only salvific way of being in the world; and that it needs to be imposed on others at whatever cost, perhaps even by force of one kind or another. This seems, at least, to capture the abjective sense intended by those who use the trope of ‘Islamic fundamentalism’.

Relationships of power
Where does fundamentalism in this sense come from? To be clear about issues of religious fundamentalism today, we need to be clear about relationships of power in the world — around us and in which we are embroiled. Fundamentalism can arise both as a response to dominance and as an act of dominance itself. That narrow slice of Islam that engages in violent resistance in central and west Asia is an example of a fundamentalism, then, that has arisen as an act of resistance to amer-european christian political dominance in the world.

Whatever one’s ultimate judgment might be of the Other, if we are serious about understanding — rather than merely quashing — those who oppose us, then we need to see the reactive response of the Other in its own interpretive context. Too often, we see a response to important or global dissent that is merely a reaction based on self-interest. It would be helpful today to begin our understanding of contemporary religious fundamentalism as a perceived self-defense against what non-U.S. peoples around the world may be identifying as the reigning fundamentalism of the U.S. dominated world: namely, the ideological impositions of the IMF, World Bank, Security Council Permanent Membership, and the radical eurochristian individualism that lies at the base of these ideologies.

The American Indian experience of fundamentalism, on the other hand, has been the imposition of dominance by an invading colonial power. From an American Indian perspective, fundamentalism began with the colonialisit urge of European expansionism and the colonial need to impose structures of thought, patterns of behavior, and a certain cultural unification on the colonized other. It came with the European invasion in the form of the imposition of whole ways of thinking about the world, along with the religious teachings and practices to go with those ways of thinking. While this fundamentalist imposition of culture, values and language was quite apart from the theft of the land, it served as a colonial device to rationalize and self-validate conquest, theft, and genocide.

Part of the strategy invariably involved sending missionaries from the metropole to the colonized in order to win their adhesion to the colonizer’s cultural and religious beliefs. While the missionaries themselves no doubt had concern of some kind for the Natives, the missionized, their efforts served especially to increase the effectiveness of the colonizer governmental structures of control by subtly shifting the cultural values of the colonized toward those of the colonizer.

That cultural practice is inherent in colonizer religious beliefs is already apparent in the missionaries insistence (John Eliot in 17th century puritan New England; the Franciscan Gerónimo de Mendietta in Mexico half a century earlier) that Indians must learn European culture before they can fully convert to the gospel and affirm the doctrines of the church. In the vast majority of cases, these colonial missionaries served the purposes of colonial government more overtly and purposefully. Bishop Henry Benjamin Whipple and Jesuit Pierre-Jean DeSmet, to suggest just two examples, served as U.S. government officials in negotiations with the same Native peoples whose trust they were purported to have won as missionaries. More pernicious was the insistence, using fear in a variety of ways, that any Native community was condemned by a loving god unless they adopted and learned to reflect back the colonizer’s religious traditions.

Thus aboriginal communities in the
Americas experienced religious fundamentalism from the very first preaching of the gospel in their midst. In puritan ‘New England’ it began in 1646 with John Eliot or on Cape Cod with Thomas Mayhew, and concurrently with the Massachusetts General Council passing a law that made it illegal for any Indian to mock the missionary. In the Roman Catholic version in California, the 18th century Franciscan missionary Junípero Serra (continuing the 16th century efforts his Franciscan ancestor Gerónimo de Mendieta honed among Indians in Mexico) used the local Spanish military detachment to hunt down any Indian person who, rethinking his or her conversion to Christianity, tried to leave the walled mission compound in order to rejoin their communities and families.

By the 1880s this Christian fundamentalism had captured the hearts of liberal republican politicians, who were often also churchmen or were following the advice of churchmen like Bishop Henry Benjamin Whipple. These politicians called explicitly for the imposition of Christian conversion and a concomitant conversion to euro-american culture.

Devastated communities

While the intent of the missionizing process was to replace Indian cultures with their own European culture, missionization was devastating to the community structures of every Indian nation. For example, the very first White euro-missionaries who entered an Indian community with an idea to convert members of that community to their church functioned explicitly to split that community and to destroy the indigenous culture and value system that they had encountered.

The community had been a coherent and integrant whole, intricately bound together in complex structures of family, clan, village, sodal and modal organizations. People awoke each morning with a clear sense of who they were and what needed to be accomplished that day. If there were a ceremony, it would be a tribal ceremony in which all were involved as participants. Suddenly, with the appearance of the powerful White colonial official (and the missionary was always a colonial representa-tive), people are faced with a choice as to whether to participate with the community for the good (salvation) of the whole, or to make an individual decision for personal salvation. Indeed, the European ideal of individualism was the first colonial imposition in the European colonial project in every corner of the colonized earth.

Since our spiritual life was inherently community based, every major ceremony called for the involvement of the whole community. In my tribe, key leaders from virtually all 24 clans had to be present in order for a major ceremony to be completed in a healthy fashion. There was never a question as to which ceremony or which church one would attend on a given day. Every ceremony was a community event that commanded the attention of every person in the community. The first euro-western missionary to venture into an Indian community with his colonial proclamation of a better gospel and a new hegemony succeeded first of all in splitting the community irrevocably. Suddenly, with the first convert, every member of the community was faced with a new choice: to participate with the community or to honor a perception of a greater power (backed by the U.S. Cavalry) represented by the colonizer’s god.

The columbusday banner recalls the presence of missionaries in every conquest of the Americas and the imposition of a new religious conviction that destroyed or attempted to destroy the peopleness of every Indian nation, that is, proactively to destroy that nation’s community-ness by replacing the communitarian structures and value system with radical euro-western individualism. After several hundred years of missionary preaching of the gospel in Indian communities of north America, the net result has been the multiplication of denominational choices and the greater division of community; the destruction of our own religious traditions; the end of too many grand ceremonies that require the participation of different personalities from a variety of different clans; the destruction of communitarianism in favor of a new radical individualism; the devaluation and replacement of Indian values with those propagated by the missionaries and deeply reflective of their european culture.
Colonial entanglement
This sense of fundamentalism — the religious attachment to the superiority and normativity of European culture (and its religion) and the concomitant privileging of Whiteness — has been historically always in play in the colonialist interaction between American Indians and the euro-colonizer, just as it was inherent in the colonialist project of *mission civilisatrice* in all 19th century European colonialism. In any context where there is a political imbalance between groups (societies, genders, classes), when a socially constructed dominant group imagines itself normative or superior and supposes its prerogative to teach, mentor, manipulate, coach, subdue, or enslave the dominated other falls into this pattern of colonial entanglement.

In the context of the modern or postmodern world, then all missionary work dedicated to a mission of conversion is necessarily imperialis-tic and triumphalist and fits into a pattern of colonial conquest. As a result, it is always a dangerous and inherently destructive enterprise. The biblical notion of mission, it would seem, rooted as it was in a survival modality in worlds of Judaism and Roman Empire that threatened to destroy early Christianity, is one that has been terribly warped by the social fabric of colonialism in the modern world.

In today's world, fundamentalism continues to have its political and economic analogies which are not entirely non-religious, depending on how broadly analytical one's definition of religion dares to be. Does a ‘god’ have to be named — even in atheistic religions like Buddhism or in indigenous cultures for whom the word god equally fails to function in any useful way except as a Christian missionary device? Or can the god be merely presumed and unnamed as such, as in the globalization of capital?  

Otherwise useful words such as freedom and democracy have become powerful religious tropes — along with the blatant political positioning of the language of free trade and capitalism — as political rhetoric in the U.S. government's and U.S. press’ attempts to justify the invasion of other countries and the killing of innocent civilians in those countries. While these tropes voice a clear political agenda, they presume to voice a normative and universal value that is to be imposed on all others in the world of U.S. dominance. World domination. As such then, the U.S. imposition on Iraq of ‘modern’ euro-western statist democracy, with its attendant notions of freedom of religion, is a distinct type of religious fundamentalism, as are its economic doctrinal counterparts: capitalism, privatization, and the globalization of capital.

This mode of fundamentalism as dominance continues to be imposed globally in the economic and governance policies promulgated by the priestly institutions of globalization: the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The banner of Christ, carried so proudly in the Columbus Day parade as a remembrance of triumphal glories past, has been replaced, by a new gospel and a new fundamentalism, rooted in the same euro-western culture as the old gospel, but to which Christianity has become merely the choir.

And American Indian peoples in the U.S. continue to be today the poorest by far of all ethnic communities on the continent by all social indicators. The Columbian legacy and the genocide it spawned is long-lived indeed. That it is now celebrated as a holiday by a modern liberal democratic state can only be seen as an act to further disavow the abjected aboriginal owners of the land.

Note

1 As one National Public Radio commentator put it the day after 9-11-2001, the ‘Twin Towers’ of the World Trade Center marked the ‘uprights of the world’s largest dollar sign.’

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Religion, identity and dialogue

Glory E. Dharmaraj

I am the boy with his hands raised over his head
in Warsaw

I am the soldier whose rifle is trained on the boy with his hands raised over his head
in Warsaw

I am the woman with lowered gaze who fears the soldier whose rifle is trained on the boy with his hands raised over his head
in Warsaw

I am the man in the overcoat who loves the woman with lowered gaze who fears the soldier whose rifle is trained on the boy with his hands raised over his head
in Warsaw

I am the stranger who photographs the man in the overcoat who loves the woman with lowered gaze who fears the soldier whose rifle is trained on the boy with his hands raised over his head
in Warsaw

The crowd, of which I am each part,

moves on beneath my window, for I am the crone too
who shakes her sheets over every street in the world
muttering
What’s this? What’s this?

‘The House that Fear Built: Warsaw, 1943’

This seemingly simple poem by Jane Flanders, with its incremental pair of witnessing eyes, captures for the modern reader a cluster of multi-layered, multi-perspective, and inter-locked realities, seen through a panoptic vision. This poem is also a visual mnemonic grid for the historical burden laid on a reader, in a given time in history. It is a photograph in words etched in memory, in an age where photo opportunities often replace points of view, with pictures dominating words because they sell and are even cheap to produce (Fore, 2001: 13).

However, a multi-perspective, word-picture of an innocent victim or a scapegoat is a mnemonic prism, through which a witness can see how shared lines of visions as well as differing lines of visions constitute multiple realities.

Attendant, also, are questions for communications in general, and Christian communication, in particular. If you see many sides, what do you do? If you see only two sides, what do you do?

The German poet, Rainer Maria Rilke, seems to posit another angle. That is ‘Living the questions.’

To name an enemy has not been easy, as it has been evident in the U.S. communication context. The phrase, ‘War on Terror’, used for some time, does not any longer make a distinction between the method and the user of the method. Is the name of the enemy terror? Terror is a method used by an enemy, and not the enemy itself. It is rather ‘an amorphous idea of intimidation rather than a specific, belligerent nation or a hostile people’ (Safire, 2006: 9).

Some thinkers posit the current times as transition period. That is, we are moving away from a traditional concept of a world with
individual enemies for individual countries’ to that of ‘multifaceted enemies for all’. It is incumbent on communication to catch this sight of a larger canvass of the real ‘multifacetedness’ of the enemies, identify them, and confront the hydra-headed monster, while demolishing an ongoing ‘construction’ of enemies who do not exist at all. Totalizing the enemy has to be avoided at all costs.

Seeing each other into a composite vision of realities

Issues and struggles under analysis, namely, religion and identity, are fluid notions, caught up in the rigidity in their representations, while the solutions need to be pragmatic with short-term and long-term goals.

Interconnected realities of our times demand interconnected, intercultural, integrated visions. Nelle Morton popularized the notion of women ‘hearing each other into speech’. It is time for all of us, not only to hear each other into speech, but also to see each other into a composite vision. In other words, interconnectedness of stories is a key need in communication as well as mission theology.

For the church in the United States, simultaneously, I long for a theology of interstices: a theology that seeks to discover God’s presence through the experiences of those who live in the cracks or narrow spaces of church and society, and build bridges between and among them.

A theology of interstices would lift up the voices and experiences of persons who are struggling for life, as members of marginalized groups, without interconnectedness between their realities reflected in a bridge-building theology.

Communication, whose core is interconnectedness, and theology, whose core is connecting across the interstices in God’s presence, can explore the invisible threads of systemic and deep-rooted causes. For example, is there a connection between violence in the bedroom and the violence against women in armed conflict and militarization? Are there connections between deep-rooted issues such as unequal distribution of resources, structural marginalization of peoples, and lack of equal access to political power? Isolated representations of these, without exploring the deeper connections among these continue to create a ‘culture of violence’, here and worldwide.

On March 30, 2006, I coordinated a media monitoring of peace across the country for the United Methodist Women. The media monitoring for images of peace was designed on the model of global media monitoring of the images and representation of women in media, sponsored by the World Association for Christian Communication.

In the content analysis, among many others, I asked questions such as:

- How is the story of peace and conflict treated?
- How does violence occur?
- What is the conflict about?
- Why does it happen?
- How are race, class, gender, sexual orientation or other forms of exclusion a factor in the conflict?
- How are economic and/or religious interests a factor in the conflict?
- Who is being violent? Who is the victim?
- How are the aggressor and the victim presented?
- What is the role of women in the conflict?
- What is their role in peace efforts?

I distributed 128 monitoring forms to monitor the first page or the lead page of newspapers across the country. I received 76 completed responses, with a total number of 76 different newspapers monitored.

Preliminary analysis shows that 36% of the news stories dealt with violence in the Middle East, 5% racial and religious intolerance, 7% the rising tide of protest against immigration laws, 2% crimes, 2% drug-related offence and so on.

News stories of the War in Iraq, international debate on Iranian enrichment of uranium, local disputes, fights and killings dominated the reports. One of the participants wrote, ‘Will we ever have peace anywhere in the world?’ Another said the ‘extreme horror’ of the world was ‘sickening’.

When women appeared in stories involving violent conflict, they most often were portrayed as innocent victims, passive observers hoping
for a better future, or the solace of husbands and children besieged by turmoil. Several women asserted that regardless of news portrayals, women’s active peace work is ‘gradually increasing worldwide.’

Further, during times of crises, such as armed conflict, natural calamities, and terrorist acts, there is a likelihood of ‘co-option’ of communities into racial, ethnic, religious, or ideological identities. A key challenge, in particular, for most of the women in the U.S. context is balancing security and freedom, national defense and international relations, local community and world community.

While living out these contradiction-laden, often polarized claims, the concept of ‘global sisterhood’ is often challenged. When crises such as war, terrorist acts, and natural calamities occur, women often deny their identities, but are co-opted along lines of identity drawn by religion, race, class, and ethnicity.

In short, they are caught in the oppressive discourses and dominant practices, with their contradictions and complexities, and are unable or unwilling to transcend beyond their narrow selfhood.

The role of communication, in this context, is to recover the muted voices, stifled differences, and multiple identities. I would like to suggest some strategies.

Strategy 1: Empowering the margins through communication

Early this year, Mark Fitzgerald talked about an investigatory committee of the Washington Post staffers finding a management emphasis on celebrity reporters. Fitzgerald found a paucity of non-minorities among the ‘celebrity reporters’. Nearly half of the newsroom jobs filled between 2003 and October 2005 were never posted. He went on to say, ‘Of these unposted jobs, 74% went to non-minorities’. The result has been, in his words, ‘an exodus’ of black, Asian, and Latino journalists (Fitzgerald: 2006).

In the U.S. media monitoring done in 2005, women were more visible in news media, but their perspectives were not. Gender identity is still a complex one in relation to media. While identity as a concept is contradiction-ridden, racial profiling has been used in order to address the issue of terrorist acts.

Strategy 2: Creating safe spaces for Civil Rights

As a response to the tragedy of September 11, the Patriot Act (HR 3162) was signed into law ‘to deter and punish terrorist acts in the U.S. and around the world, and to enhance law enforcement investigatory tools.’ While those who commit terrorist acts must be brought to justice, the balance between security and civil rights has been at stake because of the arrest of innocent immigrants.

In ‘Little Pakistan’ in Brooklyn, New York, out of more than 120,000 Pakistanis, 15,000 fled to Canada, Europe, and Pakistan, due to massive arrests in that area. According to a story in the Washington Post (May 29, 2003), federal agents stopped and detained hundreds of Pakistanis in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks. The Department of Homeland Security also required that every male Pakistani visa holder age sixteen and above register with the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Some 13,000 of those who voluntarily registered were placed into deportation proceedings because of irregularities in their immigration status. Such irregularities would have required basic legal corrections before September 11. While the Special Registration has ended, some people are still under threat of deportation. Detainees have suffered 24 hours of illumination of cells, lack of proper medical care, racial slurs by guards.

In many instances, neither the detainees nor their families have been notified of their status or their rights. People who come under racial profiling in this are South Asian men, especially Arab and Muslim men. Most of them are guilty until proven innocent.

But a woman responded to Patriot Act by co-founding a committee on the Bill of Rights Defense Committee. Nancy Talanian came up with the idea of establishing ‘civil liberty zones’ in communities across the United States. A national grassroots movement to protect innocent people who come under racial profiling was started by a woman.

As of August 2, 2006, grassroots opposition
to the USA Patriot Act, there are 408 resolutions, including 8 states, 400 cities, and counties, encompassing 85 million people. Alaska, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Maine, Montana and Vermont have come up with statewide resolutions. Faith-based grassroots men and women have engaged in creating these safe spaces, creating a climate for communication for civil rights (Women’s Division: 2006).

**Strategy 3: Communication as enabler of ‘inter-regionality’**

Communication is not just sending and receiving messages and images. As Mikhail Bakhtin, a Russian formalist, would say, communication is taking into consideration the potential response of the receiver and intended audience.

Recently Riad Jarjour, President of the Middle East Regional Association of WACC reported:

‘One can observe the growth of different types of religious “fundamentalisms” in the Middle East, many of which promote use of violence to address grievances, something which no religion justifies. This violence causes Western nations to have an adverse reaction to Islam, particularly to Muslims who live in Western countries. Moreover, this type of fundamentalism gives rise to and promotes an ever-increasing and militant interpretation of both Western and Eastern Christian fundamentalism. In this context, the American/Western war against terrorism has not succeeded in curbing this latter type of fundamentalism. On the contrary, this war appears as if it is responding to terrorism by counter-terrorism tactics, both of which are unacceptable and must be condemned’ (Jarjour: 2006).

For communication in general, Christian communication, in particular, the notion of inter-regionality, or inter-regional sensitivity is vital for the promotion of peace and curbing religious fundamentalisms.

Recently in its Board meeting, the Women’s Division of the General Board of Global Ministries came up with a resolution regarding peace in the Middle East:

‘That we seek alternate perspectives on the Middle East from those disseminated by mainstream media, especially during times of war, attacks, and conflicts.
That we critically evaluate justifications given by political, religious, and other sectarian entities to attack or declare war on other parties.
That we contact media outlets when reports of conflict do not include all relevant parties, including civilians.
That we engage our elected legislative representatives at the national level in ongoing discussion of the impact of conflict on women, children, and youth of the Middle East.’

**Strategy 4: Education on fear-based vision versus shalom based vision**

Moving the faith community from a fear-based vision of security to the vision of shalom proclaimed in the Bible is an ongoing task. Bryan Massingdale, a Franciscan theologian, presents the competing claims of two visions. He says:

‘The first is rooted in a world of fear, seeks security in military power directed to the end of defending economic privilege for a few. The other, rooted in a world view of blessing, sees security lying in the effort of assuring that the blessings of creation are enjoyed by all. How do we respond to these visions?’

Lifting up the alternative vision of shalom in the Bible and asking the difficult question why we cannot think about peace and work for just peace is one side of the story of making a difference. The other side is helping handle grief on the part of the victims and grieving communities. Jesus weeping over Jerusalem is only a partial picture. Jesus simultaneously asking why Jerusalem cannot think about things that make for peace constitutes the whole. The pastoral and the activist can be the twin strategies of the faith communities. They should not be polarized.

It is imperative to lift up the liberating passages from the Bible in order to move the faith community on the road to peace, at the grass-
roots level, since there are members at the pew who may not be moved by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but who are faithful to the gospel and the prophetic call to peace and justice in the Scripture.

Strategy 5: Salvation for the perpetrator and the victim
There are deep and systemic evils. As we recall, Nelson Mandela sought freedom for himself and his people first. Then, in what he termed the ‘long and lonely years’, he evolved a more integrated approach. Mandela said:

‘My hunger for the freedom of my own people became a hunger for all people. I know as well as I knew anything that the oppressor must be liberated just as surely as the oppressed. A man who takes away (another) man’s freedom is a prisoner of hatred, and is locked behind the bars of prejudice...Both are robbed of their humanity. When I walked out of prison, that was my mission: to liberate the oppressed and the oppressor both.’

A similar vision is lifted up by Mitri Raheb, a Lutheran minister in Bethlehem. He is a tireless prophet of hope in the Middle East and spells out the dynamics of hope in terms of neighborliness. He says:

‘What is the benefit if Israel wins the moral and financial support of the American Jewish community and the Christian right, yet loses its Palestinian Neighbors? What is the benefit if the Palestinians win the sympathy and support of most of the Arab and Islamic countries and lose their Israeli neighbors?’

Kosuke Koyama, a theologian, would have summarized it in just one phrase, ‘neighborology’. Christian communities have produced much by way of theology. But what is needed, according to Koyama, is ‘neighborology’. Easily understandable resources on interfaith in the hands of the faith community is of great help in times such as these.

Seeking to be faithful Christians, in a religiously plural U.S. context, calls for interdependency on each other’s religious tradition, in order to address justice issues and live a peaceful co-existence.

If you see two sides, create a third. If you see many sides, form a circle. If you see many circles, begin to dance.

References

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Pentecostalism, media and cultural discourse in Africa

Ogbuf Kalu

Media use is the most important explanation for the growth of charismatic and Pentecostal movements in contemporary Africa. It gave new value to the missionary strategy and radically reshaped the religious landscape in a way that ‘charismatized’ the mainline churches. However, for reasons that the author begins by explaining, the following article reflects on Pentecostal cultural discourses rather than exploring how they use media. Cultural policy is the backdrop or foil to their media use.

Cephas Omenyo’s study, Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism documents that trend in Ghana. A recent documentary by James Ault on African Christianity, shot in Ghana and Zimbabwe, illustrates how the liturgy, doctrine, ethics and other practices in the mainline churches resonate with Pentecostal spirituality, liturgy and doctrines. Two explanations argue that the missionary-founded churches are engaged in encapsulating strategy; that they retain their members by enlarging the charismatic space for the youth and women.

The second explanation is that Africans have always been attracted to the charismatic and pneumatic elements of the gospel because these resonate with the goals and practices of traditional religion. This buttresses the argument that African Christianity is an extension of African traditional religion. People come to the charismatic churches to seek answers to questions raised within the interiors of the primordial worldviews. The implication is that Pentecostalism is growing because of its cultural policy and attitude to indigenous worldview and culture.

Pentecostalism in African cultural discourse

Many African countries have dug deeply into traditional values for cultural symbols of unity. In the rainbow ideology of South Africa, the television features a stimulating jingle, Simunye-e-e-e, we are one! In Ghana, Sankofa, a Twi word, is one of the symbols used to promote unity based on the recovery of Ghanaian cultural heritage. Each of the symbols affirms a salient value that should be cultivated. Sankofa is the bird that turns its head to look backwards in the direction from where it came because a person who is not conscious about where a journey started may not know where he/she is going. This symbol urges people to ‘go back and take it’, or look back and reclaim their cultural heritage.

Pentecostal cultural discourse must be set within the other discourses canvassed as scholars explain the recent explosion of Pentecostalism in Africa. The historical discourse takes a long view to show how the movement’s historical origins hold clues to its contemporary salience. It fits the movement into the trail of ferment in African Christianity and the African’s attraction towards the charismatic or pneumatic tradition within the gospel.

Some scholars have deployed the instrumentalist explanation that runs into various grooves. It images the growth of the movement as an aspect of a religious response to contemporary cultural challenges and Africa’s struggle to respond to the economic, social and cultural forces of modernity and globalization. It is a functionalist analysis that examines the response of the movement to a cultural environment embattled by external global cultural forces. Hot Christianity becomes a solace from the harsh realities of the collapse of economies, marauding poverty, softness of the state, failed leadership and legitimacy crises.

The tendency is to start the analysis from the external cultural contexts and show how Africa responds to the forces of externality: modernity and globalization. It ignores the
indigenous factor and limits the interpretation of Pentecostalism to its salience in ‘globalizing economies’.

An awkward strand applies a conspiratorial theory to expose the covert activities of the American security forces in alliance with the American Right-Wing fundamentalists. 2

Undeniably, there must be a religious response to the socio-economic and political forces in contemporary Africa. Indeed, every religious form addresses the issues of the day or risk losing relevance.

It is however unclear why certain choices are made in a congested religious market place. The religious discourse images Pentecostalism in Africa as primarily a religious movement. To ignore this will be like watching a dancing madman without hearing the music playing in his ears. Africans say that the madman may look stupid but he is hearing the spirits blowing sweet tunes with the conch. 3 They also say that how a spectator describes a masquerade procession depends on where the person stands.

These scholars have interpreted the movement from various stances, methodologies, biases, vested interests and ideologies. The movement should benefit from the interdisciplinary resources because it will be reductionist to fasten onto any mono-causal mast.

Exploring the cultural discourse

The burden here is to explore a different discourse, the cultural discourse and to start from a different location. The cultural discourse argues that Pentecostalism has grown because of its cultural fit into indigenous worldviews and its response to the questions that are raised within the interior of the worldviews. It asserts that the indigenous worldview still dominates contemporary African experience and shapes the character of African Pentecostalism.

It interprets African Pentecostalism as the ‘setting to work’ of the pneumatic semen of the gospel in Africa, at once showing how Africans appropriated the gospel message, how they responded to the presence of the kingdom in their midst, and how its power transformed their worldviews. Exercising a measure of agency, African Christians absorbed new resources generated internally and externally in reshaping their histories. The face of Christianity acquired a different character in the encounter because it was now expressed in the idiom of the African world. This means that the conversation partners in shaping Pentecostal ideology and praxis are the indigenous religions and cultures, the experiences of individuals and communities of contemporary cultures and competing religious forms in urban and rural contexts, biblical resources and a certain ecclesiastical tradition or the pneumatically-driven Pentecostal image of the church. These are not discreet categories but shape the being, saying and doing of the Pentecostal movement. They are useful sources for revisiting the debate on Pentecostal response to African cultural heritage.

Recently, the social scientific method in doing the cultural analysis and this has become quite a significant voice in constructing the image of Pentecostalism. This voice virtually drowns the theological voice because it is ‘scientific’ and is embellished with prolific jargons. It is built on certain assumptions, worldview and methodology that jar with theological method. According to Michael Barnes, the history of secular social science theorizing has put theologians on guard. Some treat the social sciences less as a servant than as an animal to be domesticated, like goats worth milking once in awhile but to be tethered outside the tent where their gamey odor will not disturb the finer air of theology. 4

Yet some models of cultural analysis share the same assumptions in theological anthropology. From both perspectives, we must be attentive to three dimensions in the conversation between religious traditions and cultures: how the religious traditions challenge cultures by posturing in a prophetic stance, how religious traditions are challenged by cultures and how religious traditions could engage the resources of cultures in pursuit of their own religious mission.

Equally important is a revisit of political economy under the colonial canopy. To profile the terrain, we deploy the theory of three publics that modifies P.P. Ekeh’s concept of two publics. He argued that colonialism created two publics, that the African exploited the niches
between the traditional and civic (modern) publics in negotiating citizenship and responsibility.\textsuperscript{5} It is more complex. There are three interpenetrating “publics” in the African political and moral universe: the indigenous culture or public, an emergent culture/public created in the encounter between the indigenous and the western cultures and the external western public that is maintained by multinational corporations, international organizations and other agents of globalization who operate with a western mindset. Foreign education and global forces keep the character of the western public in Africa’s present. One could hear the white complaints about their hosts’ different work ethics, priorities and lifestyle, indicating that this public is peripheral but influential because of the amount of resources that it controls. The most powerful political space is located in the emergent public that is neither primal nor western, a veritable mélange of both. One of the songs by the Afro-jazz artist, Fela Ransome Kuti dubbed it, *shakara* culture (lacking stable roots), spawned in the *sabob gari* (strangers’ quarters) of the urban environment. It has its own value system bred in the anonymity of the town. Studies on African urbanity have described the strangeness, allure, opportunities and challenges of this environment. Under the imprint of Heineman’s Africa Writers series, novelists such as Wole Sonyika in his *The Interpreters*, Alex la Guma’s *Down Second Avenue*, Cyprian Ekwensi’s *Lokotown* and *Jagua Nana* have recreated the noise, bustle, slums and chaos in African cities. As a society is thrust into the enlarged or re-organized macrocosm, new lifestyles and ethical options are spawned.\textsuperscript{6}

From this moral perspective, it is as if the urban is a deviation, lacking authenticity, a veritable wasteland inhabited by ‘black Englishmen’ who were neither English nor authentic Africans. Changing value systems ensured that people did things in the emergent public that they would not dare to do in the indigenous or western publics. In the latter they would be imprisoned; in the former gods were the policemen. But the emergent public was regarded as the white man’s world where people did the white man’s work and live in ‘half London.’ To foray there successfully was an achievement to be celebrated with the flute and drum. People learned to loot in the emergent public without due repercussions in the primal context as long as they were not caught and brought home and shared the wealth with the kinsfolk. The interplay between the three publics has been used to explain the breakdown of social control models and the moral collapse in contemporary culture.

James Ferguson has theorized the cultural dualism in rural connections and urban styles in his book, *Expectation of Modernity*. He urges that urban scholarship should focus on circular migration rather than rural-urban migration precisely because most African migrants spend the period in the urban environment in planning the re-entry or return to the homesteads. So, he designed the character of urban life as a spectrum from two polarities, the cosmopolitan capability and localist capability. As a town dweller shows a high cosmopolitan style and urban competence, the risk may be a decreasing capability to perform localist expectations. Villagers often label such people as being ‘lost’.\textsuperscript{7}

It, therefore, matters where an analysis starts or is located because many studies on African Pentecostalism are usually placed in the contemporary period and in the context of urbanity and its *shakara* (rootless) culture. From here, assertions are made that ignore in-depth ethnographical research and that presume a higher degree of urban ethos than exists in Africa. It does not recognize the force of cultural villigization of the modern public space; that most of the inhabitants of the towns carry medicine made in the villages to empower their successful foraying in the towns. As Ellis and ter Haar observed:

‘Many Africans today who continue to hold beliefs derived from their traditional cosmologies apply these to everyday life even when they live in cities and work in the civil service or business sector. Religious worldviews do not necessarily diminish with formal education.’\textsuperscript{8}

Perhaps, western scholars start from their
Pentecostalism in the United States was ascribed to rapid social change, urbanization, social mobility and the undermining of traditional values and structures of meaning. Thus, there is a connection between the movement and urban anomie, deprivation and cognitive dissonance.

The analysis of contemporary experience in Africa does not start from globalizing cultural forces, however crucial. The force of traditional cultures in determining behavior and policy in the modern public space compels an in-depth study of its salience and resilience. Pentecostal cultural policy demonstrates an acute awareness of this powerful reality for the majority of Africans, in a continent where most people live in the rural areas and where the urban dwellers cultivate their roots in their villages.

Notes

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The unknown history of televangelism

William F. Fore

A brief summary of how televangelism in the United States began, grew, and finally dominated the media is given in the following article. It explores some implications of this history, and indicates why the subject deserves a good deal more careful analysis than it has received thus far. Along the way it describes how the televangelists gained power over the Federal Communication Commission, a power that has provided a unique opportunity for fundamentalist religion to effect cultural change.

A great deal is being written these days about the increasing role of religion in American life, and in particular, its political life. A recent book by best selling author Kevin Phillips, entitled American Theocracy (Penguin Books, Viking Group, 2006) details the central role religion now plays in America.

Many writers, sociologists, historians, cultural analysts, have described this phenomenon and tried to explain its origins and power. They point to the sect-driven dynamic of American religion, the populist innovations in worship developed by laypersons, the large number of denominations, the pervasive influence of the Bible and its literal interpretation. But with few exceptions, almost none of them has dealt with one of the most important factors in the equation, the use of the mass media by televangelists.

A brief history of religious broadcasting

In 1934 the U.S. Congress passed the Communications Act which authorized the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) to grant broadcast licenses. The Congress asserted that the electromagnetic spectrum is a national resource that cannot be owned by any one person or corporation, but that it can only be licensed for a specific period of time. The license, in effect, is a monopoly to use a scarce commodity. In exchange for this monopoly, the station is obligated to broadcast ‘in the public interest’. From the beginning, religious broadcasting was considered one of the ways of fulfilling a station’s ‘public interest’ obligation.

But which religious speakers should broadcasters put on the air? Literally hundreds of ministers and evangelists asked for time. At first the radio networks sold time to religious speakers, but some of the more outspoken clergy were much too narrow and controversial for their liking. Perhaps the worst example was Father Charles Coughlin who broadcast on radio in the early 1930s, regularly preaching hatred of Jews and blacks.

Very soon the radio networks decided not to sell time but to give time to the largest representative bodies which would speak on behalf of all religions. These groups were the national Council of Catholic Bishops, the Federal Council of Churches (Protestant), and a coalition of three national Jewish organizations.

This system worked reasonably well throughout the late 1930s and 1940s. When television came in about 1950, each of these ‘faith groups’ was given time each Sunday for their TV programs, programs which were broadly representative of the religious and cultural diversity of the country as a whole. The FCC gave ‘public interest credit’ to the networks and their stations for providing free time. In fact, the networks themselves actually paid for the program production.

However, the evangelical and fundamentalist groups were more or less excluded from this agreement, although the Southern Baptists, Mormons and others were given a modest amount of air time, and some televangelists were able to buy time, mostly on radio and non-network TV stations.

In 1960 all this changed. Under growing pressure from conservative groups, the FCC ruled that local stations could sell airtime for
religious programs and still get ‘public interest’ credit. Suddenly evangelical groups lined up to buy commercial time on radio and TV, and local stations that had previously agreed with the network policy not to sell airtime for religious broadcasting, began to cash in on the new demand and to sell time to the highest bidder.

The new FCC policy was devastating to programs that had been carried free for the major (main line) groups. Just before the FCC ruling took effect, only 53% of all religious broadcasting was paid-time. But by 1977, paid-time religious broadcasting had risen to 92%. Thus, since the mid-1970s, religious broadcasting has been firmly in the hands of the televangelists.

Deregulation
However, the changes in religious broadcasting were only the beginning of a more fundamental change in broadcasting itself. When Ronald Reagan became President in 1980, he brought about an almost complete deregulation of radio and TV. He did this by weakening the FCC to the point where it had very little real control. He cut the number of FCC Commissioners from seven to five. He drastically reduced its budget. And he installed a Chairman who publicly proclaimed that ‘television is no different from a toaster’. That is, in his view, the TV set was just another appliance. The cultural impact of broadcasting was irrelevant. The marketplace, not public policy, determined who controls TV and radio.

The result was the rapid buying up of stations by large networks, which made possible the centralization of power in the hands of only a few multinational corporations who now own every part of the broadcasting system—radio, TV, cable, and satellite. Programming, including sports, news, investigative reporting, even the weather, rapidly became commercialized. Profits ruled over the public interest.

Businesses profited greatly from this change, and so did the Electronic Church. Televangelists used money sent by listeners and viewers (much of it pledged for mission work overseas) to buy up hundreds of radio and TV station licenses, and to create satellite-fed networks. Some of the largest televangelist organizations became multi-million dollar giants. Aggressive and legal fund-raising on the air made possible the creation of huge distribution systems for the televangelists, all with the bonus of being tax free as religious organizations.

Political power of the electronic church
In addition, since 1960 the religious broadcasters have steadily increased their political power in America. Consider the famous ‘Madelyn Murray O’Hare Affair’. In the 1960s and 70s, Madelyn Murray O’Hare was a famous American atheist. Among other things, she attacked the electronic church through marches and protests. But in 1975 an anonymous letter began to circulate, charging that Mrs. O’Hare was trying to get the FCC to remove all Christian programs from radio and television.

To quote from the letter: ‘(Her) petition, Number 2493, would ultimately pave the way to stop the reading of the gospel (of) our Lord and Savior, on the airwaves of America. They got 287,000 signatures to back their stand! Please stand up for your religious freedom and let your voice be heard.’

The only problem with this letter, which was passed on to thousands of conservative Christians in church meetings, newsletters, and through private mailings, is that none of it was true. Mrs. O’Hare had not filed a petition with the FCC. There were no 287,000 signatures. The whole thing was false. It was soon revealed to be untrue in the press and on the air. The FCC issued a public statement saying the petition never existed and that it had no intention of forbidding Bible reading on the air.

Yet this did not deter the religious faithful. They began to send letters and postcards to the FCC by the thousands, and finally by the millions, for months and months, and then for years and years. The Commission received so much protest mail (more than 30 million!) that they had to stop opening them, and merely piled stacks of mail bags in their closets.

And from this experience the FCC got the message, loud and clear: don’t challenge the Electronic Church. Ever since that time, the Commission has refused to exert any significant regulation over so-called religious stations. Today there are some 1,600 ‘Christian’ radio
stations on the air, and 250 ‘Christian’ TV stations. They blanket the nation. Their licenses require them to broadcast ‘in the public convenience, interest and necessity’, and the courts have ruled that this means a broadcaster must provide diverse programming that meets the needs of its entire listening-viewing audience. But these 1,600 radio stations do not do that. Instead, they broadcast, hour after hour, the brand of religion that suits them, and nothing more. The FCC should have long ago denied them their licenses to broadcast, but they will not. They cannot, because the religious right has become so strong in the Congress and the Administration that it would be political suicide for any politician to challenge these stations.

If you turn on one of these stations, you will hear an amazing gospel. The outline of the message is rather simple, and bizarre. For most of them it goes something like this: The Old Testament is literally true, and it promises the Jews that they are the People of God. Once Israel has occupied all of the ‘biblical lands’, legions of the anti-Christ will attack it, triggering a battle in the valley of Armageddon, at which time the Messiah will return for the ‘rapture’.

During the ‘rapture’, true believers will be lifted out of their clothes and transported to heaven, where, seated on the right hand of God, they will watch their political and religious opponents suffer plagues of boils, sores, locusts, and frogs during the seven years of ‘tribulation’ that will follow. Then there is increasing struggle and the final battle on the plains of Armageddon. Christ is victorious, and those who are saved look forward to a glorious reign of a thousand years, a new Heaven and a new Earth. (Incidentally, this is one of the main reasons for America’s support of Israel, since Israel’s control of the ‘biblical lands’ is a first step toward the ‘rapture’ and the end of the world which is so much desired by these Christians!) If you find it difficult to accept that many ordinary people would really believe this sort of thing, consider that in a 2004 Gallup Poll, 55% of Americans said they believe the Bible is literally true, including the story of Noah’s Ark and God’s creation of the earth in six days. Even more disturbing, 71% of evangelical Christians said they believe the world will end in an Armageddon battle between Jesus Christ and the Antichrist. Thus, millions of people in America hold this amazing (and very disturbing) view.

But of course, millions do not. The result is that America is a nation deeply divided between people who are concerned about real-life issues, war and peace, social justice, the health and welfare of people, on one hand, and other people who are concerned, instead, about ‘values’, by which they mean adherence to ancient taboos, dependence on a magical God, enforcing acceptance of ancient creeds, requiring everyone to believe as they do, and finding safety in raw (though often hidden) social and economic power.

**Implications**

What are the implications of such a message, broadcast everywhere in America, everyday of the year, on radio and television? First, consider the theological implications. In the last half-century a whole new understanding of the Bible has emerged from Biblical scholars. The result in Europe has been a mass exodus from the traditional churches which cling to the orthodox views, while in America there has arisen a much stronger fundamentalism. Why has there been such different religious development on the two sides of the Atlantic? A major difference is that in America there were scores of television evangelists and hundreds of radio preachers on the air, day and night, preaching a bogus religion whose story is a wild tale of the end of the world, and whose values closely resemble the values and worldview of secular America, the values of winning, of wealth, of power, and of being Number One. On the other side of the Atlantic, European audiences were never subjected to this kind of message.

Second, consider the political implications. Today there is a significant group within the fundamentalist community who want to bring about a complete change in the American form of government. Pat Robertson is a key leader in the group called Dominionists, or sometimes Reconstructionists. Robertson and his followers...
consistently and openly argue that America must become a theocracy under the control of Christian fundamentalists. He is on record saying that democracy is a terrible form of government, unless it is run by his kind of Christians.

Dr. Gary North, a major figure among the Dominionists, clarifies their goal and tactics: ‘We must use the doctrine of religious liberty ... until we train up a generation of people who know that there is no religious neutrality, no neutral law, no neutral education, and no neutral civil government. Then they will get busy constructing a Bible-based social, political and religious order which finally denies the religious liberty of the enemies of God.’ To give you an idea of what the new Bible-based order would be like, Dr. North advocates public execution of women who undergo abortions, and a similar fate for those who advise them to do so.

This situation could easily be dismissed as the ravings of a few neurotic sociopaths, except for the chilling fact that our President and many of his advisors talk in much the same way. While Mr. Bush does not agree wholly with the Dominionists, he is supported by many of them, and they have much in common. In Mr. Bush’s world, there exist only two groups, the enemies of freedom and the lovers of freedom, the evil and the good. Thus to waver, to change policy, would be to tempt God’s disfavor. Indeed, the very act of holding to his resolve, what his critics identify as his stubbornness and arrogance, becomes a way of reassuring himself of his special place in God’s plan.

Summary
What we have in the American Electronic Church today is a phenomenon that has gained immense power, almost entirely through the use of radio and television. The televangelists have used this power to join forces with the political right in order to bring about a nation more in conformity with what its adherents believe to be the will of God, or at least the demands of Christianity. This power came about because the FCC, which is charged with making certain the airwaves are used to meet the needs of the entire community and that all issues of importance to citizens are thoroughly aired, has failed in its task.

The FCC has allowed licenses to go to religious groups who have no intention of ever broadcasting in ways that speak to the diversity within their community, but only to use their monopoly as a tool to further their own narrow ideology. And if they are able to continue to gain power, some day they may even attempt to deny religious liberty to all the ‘enemies of God’. This is what the current ‘culture clash’ in America is all about.

Of course, this situation was not created in a political and social vacuum. Many other forces were at work, including the powerful commercial broadcasters who wanted to be free from regulation at least as much as the religious broadcasters. But without the development of large and powerful conservative religious broadcasting, with its strong political component, much of what has occurred in the past six years in the United States simply would not have happened.

Mr. Bush would not have been elected President. The nation would not have been plunged into a war that is understood by many to be a religious war and not acknowledged to be about oil. And millions of Americans would not have been misinformed and misled into accepting a war based upon both false information and a superficial misunderstanding of the Bible and its teachings.

Television is not a toaster. It is the world’s most important source of news and information, and its most powerful propaganda agent. Unless it is regulated by governments so as to insure that all people have access to all sides of issues, democracy as we know it becomes impossible.

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Communication is peace: WACC's mission today

Philip Lee

‘The peoples of our planet have a sacred right to peace’, states the Declaration on the Right of Peoples to Peace, adopted by the UN General Assembly on 12 November 1984. What does this mean in the context of today’s complex societies? In what kind of environment can people flourish without conflict? Where does communication fit in? And what should be WACC’s role?

When the world was divided into ‘true believers’ and ‘infidels’, it made sense for the church authorities to enforce the ‘great commission’ to ‘go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation’ (NRSV, Mark 16:15). The verse that follows that command makes it clear that those who do not believe the good news will be condemned, so a strict interpretation condones the alienation, if not the elimination, of all those who refuse the grace of salvation.

This aim of the early church authorities was immediately contested on several fronts. The power and resources of the early church were challenged by the Jewish authorities, the residual Egyptian and Persian empires, the declining Roman power, and the arrival of hoards of ‘outsiders’ (Vandals, Visigoths, Huns), as well as the imminent rise of Islam. Only by allying politically and economically with the dominant powers could the church ever succeed in proclaiming the ascendancy of the Christian faith over all other religious or secular beliefs.

Tactically this was an error. It meant ‘interpreting’ (thus altering) the biblical commandment to ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’, which appears in Leviticus (19:18) and is also flagged in several places in the New Testament (Mt 19:19; Mk 12:31; Lk 10:27; Rom 13:9; Gal 5:14; Jas 2:8). Clearly a founding principle of Christianity, it was quickly ignored by the church authorities for reasons of political expediency and on many occasions dismissed altogether. The concept of a ‘just war’ of aggression, for example, enabled church authorities to endorse hostile and belligerent acts.¹

Modern Christianity has come a long way towards reconciling some of its earlier more callous and divisive beliefs. Even so, it still has a long way to go. Many churches have debated their response to homosexuality. Some have rejected homosexual practices as incompatible with the Scripture, at the same time as condemning homophobia, defined as an irrational fear of homosexuality. Some have decided that they cannot legitimize or bless same-sex unions or ordain those involved in same-sex unions. Ironically, they are still committed to listening to the experience of homosexual people, assuring them that they are all loved by God.

Other churches explain why the ordination of women is impossible. They say, for example, that the issue of the ordination of women is not a matter of ‘human rights’ or ‘church tradition’ or various human opinions and customs. Nor is it a matter of ‘discrimination against women’, but a question of avoiding becoming ensnared in self-centered demands for ‘rights’ and forgetting the Lord’s call to service.

In 2006, with public awareness of HIV and AIDS running at an all time high, the Roman Catholic Church, at the behest of Pope Benedict XVI, asked senior theologians and scientists to prepare a document discussing the use of condoms as a means of preventing the transmission of HIV. It is doubtful whether the proposed document will pave the way for a fundamental shift in church policy. The Vatican still opposes the use of condoms as part of its teaching against contraception and advocates sexual abstinence as the best way to fight the spread of the AIDS virus.

Women, homosexuals, people of color, and people of other faiths and none, still find it difficult to conceive that ‘love your neighbor as yourself’ does not mean total acceptance, inclusion and equality. These aspects of ‘tolerance’
are present in the widely ignored Declaration Toward A Global Ethic of the Parliament of the World's Religions (1993) whose introduction states:

‘We must treat others as we wish others to treat us. We make a commitment to respect life and dignity, individuality and diversity, so that every person is treated humanely, without exception. We must have patience and acceptance. We must be able to forgive, learning from the past but never allowing ourselves to be enslaved by memories of hate. Opening our hearts to one another, we must sink our narrow differences for the cause of the world community, practicing a culture of solidarity and relatedness.’

The Declaration lists four ‘irrevocable directives’. They are commitment to a culture of non-violence and respect for life; commitment to a culture of solidarity and a just economic order; commitment to a culture of tolerance and a life of truthfulness; and commitment to a culture of equal rights and partnership between men and women. It is this call to recognize and protect the abundant diversity of life that should underlie the mission of the churches today and, by implication, their communication practice.

Proclaiming values that everyone can recognize

The mission of the churches used to be to proclaim the ascendancy of the Christian faith over all other religious or secular beliefs. This meant proselytizing, converting the non-believer. It meant ‘going public’ with a different, possibly alien, set of beliefs and values and extolling social and cultural values that reflected particular denominational tenets of faith. In terms of the mass media, it meant criticizing and condemning practices with which the church disagreed or that did not conform to its historical role as ‘guardian of the faith’.

In a pluralistic world of different cultures and beliefs, the mission of the churches must be to proclaim non-violence, tolerance, truthfulness, and equal rights as universal values. In practice, this means criticizing abuses of power, campaigning to reform unjust political and economic structures, and reshaping social and cultural attitudes and beliefs in the light of modern understandings. In terms of communication, it means using mass and community media for social change. It means ‘going public’ with beliefs and values in which everyone can see him or herself represented fairly and justly – beliefs and values that include rather than exclude.

Further differences between the old and the new models are identified in the table opposite. But the question of how far the churches have come remains open to interpretation. For example, much of the pioneering work of the churches in Latin America in the three decades 1960 to 1990 (Dom Helder Câmara in Brazil, Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez in Chile, Mons. Oscar Romero in El Salvador, Bishop Juan Gerardi in Guatemala, Bishop Samuel Ruiz in Mexico) reflects an understanding of Gospel values that many conservative and reactionary groups still contest.

What does this mean for WACC?

In 1986 WACC defined its understanding of the role of communication today in the form of its Christian Principles of Communication. They rationalized the situation facing communicators in a world where public communication, at the beginning of yet another phase of ‘globalization’, was tending to reinforce divisions, widen the gap between rich and poor, consolidate oppression, and distort reality in order to maintain systems of domination and subject the silenced masses to media manipulation. WACC recognized five crucial components of good communication:

Communication creates community. Genuine communication cannot take place where there is division, alienation, isolation and barriers that disturb, prevent or distort social interaction. True communication is facilitated when people join together regardless of race, color or religious conviction, and where there is acceptance of and commitment to one another.

Communication is participatory. Participatory communication may challenge the authoritarian structures in society, in the churches and in the media, while democratizing new areas of life. It may also challenge some of
The old | The new
---|---
Churches converted infidels to the Christian faith without regard for cultural or racial difference. | Churches promote a Christian faith that emphasizes a just and equitable basis for co-existence.
Churches created a community of believers whose aims were to divide and conquer. | Churches create a community of believers whose aims are solidarity in diversity.
Churches restricted participation to strictly hierarchical levels. | Churches encourage participation at all levels.
Churches liberated people from their ‘pagan beliefs and superstitions’. | Churches affirm people in their own social and cultural histories.
Churches supported and developed other cultures in order to change them. | Churches support and develop other cultures in order to engage with them.
Churches interpreted the signs of the times according to the political, social and cultural needs of the elite. | Churches interpret the signs of the times according to the political, social and cultural needs of the marginalized.
Churches communicated hierarchically. | Churches communicate multilaterally.
Churches used mass media to reinforce faith and to obstruct political and social change. | Churches use mass media to challenge faith and to promote political and social change.

The ‘professional rules’ of the media, whereby the powerful, rich and glamorous occupy center-stage to the exclusion of ordinary men, women and children. Participatory communication can give people a new sense of human dignity, a new experience of community, and the enjoyment of a fuller life.

Communication liberates. Communication that liberates, enables people to articulate their own needs and helps them to act together to meet those needs. It enhances their sense of dignity and underlines their right to full participation in the life of society. It aims to bring about structures in society that are more just, more egalitarian and more conducive to the fulfillment of human rights.

Communication supports and develops cultures. Communicators have a responsibility to use and develop indigenous forms of communication. They have to cultivate a symbolic environment of mutually shared images and meanings which respect human dignity and the religious and cultural values which are at the heart of Third World cultures. One of the greatest assets of today’s world is its many different cultures, revealing the richness of God’s image in all its diversity.

Communication is prophetic. Prophetic communication stimulates critical awareness of the reality constructed by the media and helps people to distinguish truth from falsehood, to discern the subjectivity of the onlooker and to dissociate that which is ephemeral and trivial from that which is lasting and valuable.

Each of these five principles contributes directly to a sixth that is implicit. Building a genuine sense of community, enabling all members of society to participate, guaranteeing true freedom to speak out and be heard, openly recognizing cultural diversity, and creating critical awareness of potential problems and solutions can be described as the pillars of peaceful coexistence. Yet peace does not exist in and of itself – it has to be worked for.

There are two kinds of peace. The absence of war, violence, acts of terrorism and hostility constitutes what has been called ‘negative peace’. Positive peace, on the other hand, is much more than those absences: it means establishing and maintaining a harmonious, functionally co-operative and well-integrated society at local, national and global levels.

Professor Johan Galtung refines these concepts further: ‘Peace is the absence/reduction of violence of all kinds’, and ‘peace is non-violence and creative conflict transformation.’ In short, peace is the political, social and cultural context in which conflict can ‘unfold non-violently and creatively.’

Communication promotes peace
The true mission of faith-based organizations and, therefore, communication, is peace. This is
implicit in ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’, since only a fool would wish to be denigrated, vilified, or killed in the processes that lead to conflict and war. Only by invoking the sacredness and inviolability of life, by advocating non-violence and creative resolution, can communicators act morally. Communication that promotes peace responds, therefore, to the reality of:

‘Otherness – the other race and ethnicity, the other sex and caste, the other nation, other faith, other ideology, even other language. Otherness is one of the key concepts of contemporary philosophy, of social ethics, and of communication studies.’

Communication that promotes peace must not confuse freedom of expression with intolerance or intemperate criticism or confuse pluralism with indifference to truth. It must cultivate truthfulness in place of dishonesty, bias and opportunism. It must actively seek truth in place of spreading ideological or partisan half-truths. It must courageously serve truth in a constant and trustworthy way.

Communication for peace includes mediation via mass and community media, non-violent methods of conflict resolution, and a clear stand against the arms race. It supports those affected by violence and war – orphans, widows, widowers – and their communication rights. It demands accountability from those involved in violent confrontation, strengthens inter-governmental and non-governmental bodies involved in peace-making, promotes a discourse of peaceful co-existence rather than security issues, and advocates extensive deployment of ICTs in peace programmes.

Above all, communication for peace attempts to mend the fabric of communities torn by violence:

‘In the “social fabric” approach to communication for peace, social and political violence are understood as very complex phenomena that emerge at the intersection of many factors ranging from unequal distribution of resources, weak state presence, corrupt government officials, impunity, and strong presence of illegal economies (such as drug trafficking). All these, working in conjunction, erode the social fabric and normalise a culture of strong individuality, disbelief in the rule of law, fear and isolation, exclusion of difference, and lack of solidarity among individuals. In these contexts, communication for peace initiatives emerge as attempts to “re-knit” the social fabric. Here, the goal is to open communication spaces where individuals can - collectively - construct links among each other based on mutual respect, solidarity, and collective enjoyment of public spaces.’

The mission of the Christian churches is to communicate the original Gospel values of love for one’s neighbor: respect, understanding, solidarity, justice and the ‘sacred right to peace’. To do so in the information and knowledge societies of today, the churches have constructively and honestly to criticize their own and other’s use of the mass media and all other means of communication in order to debate, question and challenge the policies and actions of any ‘principality and power’ that misrepresents or negates those values.

As Richard Holloway affirms, ‘Christianity is not a way of explaining the world; it is a way of disturbing the world.’ The mission of the WACC is, therefore, to promote peace using all means of communication. That is also the true meaning of global ecumenism – not the post-Reformation ecumenism aimed at reuniting all Christians, but an ecumenism aimed at bringing together all the people of the inhabited world to act in solidarity to bring about their physical and spiritual salvation.

Notes
1. The most systematic exposition of this philosophy is given by Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) in the Summa Theologica, where he discusses not only the justification of war, but also the kinds of activity that are permissible in war. Aquinas’s thinking became the model for later scholars and jurists to expand.
2. In his book A Brief History of Globalization (Constable & Robinson, 2006), Alex MacGillivray focuses on ‘global intent’ as the crucial element in the process, i.e. knowledge breakthroughs that spurred the ambition to encompass the newly imagined globe. For MacGillivray globalization is not a linear process. He identifies five cru-
cial moments of global ‘contraction’: Spain and Portugal’s carve-up of the world in the late 15th century; imperial Britain’s expanding global reach in the late 19th; the first flight of Sputnik and the Cold War that followed; the emergence of modern multinational corporations and the Internet; and the imminent challenge of climate change, or ‘thermo-globalization’, the impact of which ‘could make all previous experiences of globalization look like a false labour’.


**New Convention for Persons with Disabilities**

On 13 December 2006, *after five years of negotiations, an international treaty giving greater rights and freedoms to disabled people around the world was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. The UN Convention on the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities is the first human rights treaty of the 21st Century. The UN expects that it will contribute to a significant improvement in the lives of disabled people whose world population is estimated to be 650 million.*

UN General Secretary Kofi Annan greeted ‘the dawn of a new era - an era in which disabled people will no longer have to endure discriminatory practices and attitudes that have been permitted to prevail for far too long.’

Proponents of the convention maintained that the treaty was necessary because people with disabilities represent one of the most marginalized groups and their rights have been routinely ignored or denied throughout much of the world.

While the Convention does not create new rights, it specifically prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in all areas of life, including civil rights, access to justice and the right to education, health services and access to transportation.

Currently only 45 countries have specific legislation that protects disabled people. The Convention recognises that a change of attitude is vital if disabled people are to achieve equal
status – countries that ratify it will be obliged to combat negative stereotypes and prejudices and to promote an awareness of people’s abilities and contribution to society.

Countries will also have to guarantee that disabled people will have a right to life on an equal basis with others. Access to public spaces and buildings as well as transport, information and communications will also have to be improved.

Most notable among the countries that will not be signing the convention is the USA. It says that it already has comprehensive laws on disability rights.

Articles 19 and 21 of the Convention include communication and the mass media in their texts, which are given below.

**Article 9 – Accessibility**

1. To enable persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life, States Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure to persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas. These measures, which shall include the identification and elimination of obstacles and barriers to accessibility, shall apply to, inter alia:
   (a) Buildings, roads, transportation and other indoor and outdoor facilities, including schools, housing, medical facilities and workplaces;
   (b) Information, communications and other services, including electronic services and emergency services.

2. States Parties shall also take appropriate measures to:
   (a) Develop, promulgate and monitor the implementation of minimum standards and guidelines for the accessibility of facilities and services open or provided to the public;
   (b) Ensure that private entities that offer facilities and services which are open or provided to the public take into account all aspects of accessibility for persons with disabilities;
   (c) Provide training for stakeholders on accessibility issues facing persons with disabilities;
   (d) Provide in buildings and other facilities open to the public signage in Braille and in easy to read and understand forms;
   (e) Provide forms of live assistance and intermediaries, including guides, readers and professional sign language interpreters, to facilitate accessibility to buildings and other facilities open to the public;
   (f) Promote other appropriate forms of assistance and support to persons with disabilities to ensure their access to information;
   (g) Promote access for persons with disabilities to new information and communication technologies and systems, including the Internet;
   (h) Promote the design, development, production and distribution of accessible information and communications technologies and systems at an early stage, so that these technologies and systems become accessible at minimum cost.

**Article 21 – Freedom of expression and opinion, and access to information**

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities can exercise their right to freedom of expression and opinion, including the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas on an equal basis with others and through sign languages, Braille, augmentative and alternative communication, and all other accessible means, modes and formats of communication of their choice, including by:

(a) Providing information intended for the general public to persons with disabilities in accessible formats and technologies appropriate to different kinds of disabilities in a timely manner and without additional cost;
(b) Accepting and facilitating the use of sign languages, Braille, augmentative and alternative communication, and all other accessible means, modes and formats of communication of their choice by persons with disabilities in official interactions;
(c) Urging private entities that provide services to the general public, including through the Internet, to provide information and services in accessible and usable formats for persons with disabilities;
(d) Encouraging the mass media, including
providers of information through the Internet, to make their services accessible to persons with disabilities;
(e) Recognizing and promoting the use of sign language.

Missing ethics
The Convention makes no reference to the ethical use of new technologies, especially those ‘convergent’ or ‘NBIC’ technologies (see Media Development 2/2006) that are currently the subject of much serious debate. The impact on people with disabilities of developments in nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technology and cognitive science is conspicuous by its absence.

Without further comment, Article 4 (f ii) encourages research, development, availability and use of ‘new technologies, including information and communication technologies, mobility aids, devices, assistive technologies, suitable for persons with disabilities, giving priority to technologies at an affordable cost’.

Similarly, Article 17 on ‘Protecting the integrity of the person’ merely states that ‘Every person with disabilities has a right to respect for his or her physical and mental integrity on an equal basis with others.’

As Dr Gregor Wolbring, researcher at the University of Calgary and chair of the Bioethics Taskforce of Disabled People’s International has commented:1

‘Using the term “person” in the Convention has a variety of consequences. First, it makes this a Convention for disabled people who acquired or developed their impairment-labelled characteristic of functioning after birth. It does not protect against eugenic measures of pre-birth deselection. Article 10 - Right to Life will not apply to pre-birth stages and can not be used to fight other pre-birth interventions...

Second, the Convention is susceptible to changes in the meaning of the term person, which has changed throughout history. The debate around the concept of personhood is now intensifying again for two reasons. Advances in science and technology increasingly allow for the modification and enhancement of Homo sapiens and other species beyond species typical boundaries. The design of new life forms through synthetic biology, might lead people to believe that it is essential to change the concept of “person” and “human rights” towards the concept of “sentient being rights” and to link the term “person” not just to “humans” but to cognitive abilities of any species, in order to give the required legal protection.

Different ethics and morality can be applied to biological entities not seen as persons. This is important for the applicability, legality, acceptance and ethical approval of the selection of embryos with desired characteristics, elimination of fetuses with unwanted characteristics, manipulation of embryos and fetuses, infanticide, after-birth biological enhancements and therapies on newborns, mercy killing, and interventions at any other stage of human development where a biological entity is seen as a non-person.

Disabled people will have to follow the debates around personhood and what it is to be a human being very closely to see how the applicability of the Convention might change in the future.’

Note
Congo's hidden tragedy

Hugh McCullum

There is no sky as big and deep and dark as an African sky. I awoke in the dark to a soft humming noise. A mosquito, I thought, remembering the rip in the net over my cot and Aru’s high incidence of malaria (1 million or more people die every year in Africa from the disease). As I fumbled for a candle, the humming grew louder but still soft and undulating. Can’t be that many mosquitoes. I went to the small glassless window. The sun was just touching the horizon. About 4.30 a.m. The humming grew, my eyes adjusted. I could see and was hearing a huge crowd of people about 50 meters from my room. A long orderly queue as far as I could see in the early dawn light. Sort of eerie, was it something religious on this Sunday morning, July 30?

Suddenly my brain clicked in – election day – but the polls didn’t open until 7 am. There were thousands lined up around the voting station near where I had been sleeping. Solemn, quiet, patient, hands clutching their voting papers. By the time the poll opened it seemed half the town was there.

Aru lies near the top of eastern Congo’s Ituri province, one of the most war-scarred provinces in the DRC where more than 200,000 people are still displaced, driven from their villages into squalid camps. Aru district is just a few kilometres from the Uganda border.

It is a MONUC (the French acronym for the UN peacekeeping mission in the DRC) base serving 132 polling centres which adds up to 555 polling stations, most of them in the bush. None has electricity, even in Aru, and most can only be reached by air. All day and into the night white UN helicopters had roared across the town and out to the bush, delivering all the paraphernalia needed for a national election in a country where there are no paved roads and the tracks through the bush that pass for roads are axle-breaking.

The election stories were endless and amazing. Two skinny, bent grandmothers set out on Saturday to walk 35 kilometres to the polling station and then, having voted, turned and walked back through the bush. They were dressed as for a feast: ‘We have voted; now everything will be all right. No more violence; we will be safe.’

Henriette Katuku Kishala, a nurse in a hospital, built by the Belgians in 1926, which has no electricity, and does surgery by the light of candles and kerosene lamps, said the elections would end the suffering. ‘It will make things change because we must have change; we have suffered too much.’

In Ituri’s capital, Bunia, a bashed-up city of unknown numbers, the main MONUC centre for the northeast, the blue berets from a couple of dozen or more countries are exhausted, dirty, dark circles under their eyes, but they laugh and dance and act as if they had voted themselves. ‘We did it, we did it,’ says a Pakistani corporal with huge handlebar moustaches. ‘We’ve been fighting here for months, lots got killed. Today, nothing. People walked for days, old people, crippled people, pregnant women, kids, everyone walked for miles and miles. Do you do that in Canada?’

First elections for decades

Technically, the war ended with the Pretoria accords of 2002, brokered by the UN, EU, US and South Africa. Congo is no longer supposed to be the killing fields of foreign countries and ethnic militias. These elections for president, the first in over 40 years, were held peacefully and fairly on July 30. The 19,000-member MONUC force, charged with maintaining order, brilliantly supported the complex Congo-operated voting process.

The UN spent more than $500 million, the biggest peacekeeping mission in its history. But for an area of 2.5 million sq kms, the mission is
tiny. By contrast, in Europe, Kosovo had 40,000 troops in 10,000 sq km with far fewer people. And MONUC further lacks the ability to move outside town centres while the militias still operate freely in the dense forests of the East.

Already, however, some of the more influential UN members complain about costs, what with another big mission under way in Lebanon. The MONUC mandate expires this year and diplomats worry that it will be drastically reduced or cut altogether. The auspicious vote is fragile and the fear is widespread that more conflict faces this already devastated former Belgian colony. The influential Catholic and Protestant churches have called on the two presidential rivals to talk.

A runoff election Oct. 29, 2006, between the two main candidates, interim President Joseph Kabila and former rebel leader and interim Vice-President Jean-Pierre Bemba, to achieve the necessary 50% majority posed a possible threat. Already violence has struck the capital, Kinshasa, and parts of the volatile East. And will the losers accept defeat or will they return to the bush wars manipulated by foreign economic and political interests? And will the leaders in all the countries that surround Congo leave it alone?

The runoff elections were held Oct. 29, 2006. The Independent Electoral Commission announced a month later that Kabila had won with 58% of the votes cast, leaving Bemba with 42%, a gap between them of approximately 2.5 million votes. Immediately tensions arose with Bemba declaring he would not accept the result due to fraud. He was supported by some elements of the powerful Roman Catholic church.

The election results immediately sparked violence in Kinshasa which heavily supported Bemba while Kabila received most of his votes from the Swahili-speaking east of the country. The Supreme Court was required to ratify the electoral commission’s results and also hear Bemba’s complaints that the vote was fraudulent. As the Supreme Court was hearing the case, it was set afire by a large crowd of presumed Bemba supporters, burning many electoral documents and leading the Kabila-appointed judges to suspend hearings on Nov. 22.

The black-robed judges fled the court, as documents and furniture caught fire. The UN troops, EU peacekeepers and police fired tear gas into the crowd. The future of the case is uncertain since the court had only until Nov. 23 to hear the Bemba appeal. Election observers, including former Canadian prime minister Joe Clark, heading the prestigious (President Jimmy) Carter Institute’s observer team, said there were irregularities but they were not large enough to overturn Kabila’s lead.

More distressing was the discovery by MONUC, just after the announcement, that three mass graves had been found in a Congolese army camp in Ituri province. Each grave contained around 30 bodies, not yet even decomposed in the heat of that area. Ituri is in east, a previously volatile area, and fears are high that ethnic and militia violence involving the undisciplined and often unpaid Congo army will destabilize the country.

Kinshasa, the ramshackle capital of 8 million, mostly very poor but with pockets of gross wealth, is especially fragile while observers say there is a precarious peace in the north and west of the country due more to splits in the Bemba coalition concerning what tactics to use. However, these same observers point to the serious divide between the capital and the north of the country and the Swahili-speaking east. Kabila, and the 81-year-old Antoine Gizenga, whom he has appointed prime minister have poor records in governance.

### National Elections at a glance

- Overall cost: US$430 million
- Number of registered voters: 24.7 million
- Number of voters: 17.9 million, 70%
- Number of polling centres: 11,000
- Number of voting stations: 50,000
- Number of presidential candidates: 32
- Number of candidates for 500 parliamentary seats: 9,000
- Number of political parties: 200
- Last, and only, election: 1960

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and are not Lingala-speakers who are the majority in the north and west of the country.

The newsletter, Southscan, says ‘it is not likely’ that Kabila’s future government will be able to deliver on the social front given the corrupt terms of many contracts signed by the interim government and their bad record on managing state revenues and properties.

**Pivotal to future stability**

There is no place more pivotal to the future of Africa than Congo. Since the first of two wars broke out in 1996, its potential to drag down the prospects of the continent are immense. Of the armies of the eight African countries that were involved at the height of the war, which gave them the chance to indulge in systematic looting of diamonds and other minerals, several still have influence through proxy militia, mafia-style business networks and ethnic links. The DRC’s instability immediately threatens Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi – all emerging from various forms of violent unrest – and the six other countries that border Congo.

After the 2002 peace deal brokered by the UN and South Africa, a fragile, transitional government came to power, in a uniquely Congolese power-sharing arrangement: President Kabila (thrust into the job at age 29 after the assassination of his father Laurent Kabila in 2001) shared power with four vice-presidents – the major warlords whose militias wrought havoc for the past years. (A wry Congolese joke described this unwieldy coalition as ‘four plus one equals zero’.)

This was peace enough to placate international donors, who’ve poured in money to prop up the flimsy government and maintain some stability to reassure adventurous international mining companies, who are rushing to re-open shop in the Congo.

Coltan was one of the products that grabbed the world’s attention in the DRC. An ore called columbite-tantalite – coltan for short – was one of the world’s most sought-after materials although some of its sheen has now worn off. (Refine coltan and you get a highly heat-resistant metal powder called tantalum.)

The link between bloodshed and resource extraction was slow to cause alarm in the West which ignored high level reports from the UN. Despite international pressure few multi-national or regional corporations will grapple with the possibility that their products may contain the tainted fruits of civil strife. According to the UN, more than 20 international mineral trading companies import minerals from the Congo via Rwanda alone.

‘So, don’t kid yourself, my man,’ explodes a Kisingani businessman, Mokeni Ekopi Kane, one night in the airport. ‘This war is about one thing and one thing alone. Plunder, loot, exploitation and you [Westerners] are the beneficiaries.’

It’s always been that way. When DRC was called Zaire (after it was called the Congo when it got independence in 1961 from Belgium, who had had raped its resources and murdered 10 million people since 1890 in the world’s largest ever genocide), its dictator Mobutu Sese Seko was often feted in the White House for his pro-American stance during the Cold War and for his generosity in giving away contracts to American (and Canadian) mining corporations.

In the Ronald Reagan years, Zaire received

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**Democratic Republic of Congo**

**at a glance**

- **Population**: 65 million (estimate, no census)
- **Capital**: Kinshasa
- **Area**: 2.5 million sq km
- **Major languages**: Lingala, Kiswahili, Kikongo and 220 lesser but distinct dialects, French for the elites
- **Major religions**: Roman Catholic, Protestant, Islam
- **Life expectancy**: 42 years (men), 44 years (women)
- **Main exports**: diamonds, gold, copper, cobalt, coltan, timber, crude oil
- **Interim president**: Joseph Kabila, 34, former major-general (since 2003)
- **Governance**: unelected president, four vice-presidents, interim appointed parliament, unelected senate, unpaid civil service, army and police
almost half of all foreign aid allocated by the US to the entire continent. After Mobutu had pillaged the country for 30 years, a middle-aged rebel, Laurent Kabila, seen as a puppet of Uganda and Rwanda, finally kicked him out in 1997. Mobutu died the next year in exile, with between $5 and $8 billion stashed in foreign banks and French and Swiss properties – this while the country had fewer than 50 kilometres of paved roads.

Even though per capita income, which is meaningless in DRC, is said to be $1 a day and the Central Bank has no money, the ‘fat cats’ of Kinshasa can buy a Mercedes for a million dollars today, or a box of Kellogg’s Cocoa Pops for $35 or a can of Diet Coke for $7. So, who buys these items at City Market, an American style supermarket in downtown Kinshasa? The people of the Eastern Congo who loathe the politicians and businessmen of the capital 2,000 km away call them the ‘fat cats’ whose corruption and tastes for high living have made Kinshasa the Sodom and Gomorrah of Africa.

Just outside the supermarket compound, the grotty streets steam and stink with garbage, and AIDS, malaria and other diseases kill many of the city’s eight million or so poverty-stricken people. According to the International Rescue Committee (IRC), 1,250 people still die every day because of war-related causes, the vast majority succumbing to diseases and malnutrition that wouldn’t exist but for the wars. And, beyond Kinshasa, there is little sign that the war has ended.

The countryside is broken, its peoples divided and volatile. There is no rebuilding, no phone service, no electrical grid, no roads; hospitals, when they are still standing, have been looted of everything from beds to bandages. No government employee – teachers, judges, nurses, doctors, civil servants – has been properly paid in 14 years.

Congolese soldiers, also often unpaid or their wages appropriated by their officers, are driven to violent looting. There are an estimat-
ed 33,000 child soldiers, forced into militias when they are as young as 10, accomplished dead-eyed killers at 14. Amnesty International says 40% of these children are girls or young women kept as sex slaves. Most of the DRC, especially the East, is extremely dangerous even with the big white UN vehicles constantly on patrol. The place is on edge.

Yet the Congo’s troubles rarely hit the daily newspaper columns, and the country ranks near the bottom of international donor lists. Ten months ago, in February 2006, donors made a humanitarian appeal of US$692 million for Congo. So far they have received about $100 million – $9.40 per person in need. As this was being written, donors in one day pledged $900 million to rebuild Lebanon for the third time from Israel’s lethal destruction. Last year’s tsunami raised $550 for each person and donors didn’t know how to spend it all.

What explains this widespread neglect of the Congo? To visit its trackless lands, its lush jungles, its smashed towns and cities, its hundreds of thousands of displaced who greet a visitor joyfully, is to see an incredibly brave people. The world should not be forced to make choices between Darfur and Congo. We, in obese comfort, have no right to be suffering donor fatigue.

Congo represents the promise of Africa as much as its misery. We have money for a dubious war on terror, billions to destroy Iraq and save Afghanistan from itself. Is Africa somehow entitled to less for the country that lies at its very heart?

Can Congo be saved? Of course, but it did not get this way by itself and it cannot be expected to save itself. One woman called Congo the broken heart of Africa. Another man – both are pastors in the EEC (Eglise du Christ au Congo, the Protestants) – asked if the white world would let millions more die because there is no one listening to the story of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

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‘Sport does not exist in a world of its own but reflects the world around it... if language is central to human behaviour, then the language of sport is likely to provide evidence for how we view men and women differently’ (Adrian Beard, *The Language of Sport*).

If we accept Beard’s thesis, then just what can be learned from the language of sports reporting about how we view men and women? In what ways does coverage of women in sports differ from the coverage of men? Do those differences affect how men and women live and work together beyond the sports playing fields? *Sport, Rhetoric, and Gender: Historical Perspectives and Media Representations*, an anthology of scholarly papers and popular articles edited by American communication theorist Linda K. Fuller, invites reflection on these questions.

Fuller, a professor in the Communications Department of Worcester State College in the USA, is currently Visiting Senior Fellow at Northeastern University (2005-2006) with the Institute for Critical Gender and Ethnic Studies Research. Most of her previous published work focuses on popular mass media.

Her latest book analyses what Fuller terms ‘the nexus between rhetoric, sexuality, and sport’. Her objective, she writes, is to ‘deconstruct the role of language in the multibillion dollar infotainment business.’ In combining gender studies, sociolinguistics, and the sociology of sports, Fuller has created a unique anthology marking what she writes in the introduction is ‘the first time gender and language have been applied to the field of sport.’

The anthology presents compelling evidence of the impact of sports on business discourse and practices and on social perceptions of success and appropriate behaviour. In their well-argued chapter *Language, Gender, and Sport: A Review of the Research Literature*, Segrave, McDowell, and King present evidence in support of their theory that if language is a mechanism which can ‘inferiorize women’ then ‘the language of sport in particular can contribute to their cultural devaluation.’

Examples cited include a process the authors call ‘asymmetrical gender marking’ through which women’s athletic events are marginalized. The authors maintain that by identifying (‘marking’) athletic events featuring women as ‘women’s athletic events’ - while identifying events featuring men simply as ‘athletic events’ - the activities of men become the norm and women’s events are understood to be derivative or second-class.

But does this matter? Segrave, et al, argue compellingly that language is indeed ‘critical in the construction of social reality.’ Their analysis supports the theory that language is indeed ‘critical in the construction of social reality.’ Their analysis supports the theory that language is indeed ‘critical in the construction of social reality.’ Their analysis supports the theory that language is indeed ‘critical in the construction of social reality.’ Their analysis supports the theory that language is indeed ‘critical in the construction of social reality.’ Their analysis supports the theory that language is indeed ‘critical in the construction of social reality.’ Their analysis supports the theory that language is indeed ‘critical in the construction of social reality.’ Their analysis supports the theory that language is indeed ‘critical in the construction of social reality.’ Their analysis supports the theory that language is indeed ‘critical in the construction of social reality.’