Roots of Modern Faith:
Fundamentalism, Fideism and the Legacy of Erasmus

James Mark Shields ©1993 (revised 2007)

ABSTRACT
This paper explores two contrasting "styles" or vocabularies of transcendence: *fundamentalism* and *fideism*. After a brief analysis of the main features of fundamentalism generally and within contemporary Christian contexts, the roots of the fundamentalist vocabulary in modern European thought are explored, leading to discussion of a deep conflict rooted in competing vocabularies of the Reformation era—epitomized by the figures of Erasmus Desiderius (1469-1536) and Martin Luther (1483-1546). At the heart of this issue lies the question of whether the very notion of transcendence can be reconciled with the pluralist demands of secular liberalism and the "post-modern" paradigm more generally.

In the early 1990s a five-year program sponsored by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences at the University of Chicago called the Fundamentalism Project began to publish its findings in several weighty tomes, and numerous other works of comparative fundamentalisms have since appeared on the shelves of bookstores and libraries across the Western world. Seeking a common thread, or at least certain recognizable family characteristics shared by the many instances of this contemporary phenomenon, the Fundamentalism Project found that so-called fundamentalists tend to be, for the most part, traditionalists who have been "forced" (by the encroachments of modernity) into activism, in order to secure the "purity" of their faith, and of the particular beliefs and values tied up with (and justified by) that faith. Thus, it is largely in reaction to the forces of modernism, secularism, and relativism that fundamentalists seek to remake the world, via an eclectic combination of modernity and tradition, and utilizing whenever necessary modern *forms* (technologies, mass media) in order to present and "re-establish" traditional *content*.

Lawrence Kaplan (in *Fundamentalism in Comparative Perspective)* gives what he feels is the central need for the study of fundamentalism (as American political theorists like Zbigniew Brzezinski during the height of the Cold War defended the need for a careful study of the menace of totalitarianism), namely, the implications of the ("naturally") hostile political manifestation of such, and more specifically its connection to "terrorism." The particular mindset behind fundamentalism, says Kaplan, what one may call the fundamentalist impulse, is *only* of consequence (and therefore "worthy of attention") when such becomes politically potent (i.e., disruptive), "altering what had been considered the normal and predictable parameters of a country's political life" (Kaplan 5). Without denying the importance of overt political consequences, such an unashamedly functionalist justification for the study of fundamentalism has the danger of neglecting the contextual (psychological, sociological, and historical) roots and motivations that may in fact underscore the *actualization* of the so-called fundamentalist impulse. Most importantly, as I will argue, the fundamentalist impulse is in a certain respect foundational to modern Western thought, and may benefit from an introspective (or reflexive) hermeneutical study.

Fundamentalism has characteristics that have been around for at least as long as religion itself, but the term is generally used to imply the peculiar combination of traditional concepts with certain modern ideas, and modern *techniques* in particular, that makes this a distinctively modern, in some respects even post-modern phenomenon. This curious blending of the old and the new, of unwavering idealism and practical realism, has at its root "a reaction to changing circumstances by [the] select[ion] and recycling [of] parts of a received repertoire of texts and symbols in novel ways" (Ruthven 31). One important point must here be made: fundamentalism as *reaction* need not be confined to the sphere of religion, but may coexist with any body of shared beliefs, being essentially a style or form of faith-orientation. This deserves mention here because there is some danger in attributing a necessary or causal link between, not only fundamentalism and a particular religion (say, Islam), but also between the fundamentalist impulse and religiosity more generally. Religious contexts *are* extremely hospitable (or, negatively, one might say susceptible) to fundamentalism, if only because religion remains in our day the one realm where faith, belief, and a sense of universal Truth can be maintained. God, in however abstract or vacuous a form, still holds the ultimate veridical and justificatory power for many people. And, of course, within the religious context, fundamentalism is not confined to the monotheistic or Abrahamic traditions, but can (and has) become evident in all of the world's major religions.[4]

As a world-view, and a particular form of faith-orientation, then, fundamentalism can be identified by the following family resemblances:

1. A general hostility towards modernity (or, more accurately, towards the values, or lack of such, of modernity), particularly as embodied in the rationalistic, post-Enlightenment world view;

2. a sense of the necessity of reviving or retrieving the past, usually taking under the auspices of a charismatic leader who draws legitimacy from a deity or some other transcendent referent (often in the form of a sacred, revealed text);

3. a reactionary political manifestation that will strive to enforce the (re)-institution of "traditional" values against the current of the times, often accomplished by the

paradoxical use of the tools and techniques of modernity (i.e., guns, video, and the internet) against modern values and society.

Politicized Religion or Sacralized Politics?

The underlying idea [of fundamentalism] is that a given faith is to be upheld firmly in its full and literal form, free of compromise, softening, re-interpretation or diminution.
– Ernest Gellner

In the Western media, the term fundamentalism is most frequently cited with respect to political unrest in the Middle East. Islamic fundamentalism is without question the most noticeable (and perhaps most "successful") religio-political experiment in modern times. The Iranian Revolution of 1979 shocked many in the West as well as in the Middle East, with the very notion of establishing a religious state in the late twentieth century baffling conventional wisdom, which held that the world was leading, slowly but inexorably towards political secularism, whatever the particular ideology expressed in political or economic terms. Not only was the new Islamic Republic a religiously inspired state, it was one that claimed to foment the rebirth of a purified and severe single value-system, a value-system of a culture of the distant past. Moreover, though it is and may remain the only successful political manifestation of Islamic fundamentalism, the Iranian example did not go unnoticed by jihadists, revolutionaries, clerics and secular leaders of other Islamic nations.

The very same year of the Iranian revolution, 1979, witnessed the birth (or rebirth) of fundamentalism as an active and aggressive force in America, in the formation of the (now defunct, at least in name) Moral Majority. It is in fact from Protestant Christianity that the term "fundamentalism" originates: in the late 1920s it was applied to (and proudly accepted and disseminated in turn by) a faction of conservative Protestants concerned with the growth and spread of liberal Protestantism, and insistent on the claim of biblical inerrancy as the basis for the actualization of true Christianity.[5] This movement eventually faded away, overwhelmed perhaps by the McCarthyite crusade that had greater enemies than liberal Christians to defeat. But, with the Reaganite "new morning" for conservatism, and with communism in obvious and irreversible decline, Christian fundamentalism was given new life in the 1980s.

Fundamentalism involves a double-sided reaction: a) against the liberalization (what they perceive, in some cases not unjustifiably, as the virtual secularization) of the faith-tradition in question; a liberalization that is generally carried out by liberals, moderates or reformers who wish to convert long-standing precepts to contemporary tastes; and b) against secular modernity more generally, often lumped under the all-embracing epithet "secular humanism," which is seen to be amoral and destructive, not only to personal values, but inevitably to political culture and social stability. Yet, as has already been suggested, the rejection of the modern is selective: it is often the case that fundamentalists are willing to utilize (often with great expertise) the most advanced technologies and means of the modern world. The goal, a purified, orthodox regime, or at least the hegemony of fundamental values within the larger community, outweighs any qualms they may have regarding the co-optation of the

weapons of the enemy. After all, it is the underlying values and beliefs of the group that are at stake, not the (superficial) state of technological sophistication. In this sense it would be wrong to condemn fundamentalists out of hand for bad faith (though of course there will be cases of such).

The Enlightenment is of course a common target for fundamentalist rhetoric in the West, while the forcible exportation of such (as cultural imperialism), and its consequent failure, is a theme common to both leftist academic circles and within Islamic and Third World fundamentalisms. There is general agreement that the Euro-American emphases on materialism, luxury, and rampant consumerism contribute to the "disintegration of values" now being felt throughout the world. *Anomie*—moral decay on a grand and devastating scale—is understood as the necessary and inevitable culmination of the modern secularist paradigm; the breakdown of family structures (the infamous "family values" issue that has dogged US presidential elections for several decades), and the spread of violence and (especially internet) pornography are cited as evidence in support of this claim. Here arises a point of difference between American (i.e., largely Protestant Christian) fundamentalists and those of the Islamic or Third World varieties: the former frame their arguments in terms of a revivified but distinctly American way of life that includes many of the individualistic values decried by the latter. On the matter of moral decay and the need for a resurrection of values there is common consent, though of course the *content* of the values in question differs accordingly (though perhaps less than one might think).

Fundamentalism embodies a particular form of *politicized religion*—a combination that runs contrary to the modern agreement regarding the separation of Church and State.[6] Steve Bruce suggests that the foundation of the Moral Majority was in fact part of a conscious design of a group of conservative Republicans to utilize religious rhetoric and motifs to further their political goals. For Bruce this is a typical example of the manipulative aspect of fundamentalism, a view that is widespread among Western critics, who frequently deride fundamentalists as little more than carnival hucksters cheating the naïve masses out of their money. However, this condemnation (for such it seems to be, even in Bruce, who couches his remarks in analytical and dispassionate terms) would only be valid if the values and beliefs of the fundamentalist leaders did not reflect those of a recognizable subsection of American society. Dismissing fundamentalism as a scam—an ingenious ruse perpetrated by an hypocritical elite over a hopelessly naïve group of undereducated and underemployed people—not only smacks of intellectual elitism, but seems to be an attempt to explain away the fundamentalist phenomenon as an anomaly, a form of fanaticism which only relates to a small number of easily manipulated loonies. The fundamentalist impulse is much deeper than this, as we shall see, and much more complex.

Certainly, there *are* contradictions to be found in the rhetoric of fundamentalists as they attempt to transpose so-called traditional values onto twentieth and twenty-first century realities, but as we have suggested, content and ends outweigh form and means when it comes to the actualization of the Truth.[7] Also, there appears to be an undeniably gnostic element within such movements: in the Shia version, Islamic clerics and scholars are the sole experts, the only ones capable

of deciphering the content of the sacred texts, and thus come to embody a private elite (akin to Lenin's Bolshevik vanguard), ready to carry out in practice the exact meaning of the transcendent texts, for the good of the people, the community of the faithful. The power of knowledge is unapologetically circumscribed to an in-group within the larger in-group—a highly undemocratic form, it would seem, particularly as such movements often claim to be "popular" uprisings, but we must not conflate these two terms, for (as we know all too well from the experience of twentieth-century Europe) what is popular may not be by any means democratic. Kaplan, speaking of Islamic fundamentalism in a cynical tone reminiscent of Bruce on the Protestant variety, concludes that such "permits a traditionally minded clergy to manipulate the masses for its own advantage" (Kaplan 11). But again, does not the faith of a great number of those involved, a faith that seems very *real* indeed, obfuscate this point? From liberal-democratic eyes such practices seem suspect, but perhaps it is to Allah's or God's advantage that the priests maintain strict control over the sacred referents, and that the family remains the centerpiece of social organization, and so on. While these sacred texts may make no mention of a politicized clergy, family values, or an Islamic Republic, could not practical foresight be here confused with intentional deceit and willful manipulation for strictly power purposes? Obviously I am here playing devil's advocate, and have no wish to defend fundamentalism as a political manifestation, but it *is* my contention that the deeper roots of the problem remain largely unexplored, sacrificed to the equally valuable but limited (and co-opted, as a form of apologia for the cause) liberal political analysis, which tends to be overwhelmingly functionalist in orientation.

The Faith Imperative & the Fundamentalist Impulse

[U]nexpected developments now characterize contemporary world affairs… [and therefore] we should be less confident than some of our Enlightenment forebears that rational modernity will inevitably overcome the remnants of irrational traditionalism.
– Lawrence Kaplan

Unexpected developments, just because they are unexpected, do not arise without a history, out of nowhere. Martin Marty, in his "Fundamentals of Fundamentalism" makes no attempt to determine what role individual psychology may play in fundamentalism, resisting, as he says, the temptation to psychological reductionism. But what about basic "psychological factors," such as personal and interpersonal ideas about faith, or notions of solidarity and exclusionism? In a similar fashion, *The Guardian* newspaper in their treatment of fundamentalism arrives at the conclusion that "fundamentalism has less to do with faith, than with the moral basis of social behaviour" (Ruthven 31). But is not personal faith inextricably intertwined with morality and social behavior, particularly in the context of religion?

At the personal level, the fundamentalist impulse is, first and foremost, a conservative one, and can develop only where there exists a sense of tradition that once had authority, but whose authority is now threatened by the encroachments of the new and/or the other. The element of threat, which *is* more often than not real (though perhaps more diffuse than imagined), bolsters what can be called a siege mentality,

which does not, however, exclude the possibility of heresy, of apostasy from *within* the group. Whether internal or external, the "enemies" must be identified (often indiscriminately co-opted by the all-encompassing bywords like Satan or the Infidel)—a process that is usually left to the leaders of the movement. Once identified, these enemies (whether Zionists, Western imperialists, liberals or secular humanists) bring together all that threatens the "world" that the group seeks to reinvent. Authority is sought, as we have seen, in a charismatic leader, a holy office, a sacred text, each of which is beyond doubt or reproach—infallible—in expressing the "final truth about reality" (Marty "Fundamentals" 20). Though highly exclusionary, fundamentalists may seek to *persuade* (for instance, by means of telecommunications in the USA), though they do not generally aim for the *conversion* of the other, as such would likely lead to further dissolution of the sacred values. Marty employs the image of a castle: "One needs thick walls, fortresses, a 'keep' for the people within[; o]ne needs towers and battlements from which to try to keep others out, or drawbridge over which the party within can make forays to clear space and keep enemies at a distance[; a]nd there must be a moat, into which those who would transgress from either direction would sink."

Thus, exclusionary gnosticism combines with a Manichean attitude towards the universe, which is clearly and unambiguously divided under hegemonies of Good and Evil, with the world (*this* world) pictured as a grand battleground for this apocalyptic struggle. The Good is commensurate with the in-group (purged of apostates and heretics), which defines its boundaries *vis-à-vis* the Other, and thus not only in terms of religious sect but frequently ethnic or tribal affiliation. Tribalism and racialism are not *necessary* elements behind the fundamentalist impulse, but are easily invoked in order to stir up anger and more clearly delineate the boundaries between Us and Them. A strong sense of being chosen as the elect by a transcendent force of some sort reinforces the readiness to go to battle for one's side. In order to act, however, one must have faith, an unremitting faith in the transcendent imperative that has been accurately deciphered by the holy leaders, and that, in its severity, calls one to action.

As a historical phenomenon, the fundamentalist impulse can be viewed in the light of a long history of reaction and counter-reaction in the West. The prospect of a "return" to fundamental or pure principles is an appealing message for persons or groups confronting uncertainties at any level, and particularly those which arise from new and seemingly threatening situations. As Marx well knew, religious certainties fulfill this role admirably, and have done so since long before the sixteenth century, when, in reaction to the decadence of the Roman Church, a certain Wittenburg monk called for a dramatic return to biblical sureties, not only to reaffirm the weakening moral voice of Christianity but also to control the alternative forces unleashed by the European Renaissance.

Christian Fundamentalism I: Protestantism

I believe I owe this duty to the Lord, of crying out against philosophy and turning men to Holy Scripture… It is high time now to be carried away from other studies and to learn Christ and him crucified.
– Martin Luther

A brief look at the most prominent manifestations of Christian fundamentalism in the West (more specifically, the USA) may tell us more about the impulse behind fundamentalism by reinforcing the fact that, while the particular vocabulary expressed in such is not intrinsic to any specific tradition or pattern of historical development, it does have roots that are deeply-ingrained within the development of modern Europe. Fundamentalism has been around in name within Protestant Christianity for eighty years, but it is only recently that critics have begun to appreciate the complexity of the movement. In the 1950s and 1960s, Daniel Bell, Martin Lipset, and Reinhold Niebuhr all regarded such unfamiliar, fervent religiosity as a sign of reactive anti-modernism, and little else—a backward-looking orientation to be swallowed, in due course, by the modern liberal wave. (Ribufffo 35)

In one sense they may have been right: American Protestant fundamentalist groups have recently backed down somewhat on their attacks against non-fundamentalists. Whether this presages a genuine recognition or acknowledgment of, even in some minimal sense, pluralism, or is, as Steve Bruce is more inclined to believe, a mere pragmatic realization by the leaders of such groups (several of whom faced public disgrace in the late 1980s) as to the political inefficacy of virulent exclusionism, there is little doubt that the tone of Protestant fundamentalist rhetoric has been tempered of late. As Bruce puts it: "Although young evangelists still have a strong sense of what is right for them, they no longer seem so sure that what is right for them is also right for everyone else" (Bruce 29). The self-confidence of Protestant fundamentalists has not suffered, however, but rather seems to be growing with this relaxation of standards.

Bruce remains skeptical of the intent of this turn, if it can be even called such; changing the name of the organization (from Moral Majority Inc. to the rather innocuous Liberty Foundation), he says, does not stop fundamentalists from dreaming of the "righteous empire." It does seem to be the case that fundamentalists of the Protestant sort are less inclined to engage in theological disagreements with others (which would entail dialogue and a partial recognition of opposing claims) than to proffer the Truth to those who are in mired in Error (if not in Sin). Despite the less combative approach in the political sphere, fundamentalists *cannot* disavow their gnostic claims, or they would be only one among many, in short, they would be *relativists*. "It is difficult for them to deflate their self-image from that of a 'moral majority' to that of a minority which asks nothing more than the right to do what is right in its own eyes" (Bruce 46). Indeed, any appeal to "minority rights" on the part of Protestant fundamentalists is almost risible when history is taken into account. Other minority groups have good reason to remember the lack of generosity of conservative Protestants when they were themselves in the ascendant.

As such, fundamentalists of the conservative Protestant sort must stick to their majority claims, behaving as if they actually represent a largely silent but numerous section of the American population, if they are to justify their call for the imposition of their particular views (regarding school prayer, pornography, abortion, gay marriage, and so on) upon society as a whole, identifying the Other in this case as a small but powerful group of "liberals" or "secular humanists," who are (systematically?) corrupting the morals and values of the (i.e., God's) nation. Reacting to this threat (which has replaced the

more concrete Red Menace), fundamentalists specifically decry the ill effects of moral particularism, seeking to reverse the privatization of values and beliefs that goes hand-in-hand with the pluralizing tendencies of late modernity.[8]

Critics contend that the New Christian Right errs in wildly overstating the threat against them (a not uncommon tendency of minority or protest movements). Moral pluralism, however widely held, is *not* an ideology imposed upon everyone; what pluralism involves is rather a "dogma of alternatives" (Bruce 50). Inevitably, problems arise whenever alternative value-systems, or faith-orientations, as the case may be, confront each other, and view their own truth-claims as superior to the truth-claims of others, or the previously-defined Other. Bruce is correct in stating that, whether humanism is, as some have claimed, a "functional equivalent" of religion, it clearly does *not* have the same consequences of religion, which provides a common direction to people's lives and a shared world view. On the other hand, secular humanism *can* become "fundamentalist" in terms of exclusionism, gnosticism, and Manicheanism, but upon doing so it effectively forsakes the label "humanism." In other words, it is the "humanism" that denies secular humanism a place as a functional equivalent to fundamentalist religiosity, *not* the "secular" aspect of such; this is an important distinction that will be developed shortly with respect to the emergence of modern Christianity *vis-à-vis* humanism and fundamentalism.

In addition, secular humanism is *not* (any longer) a movement in the sense that fundamentalism can be so termed—it is better understood as the "intellectual endorsement of what has already come to pass" (Bruce 52). Yet, although modernity does not directly challenge religion, it *does* subtly undermine it, though perhaps not in the way that is often assumed. Many fundamentalists recognize this, it would seem, but prefer to speak in terms of direct confrontation, as an agonistic vocabulary has obvious rhetorical advantages. I agree with Bruce in his conclusion that American fundamentalism, as embodied in groups like the Moral Majority and the New Christian Right, *will* fail in their political intentions. But this failure will *not* be because of their religiosity, but rather because of their fundamentalism—their claims to exclusivity, gnostic pretensions, and selective but steadfast anti-modern stance—characteristics that are by no means concomitant with religiosity. Indeed, the NCR has been attacked not only by secularists and liberal theologians but also by several figures of a conservative theological bent who argue that Protestant fundamentalists actually hamper the cause of Protestantism, trivializing the faith and antagonizing Christians and non-Christians alike. Again, the issue comes back to the validity of rival truth-claims, with Protestant fundamentalists leaning on the Canon, i.e., the Bible as interpreted through the evangelist leaders, for justification.

Catholic Integralism: Use of Tradition
History is one long desperate retching and the only thing humanity is fit for is the Inquisition.
– Cardinal Umberto Benigni

Though less well-known than its Protestant counterparts, the Roman Catholic Integralist movement of recent years exemplifies and highlights the discriminating propensity of fundamentalists *vis-à-vis* history; i.e., the selective retrieval of

tradition for the reinforcement of truth-claims, and for the legitimization of the Catholic cause against all attackers, real or perceived. Catholic fundamentalists generally overlook the murky theological issues that so engaged and bedeviled their medieval forebears, focusing instead upon issues most likely to generate emotion and spur controversy, e.g., the question of women priests, clerical celibacy, the use of artificial birth control, and the limits of ecumenism. Less likely than their Protestant counterparts to cite the inerrancy of Scripture, Catholic Integralists tend to lean on the authority of Tradition (i.e., Church history, as a lineal development) and Institution (i.e, the infallibility of the Pope). This sort of papal fundamentalism has been described as "a literal, a-historical, and non-hermeneutical reading of papal pronouncements as a bulwark against the tides of relativism, the claims of science, and the inroads of modernity" (Coleman 76). Yet Integralism is not entirely a-historical; it places a high value on history, but only on a very specific *transcendent* history. Like Scripture for the Protestants, the papacy (and Church tradition) ultimately stand above history, free from suspicion, containing a safe guide for all behavior—an open path along the King's Highway, to borrow from Bunyan. Uncritical acceptance of papal authority becomes, as it were, the litmus test for orthodoxy.

In short, it is Christian history, embodied in the tradition of the Apostles and the Church fathers (and excluding of course the schismatics of the East and North) that holds sway, *not* history as such (Cardinal Benigni's "one desperate retching" echoes, of all things, Marx's "history as nightmare" or perhaps Henry Ford's "history as bunk"); and so it is only the former which holds anything of relevance to the present and the future. When this authority was challenged by a modernist movement within the Church in the early twentieth century, one which sought to build a "true Catholicism of the future" based upon the role of religion rather than the demands of an ("outdated") scholastic theology, these modernist apostates were ostracized from the bosom of the one, true Church, and subsequently lumped together with secular anticlerical and "Masonic" enemies of Catholicism.[9] In 1907, Pope Pius X condemned modernism as "the synthesis of all heresies," and marshaled the full power of the Roman hierarchy to crush the enemy. (Coleman 82)

Catholic Integralists, like many fundamentalists, do not see themselves as "anti-modern," a term which implies, they (quite correctly) argue, an aspect of world-renunciation or cenobitism espoused by monastics, millennial sects, and cults across the globe, but that is virtually nonexistent within fundamentalist groups. Fundamentalists seek to be *in* modernity, but not to be *of* it: confronting the world as it is, they seek to *transform* modernity into a new modernity, one that, somewhat paradoxically, will revive traditional values and ideas. Very much a vehicle of protest, Catholic Integralists binarize the world into two irredeemably hostile and antagonistic world-views (giving belated victory to the Manichean heretics they once excommunicated). Perhaps unsurprisingly, recent comparative treatments of fundamentalism have found marked similarities between theirs and the language of twentieth-century fascism as the incarnation of authoritative populism. It is perhaps unsurprising to learn that arch-Integralist Cardinal Benigni supported Mussolini because "the rise of fascism, by making a clean sweep of a political system into which the Church

(increasingly) did not fit, speeded up the possibility of setting up a real party of Christian order which would usher in the final redemption of society" (Coleman 87). *A clean sweep.* Hardly muddle-headed ideologues, fundamentalists often show remarkable opportunism (the Mussolini-concord being an example of politicized religion at its best, or worst) by superimposing a political dimension on its conflicts with modernity, in the hopes that political change may entail the end of pernicious pluralism. In the 1930s, Integralism in Italy mobilized its weight around stock symbols and motifs of nationalist patriotism and xenophobia.

In recent decades, Catholic Integralism has faced the same sort of problems as the Protestant NCR, particularly with respect to the slow, but progressive liberalization of the Vatican and the papacy. Welded to their faith in Tradition is their adherence to the pope, who, if he becomes too reformist, may leave the Integralists (who maintain disproportionate but by no means absolute power in the Vatican) in a quandary of conflicting allegiances. The Vatican II Council of the 1960s was a significant setback, but stoked the movement to greater steadfastness. More recently the possible election of the potentially radical reformist Cardinal Martini of Milan to the papal throne after the twenty-year reign of the fairly reliably conservative John Paul II no doubt caused great concern among Integralists, who have reason to be pleased with the selection of Cardinal Ratzinger as Pope Benedict XVI. Even so, with the very real threat of excommunication (as in the case of the Integralist Henri Lefebvre, perhaps the first in the long history of the practice to be excommunicated for being *too* traditional), Catholic fundamentalists may choose schism over acceptance of change.[10] The retching of history, it seems, is far from over.

Monopolizing Truth: "Madmen" and Modernity
In what way can substantive content, be it a logical axiom or non-logical in its nature, so affect formal logic as to admit of variation of style of thinking while maintaining intact the invariability of form?… [T]his problem is no longer empirical and psychological, but methodological and metaphysical, for behind it stands in all its a priority the first question of all ethics: How can God permit error, how is it that a madman is allowed to live in God's world?
– Hermann Broch

As Hermann Broch penned the above lines, in an exposition called the Disintegration of Values in the European World (in his philosophical novel *The Sleepwalkers*), Cardinal Benigni and Pope Pius X were collaborating with Mussolini in a vain attempt to salvage the Church in a new age. *Pace The Guardian*'s comment that fundamentalism has less to do with faith than with the moral basis of social behavior, the modernist controversy and the fundamentalist reaction of Catholic Integralism was *very much* about the nature of religious truth, the grounds for belief, and the implications of a particular faith-orientation, or "style" of faith in a transforming world. Against the scholastics, Vatican authorities and proto-Integralists, who contended that Christian Truth was universal and unchanging and that such could be properly interpreted and disseminated only through the teaching authority of the Church, the modernists suggested the possibility of a changing, transforming vision of truth, one

which could be reinforced by ideas and traditions outside of the Church, and even outside the Christian tradition.

At a 1988 Berkeley conference on fundamentalismm, Robert Bellah spoke of "Enlightenment Fundamentalism," suggesting that the recent global resurgence of religious traditionalist movements came about largely as a reaction not only to modernity but to the narrow scientistic intolerance that frequently coincided with such—i.e., the "cribbed and confined" world view of the general academy, dedicated to an exclusionary tactic of eliminating anything beyond the purview of what Habermas has called the "technical-rational paradigm for understanding the world" (Coleman 79). This is an important point towards the realization that fundamentalism has roots in a particular understanding of *belief* in a *truth,* i.e., one that is transcendent, non-contingent, exclusionary, and even imperialistic; and in a *faith* that rises above what is rational and empirical—*and* ultimately beyond what is (merely) human.

According to Gabriel Daly, the phenomenon of fundamentalism gains support from a widespread anti-intellectualism that questions the validity of academic attempts to transform or reinterpret the purity and strength of faith. (Coleman 92) Daly insists that this protest cannot be simply dismissed as "irrationalism," though it brings to mind Heidegger's comment on Marx's dictum—"philosophers interpret the world, but the point is to change it"—that the first part of the statement denies what is implicitly pre-supposed in the second half. The *protest* of fundamentalism poses an important question, not only to church-affiliated theologians (as Daly suggests), but also to anyone concerned with the ramifications of moral pluralism and the ongoing absolutism-relativism debate, or interested in the effects of their faith and belief may have in a pluralized post-modern world. The question is: "How is it that when religious belief and practice are brought into harmony with reasonable requirements of the secular world, so often they lose their power to attract and satisfy?" (Coleman 93) This, indeed, is the crux of the matter: religion within the limits of reason alone, whether *à la* Kant, Comte, or John Dewey, seems to be little more than secularism disguised with the use of an abstract quasi-theological terminology. Moreover, rationalism and positivism neglect the non-rational element that appears in all religions, and that plays a vital role in conversion and religious experience. Daly has the (final?) word: "It sometimes seems that a church which squares up with modernity loses precisely the 'Dionysian' element which fundamentalism so often preserves."

But must the rest be silence? Must we choose between Descartes and Dionysus, with Nietzsche's hero being the only figure around which to center the revolt against the Kafkaesque world of late modernity? The Dionysian element, the most non-rational aspect of religion, is, in essence, faith. It seems safe to conclude that faith cannot be abjured nor vindicated by reason or logic. But then what are we to make of faith, and can there be any truth at all, except what resides within the individual? There can surely be faith without knowledge or proof, but can their be faith without foundation, without a Surety, a Certitude that excludes variations? Saying "I believe" is quite distinct from saying "What I believe is true/right," which in turn is quite different from the statement "Since what I believe is true/right, then what you or others believe, insofar as it differs from what I believe, is

wrong/false; and thus you who do not belong to my faith-group cannot, by virtue of this difference/opposition, share in the esteem/rights allocated to those who do belong." Yet how often has a link been made between these assumptions, a sort of slippery slope from belief to exclusionism and beyond.

Breaking down these associations, leveling the slope, as it were, is the task of any investigation that is both critical and humanist. If, as critical theologian Hans Küng has argued, truth and falsity are not monopolized by any religious tradition, and in fact have no "vertical" allegiance to any one conception of transcendence, but rather run "horizontally" across all faiths, then fundamentalism, as a horizontal phenomenon, stands before us as a possible "falsehood" *vis-à-vis* the particular faiths in which it is manifest. Fundamentalism has often been judged and criticized as dangerous to socio-political (and of course, economic) stability and to the liberal-democratic conception of "human rights," but it may also be detrimental, antithetical even to its alleged cause, namely the spread and development of religiosity in the world.

Yet the alternative to fundamentalism cannot be conceived as a singularity; relativism is not an alternative option, but a prospective *ground* on which to imagine other options. A critical hermeneutical examination of that crucial and formative period for Christian faith, the Reformation, together with a brief analysis of several of its most prominent spokesmen and concepts opens up the possibility of other paths: belief without exclusionism, faith without gnostic pretensions, a different use and conception of history and tradition, an a recognition of the failures of Christianity and the possible contingency of its truth.

Faith and the Dawn of Modernity
The world-historical significance of the Reformation has not lessened with the passing of time. Not only does it mark a new epoch—the Protestant era—in the history of Christianity, but modern civilization itself may look back to it for its beginnings.
– Richard Reardon

In *After Virtue,* Alasdair MacIntyre argues that the problems of modern moral theory emerge clearly as the product of the failure of the Enlightenment project, agreeing, in this regard, with many Christian fundamentalists. The individual moral agent is freed from hierarchy and teleology, becomes sovereign in her moral authority, yet the inherited (if partially transformed) "rules of morality" lose power in being deprived of their teleological or categorical character as expressions of divine law. (MacIntyre 62). Despite countless attempts to overcome it, this difficulty seems to be insolvable, and justifies a re-examination or exhumation of classical (for MacIntyre, Aristotelian) motifs of morality and the virtues. The focus of the present investigation is the meaning and use of faith in a socio-historical context rather than specific moral vocabularies, but the crisis of relativism has implications that span both realms. In order to trace the origins of the dominant conceptions of faith in the Christian context, it will be useful to re-examine that critical and formative period in Western history in which two grand revolutions almost simultaneously transformed what Foucault would call the modern "episteme"—the Renaissance and the Reformation.

The European Renaissance contested, for the first time since Constantine, the supreme unity of values embodied in the hegemonic Christian tradition. While it is otiose in the twenty-first century to view the Middle Ages as a period of darkness and decay or, alternatively, as a mythic golden age, in terms of religious faith it is fair to say that matters *were* relatively untroubled. [11] For the modern Romantic, of course, the notion of a single overwhelming value-system renders this period a positive archetype:

> [T]he faith was the point of plausibility in which every line of enquiry ended, the faith was what enforced logic and gave it that specific colouring, that style-creating impulse which expresses itself not only in a certain style of thinking, but continues to shape a style characterizing the whole epoch for so long as the faith survives. (Broch 447)

Yet, if the faith was pure and simple, the keepers of the Truth had grown corrupt, and scholastic theology, by introducing an abstract Aristotelian God, dared to make of the highly personal God of the Middle Ages "an entity whose name could no longer be spoken and whose image could no longer be fashioned," one that ascended into the infinite neutrality of the abstract and was lost to sight, no longer imminent but utterly beyond the reach of humanity. The combination of the scholastics removal of the point of plausibility to the plane of the infinite, the effective withdrawal of faith from concrete life (destroying what Broch called the "simple sufficiency of existence"), and the blatant corruption of the worldly papacy could not but provoke a reaction of some sort.

In short, medieval culture, "insofar as it was a unity at all, was a fragile an complex balance of a variety of disparate and conflicting elements… it is necessary to recognize a number of different and conflicting strands in medieval culture, each of which imposed its own strains and tensions on the whole" (MacIntyre 166). One particular reaction to the scholasticism of Aquinas began not long after his own time, and by the fifteenth century had emerged as the *via moderna,* which, under the influence of thirteenth-century English nominalist William of Occam, drastically limited the role of reason in human knowledge of things divine.[12] In the "modern way" truth cannot be rationally or empirically understood, but can only be found via a higher authority, which for Occam was to be found in biblical revelation. Thus *fideism* was born, as a form of dogmatic positivism with roots in a thoroughgoing skepticism.[13] Occamite fideism was to have no small impact on Martin Luther, who absorbed it in his days as an Augustinian cenobite. By the fifteenth century, the bankruptcy of scholasticism was becoming increasingly evident, and the tide turning with the Renaissance from the centralization of an ecclesiastical *organon* to the multifariousness of direct experience—from the Platonic pattern of medieval theocracy to the positivist contemplation of the empirically-given and endlessly changing world. Atomization of the world had begun, and the atomization of value-systems was soon to become a possibility for the first time.

Reaction to the institutional Church itself arrived somewhat later, and with much greater consequences. The Reformation, often dated from All Saints' Day 1517, that fateful afternoon when Martin Luther tacked his ninety-five theses onto the unsuspecting door of the Wittenburg Cathedral, was in part a *continuation* and in part a *reaction* to the flowering if the Renaissance. On the one hand, the inward turning of the eye allowed for a more immediate and re-personalized apprehension of the divinity, freed from the middlemen of the Church hierarchy. Yet the atomizing of value-systems had to be checked by a reaffirmation of Christian values, based on a purified (re-)espousal of the inerrancy of Scripture, the Gospel. Protestantism borrowed Renaissance immediacy and reinforced its glorification of action—of the *deed* that is so conspicuous in Renaissance expression. Partly by virtue of its origin an active faith, Protestantism "presupposes a religiously active man, endowed with the same positive activity as the… scientific researcher… soldier, or politician (of today)" (Broch 485). Yet even in the midst of this call to action lay an unrelenting severity, a categorical imperative of duty, an exclusion of all other value-systems; in short, a reaffirmation of pre-Renaissance absolutism.

Luther: God's Lasquenet
[T]hey who do not rightly estimate the Reformation cannot rightly understand Luther, since Luther apart from the Reformation would cease to be Luther.
– C. J. Hare

The Reformation can hardly be discussed without mention of Martin Luther, whose towering figure embodies the power as well as the contradictions of the reformulation of Christian faith which took place five hundred years ago, and whose words and deeds may shed some light on the historical and philosophical roots of a certain vocabulary of faith that we find embodied in modern fundamentalism. If fundamentalism seeks to remake the world, intent on the restoration of all things to the divine, then Luther is a kindred ancestor, a proto-fundamentalist both in spirit, and in deed. A born fighter, Luther not only rejected the (worldly and spiritual) claims of the wayward Church of Rome, but denounced, with at least equal fervor, his humanist peers for daring to put human affairs above, or even on the same level as divine things. Moreover, Luther eschewed skepticism and doubt (reborn with the Renaissance and to become prime motifs of the Enlightenment): "Without certitude," he wrote to Erasmus, "Christianity cannot exist… [a] Christian must be sure of his doctrine and his course, or he is no Christian" (Zweig 38). "God's lasquenet" (as Stefan Zweig calls him) insisted on the *literal rendering* of the sacred text, placing particular emphasis on Christ's enigmatic dictum: "I came not to send peace, but a sword" (Matt 10:34). As is the case in most revolutions, it can be said that Luther's sword escaped his control before long, and he was forced to condemn those "radical reformers" who were instigated by his teachings and deeds. Protestantism began as a partial system of values that needed to claim absoluteness in order to survive. Broch calls this "that remarkable ambiguity" that characterizes every partial system, an ambiguity that "amounts to dishonesty, epistemologically-speaking:

> on the one hand the partial system adopts the attitude of a total system towards the process of advancing disintegration and stigmatizes the irrational as rebellious and criminal, while on the other hand it is compelled to

distinguish among the homogeneous mass of irrationality and anonymous wickedness a group of 'good' irrational forces which are needed to help it in checking further disintegration and in establishing its own claims to survival. (Broch 636)

Luther's trump card was his notion of justification by faith—*by faith alone*—a specifically religious (as opposed to ethical) conviction, which implies that a person's standing with God is far more important than any moral end she hopes to achieve, even *with* God's help. For Luther faith is neither mere intellectual assent nor a formal theological concept, but is primarily an *experience*, an experience that makes a "new man," who nevertheless will always remain a sinner in the eyes of God. Richard Reardon claims that this justification by faith alone principle was of epoch-making significance: discrediting the "works-righteousness" of traditional religion, salvation becomes God's gift, not humanity's labored achievement. (Reardon 60). The sinner is but a passive recipient of divine grace, yet he gains his freedom *vis-à-vis* the church with its rules and legalistic procedures. A cynical view of Luther's victory in this regard is put forth by Bernard Shaw, who admits that, though it may be said that pre-Reformation Christianity involved very real sacrifices, "Luther delivered us from all that. His reformation was a triumph of imagination and a triumph of cheapness... [bringing] you complete salvation and ask[ing] you for nothing but faith." [14]

Some implications of this shift: since there is no longer any real clergy or priesthood except the baptized, there is no longer any difference between the spiritual estate and the temporal; with regard to Scripture, it is, as the Gospel, self-authenticating, when received with an open-heart. In a stance reminiscent of the Islamic rigorists who brought about the destruction of the "superfluous" knowledge at Alexandria, what cannot be proven out of scripture, or at least supported by its *clear indications*, is either irrelevant or false. Luther recognized, it seems, the danger of literalism and "illuminism" giving free reign to idiosyncratic readings of the Word, and fought against such cases that sprung up even in his own lifetime (e.g., Thomas Müntzer being), yet he could only claim that such were not evocations of the *true* gospel as he himself claimed. For Luther was insistent that his convictions, though revolutionary, were meant to *cleanse*, and not to *destroy* the Church: "the reformed Church he envisaged and sought to bring about would be not simply a return... to the church of the New Testament, but a continuation of that whose life and fundamental witness to the truth in Christ Jesus had persisted through the centuries" (Reardon 76).

Of course, the elites and scholastics of the sixteenth-century Church were not to be easily convinced by the rhetoric of this upstart monk from Germany. Fiercely traditional, in the literal sense of preservation of a direct line of revelation and concomitant way of life, the defenders of Christian orthodoxy could honestly feel themselves justified in obtaining recantations from heretics by the employment of the most extreme forms of physical torture, because it was there unspoken conviction that only *faith*—which they identified with an orthodoxy built up through a millennia and a half of Church history—could open the way to salvation. [15] Faith was a matter of unswerving commitment to dogma codified by the one, true, holy and apostolic Church of Rome. Although Luther rejected these norms, his views were couched in a

similar (i.e., gnostic-Manichean) language, except that it was Scripture that was to be the new and final standard of Christian orthodoxy, not the Catholic creed. Like the fundamentalists of today, Luther fought a two-front war, and was largely successful in calling forth a purified retrieval of the past while disclaiming the orthodoxy of unbroken tradition professed by his enemies in Rome.

Thus, the Reformation led by Martin Luther was a reaction, medieval in ethos, against certain tendencies of the contemporary world, which at the same time, by breaking the hegemony of unified ecclesiastical power, paved the way for the gradual secularization process that overwhelmed modernity through the Enlightenment to modern times. Unwittingly, the breach opened up by the reformers rendered it possible for new intellectual and social forces to gradually secure the emancipation of secular life from ecclesiastical tutelage. Yet this process was an unintentional one, surely; Luther aimed to *purify* Christian practice in order to save it from what he saw (perhaps rightly) as eventual dissolution, and he certainly had little sympathy for the spirit of the age which was dawning, that of the Renaissance. In fact, it can be argued that, despite his opposition to the papacy, Luther's medievalism ensured a shared understanding between himself and his Roman foes, and thus he was in some sense less of a threat to the established Church than his erstwhile mentor and eventual foe: Erasmus of Rotterdam.

Erasmus: The First European?
It would show a far more Christian spirit if every man would set argument aside and make what voluntary contribution he can to the common interest, acting in all sincerity; putting off his pride to learn what he does not know and ridding himself of jealousy to teach what he knows.
– Erasmus Desiderius

The Roman Church and Luther shared a common-ground of presuppositions, as well as a common vocabulary based upon a distinctively medieval world-view; Erasmus Desiderius spoke a quite different language altogether, one which, though agreeable to modern ears, was often difficult for his enemies (on both sides) to comprehend. Erasmus (called "the first conscious European" by Stefan Zweig) was as much a product of the Renaissance as he was a spark to the Reformation; he stood for "the freedom of the questing human intelligence in a manner that (both Rome and Luther) sensed as a threat to supernatural authority, however mediated" (Reardon 11).

Erasmus sought to reform Christianity on an *ethical*, as opposed to a *theological* level, using the newly formed vocabulary of humanism which, beginning in fourteenth-century Italy, had rediscovered the literature of classical antiquity (Lat. *literae humaniores*), and had introduced a standard of human achievement by which civilization might be judged, a set of criteria *other* than the specifically Christian one. Though prone, particularly in Italy, to a somewhat naïve, posturing classicism, the humanist movement infused European thinking with a new critical spirit that contrasted sharply with the narrow formalism of the theological tradition, especially in its rigid scholastic forms. The central concern of Erasmus is one that remains relevant, perhaps more so now than in his own time: *How can one in all honesty be at once a man of culture and a Christian?* or, more generally, *How can one be simultaneously a free human and a servant to divine*

truth? (Küng *Theology* 20) The answer for the Dutch humanist was to be found in the linking of education and piety, culture and religion, antiquity and Christianity, and, most importantly, *the human and the divine*. One could, he concluded, be authentically human by being a Christian and be a Christian by being human—Christian faith being couched in terms of human freedom and hope.[16]

Wary of venturing into the airy realms of dogmatic theology, not only from a sense of incompetence in matters so abstruse but also from a conviction that Christian doctrine is essentially simple and practical, Erasmus's innovation lay in bringing the speculative intellect to expose the superfluities and absurdities of much of what made up Christian tradition, stripping Christianity to its roots in what he called the "philosophy of Christ." He neither shunned the use of reason (like the early fideists and Luther) nor attempted to justify faith by reason (like the Thomists). Yet in one sense Erasmus was closer to Occam and Luther than to Aquinas, i.e., in his fideism; though his was a fideism of a minimized, or undogmatic sort. Preferring the *via moderna* when it came to the essentials of faith (i.e., matters that could neither be explained nor falsified by reason), he did not go so far as to discard the use of the intellect and the benefits of knowledge in explicating and justifying the more mundane (but perhaps most significant) aspects of the religious life, namely the *living* of such. Erasmus's humanistic fideism cannot be called dogmatic positivism, as not everything can be justified on the grounds of faith alone. Again, his intent was to delineate a true philosophy of Christ, which required little in the way of theological intricacy, but which, starting from a minimized faith in Christ would make full use of humanity's gift of knowledge and introspection. Moreover, for Erasmus the end of such knowledge should not be the growth of the speculative intellect but rather the *enlightenment of the moral conscience*.

The philosophy of Christ was, in essence, nothing more or less than the meaning of Christ himself, the *living* Christ: simplicity, patience, purity, humility.[17] Christ's ethical precepts, says Erasmus, are not to be explained away or glossed over in favor of (Pauline) "salvationism," but are to be taken literally, though in the spirit no less than the letter. This is particularly true of the virtue of *charity:*

> Edifying your neighbour, counting all men members of the same body, thinking of them all as one in Christ, rejoicing in the Lord over your brother's good fortune as over your own, relieving his misfortunes, correcting with gentleness such as err, instructing the ignorant, lifting up the fallen, consoling the dejected, helping those who toil, succouring those in need.[18]

Above all, *pride*, the worst of all vices, must be assiduously countermanded, including the pride of knowledge that can lead to arrogance and disdain for others. In this picture, Jesus in neither a judge nor a mediator, but a model; the externals of the religious life are relatively unimportant compared to the way in which one actually lives one's life. Erasmus can in no way be deemed a "radical" if by such is meant a literalist return to scripture and New Testament patterns. In fact, a central tenet of his Christian humanism is the treatment of the Bible as an inordinately valuable yet ultimately human and literary work—to be interpreted with all the external knowledge that can be brought to bear upon it.[19]

Erasmian reformism was swept away by the flood-tides of the Reformation, in which he was upstaged by Luther, who turned from his early reverence of the Dutch scholar to an eventual disdain for the latter's "betrayal" of Christian reform. Erasmus never condemned Luther for heresy, yet he was terrified of the younger man's "German consistency" and his willingness to overthrow much of what, in Erasmus's eyes, should have been left standing. "I laid a hen's egg," he is reputed to have said, "but what Luther hatched was a bird of a quite different sort" (DeMolen 32). Luther's criticism of Erasmus, ("human affairs mean more to him than divine things") is just, but makes a distinction that Erasmus himself would not have made. Human affairs, by virtue of being human, were in some sense already "divine," and divine things were best exemplified in human beings living the philosophy of Christ. Gradually, argues Zweig, out of this essential difference arose a far greater contrast, a split between two very different conceptions of the nature and meaning of the Christian message, as well as the meaning of faith and the use of knowledge more generally.

For the humanist, Christ was the messenger of everything human—the divine being who had given his blood in order that the shedding of blood might disappear from the world, together with discord and quarrelsomeness. To this the inflexible Luther responded that the true Christian must never yield an inch of ground when God's word is at stake, even if, in so doing, the world should have to be demolished. Erasmus confessed, on more than one occasion, that he was temperamentally opposed to dissension in addition to finding it contrary to the principles of Christ: "I see," he concluded with some prescience, "how much easier it is too start than to assuage a tumult." When confronted (by Hutten) on his "defection" from the reformers camp and his seeming refusal to die for the Gospel, Erasmus replied that he would not refuse to do so if the need arose, but he was "in no mind to die for the paradoxes of Luther." [20] Moreover, to Erasmus's mind, the sorts of questions dividing the reformers and Rome were essentially theological problems of the sort that were best left to discussion in the schools, and were certainly not principles of faith demanding martyrdom. Here Erasmus seems to have underestimated the importance of a cognitive shift that was taking place with regard to the essentials of faith, one that was, essentially, a revivified medieval way of thinking and of speaking about truth.

Theological dogmatism, or dogmatism of *any* sort for that matter, was naturally repellent to Erasmus; too many things had been defined and (acrimoniously) debated on which it would have been better to confess ignorance. If religion (as he envisaged) was to bring peace and reconciliation, rather than cause strife, hatred and discord, then theological definitions would have to be kept to a minimum, and personal opinion given more allowance. Faith is, at heart, a personal choice, and cannot be created by coercion, or even by persuasion. Of infallibility, whether papal, conciliar (traditional), or scriptural, what evidence was there? Nor indeed, Eramus might say, is reason infallible, and one must refrain from judging matters as though one thought it was. "Circumspect and clear-sighted, and ever aware of the obscurity pervading so many things on which men feel deeply, [Erasmus] could always appreciate the strength of opposing arguments, knowing that truth and justice are rarely an exclusive possession" (Reardon 39). To acquire knowledge, the

humanist realized, demands application and patience, and sound opinions can be reached only after much reflection and self-critical candour (cf. "ironism," below). Erasmus understood well enough the need for change, perhaps far-reaching change, in societies embedded in a long and relatively unified Christian tradition, but he also saw the benefits of the single value-system, and the importance of retaining some aspects of a culture that had been so long in the making and that may be useful in the face of a future uncertain.

Many thinkers—writers, philosophers, and theologians—in recent times have looked to Erasmus as a rather tragic figure in a formative age; as perhaps the voice of a possible *tertium quid,* a third way between the absolutist vocabularies of the warring and increasingly polarized sides of the Reformation; and as a "paragon of rational amenity in a violent and vociferous age."[21] Though by all means a Berlinian fox, Erasmus was no penetrating thinker of the Nietzschean sort, able to expound provocative ideas in the confines of an epigram, yet his breadth of knowledge was never circumscribed into systematic form, and his skepticism and intellectual tolerance, which may have been the reason for his "defeat," can now be looked upon as a beacon for writers of all sorts, especially theologians. No traditionalist, Erasmus sought, like Luther, to "purify" Christianity, but to do so by appealing to reason as well as faith, particularly by revealing the superfluous absurdities of the Church while emphasizing the oneness of Christianity with humanism, which shared a quintessence of "peace and unanimity." His reform was to be sought and manifested on the level of ethics—the ordering of one's life in the spirit of Jesus.[22] As far as he was concerned, *nothing* of great moral meaning or ethical significance to humankind should be excluded from what is considered Christian. Certainly Erasmus had his weaknesses, not least of which is his refusal to debate and make the effort of conciliation when events required his (profoundly influential) voice. His was not a spirit to inspire martyrs, but after fifteen hundred (or two thousand) years of Christianity, who needs more martyrs? Erasmus realized MacIntyre's point that "it is not how to die a martyr but how to relate to the forms of daily life that a Christian must learn" (MacIntyre 107).

In sum, the message of Desiderius Erasmus, and the break between he and Martin Luther, have no small importance not just to an understanding of the development of modern Christianity but also to the development of the modern vocabularies of faith, belief, and values. Their split resulted not simply from theological differences, but more so from their contrasting temperaments and world-views: Luther's resting on the theocentricity of traditional belief, Erasmus's on a sense of the inherent capacity of human beings to fashion their own destiny, to write their own story in the form of a narrative quest, albeit one that is informed, guided even, by the "philosophy of Christ" and by the knowledge and reflection gleaned from experience of "men and letters."

Notes

1. "There is a tendency for the major intellectual conflicts in human history to be binary. Great issues polarize mankind" (Gellner 1992, 1).

2. In whose company Berlin includes Shakespeare, Herodotus, Aristotle, Montaigne, Erasmus, Molière, Goethe, Pushkin, Balzac, and Joyce, and with whom he might have added anti-systematicians like Baudelaire ("Un système est une espèce de damnation qui nous pousse à une abjuration perpétuelle; il en faut toujours inventer un autre, en cette fatigue est un cruel châtiment."), as well as Nietzsche, to whom Walter Kaufmann attributes the following attitude: "The thinker who believes in the ultimate truth of his system, without questioning its presuppositions, appears more stupid than he is: he refuses to think beyond a certain point"; and this, according to Nietzsche, is a "subtle moral corruption." Moreover, in the absence of a clearly knowable Truth or realm of Certitude, the sure-footed systematician, without a hint of the paradoxes and contradictions of which life seems to be so largely composed, may be one who lacks the open-mindedness requisite for the coming age. The difficulty lies, of course, in drawing the line, as T.S. Eliot once said, between healthy skepticism and unhealthy pyrrhonism; and, one might add, between consistency and constancy.

3. Mannheim 187. "Even though," Mannheim continues, "he does not discover 'truth itself', he will discover the cultural setting and many hitherto unknown 'circumstances' which are relevant to the discovery of the truth. As a matter of fact, if we believe that we already **have** the truth, we will lose interest in obtaining those very insights which might lead us to an approximate understanding of the situation. It is precisely our uncertainty which brings us a good deal closer to reality than was possible in former periods which had faith in the absolute." Cf. Renan: "*In utrumque paratus…* [b]e ready for anything—that perhaps is wisdom. Give ourselves up, according to the hour, to confidence, to skepticism, to optimism, to irony, and we may be sure that at certain moments at least we shall be with the truth" (cited in James *Varieties* 37).

4. Indeed, in recent decades the Indian subcontinent has erupted in battles between competing religious factions, most notably between Muslim and Hindu extremists, the latter of whom are centralized in the BJP Party, a fiercely fundamentalist group led by the rather enigmatic figure of the Dowager Maharani of Gwalia, Cajmator Vijayaraje Scindia. See Dalrymple.

5. Clifford Geertz calls this reliance on a sacred text as transcendent referent "scripturalism."

6. In terms of political pressure, fundamentalists invariably shift the political agenda to the right, a fact worrying to liberals and feminists alike. The (rather undeveloped, as of yet) studies of women and fundamentalism reveal a generally reactionary androcentrism that ranges from mild sexism to overt misogyny. For the Islamic Scripturalist, women are insatiable beings whose licentious behavior must be both strictly surveyed and rigidly controlled. Echoing, quite remarkably in some respects, the sexual paranoia exhibited in much of early modern European society, if a woman is not closely monitored and supervised, it is thought, she will waste no time in leading the unsuspecting male down the road of perdition, beginning with the destruction of the family, the very foundation of the Muslim community. Indeed, a patriarchal discourse seems to be common to most, if not all, fundamentalist movements; their "antifeminist" attitude is cited by Lawrence Kaplan as a central feature of their anger at modernist patterns.

7. One example being the Moral Majority's dual claim that, on the one hand, *anomie* is rife and spreading throughout the nation, *yet* America is still, and will remain, "God's land." See Kaplan 11-12.

8. Ironically, the Protestant Reformation was in large part a reaction that *favored* the privatization of faith against the elitist and removed hierarchy of the Vatican.

9. Recent scholarship has seen interesting arguments regarding the dangers of proximity. Lester Kurtz (*The Politics of Heresy*) notes that the principal enemy of fundamentalism often tends to be less an external enemy than a deviant insider like "liberal religiosity"—a "stalking Trojan horse that brings the values of secular modernity into the midst of the religious camp" (Kurtz 22). Thus, American Protestant fundamentalist invective is as strong, if not stronger, against the National Council of Churches than anyone else, and Catholic Integralist polemic is turned more towards progressive Catholic theologians ("modernists," and recently, "postmodernists") than against secularists. Proximity in space and in shared history, tradition, and aspects of life is considered dangerous by many fundamentalists, who believe that dissidents working *within* an organization are more likely to attract followers and affect schism than external critics who, by virtue of their exteriority, speak a different language altogether, and can make no legitimate claims. Lewis Caser, writing about the "scapegoating" of deviant insiders, notes that "the search for or invention of a dissenter *within* may serve to maintain a structure which is threatened from *outside*" (see Coleman 82).

10. Lefebvre has this to say about the disastrous effects of modernism in the Church: "*Liberté* was embodied in the pernicious doctrine of religious freedom; *egalité* was expressed in 'collegiality', the idea that all bishops of the world formed a team with the pope, thus undermining the papal monarchy; while *fraternité* took the form of ecumenism which allegedly masked the differences between Christians" (see Coleman 84).

11. Broch: "[As] a world founded on being, not on becoming…its [i.e., the medieval world's] social structure, its art, the sentiments that bound it together, in short, its whole system of values, was subordinated to the all-embracing living value of the faith" (447).

12. William of Occam (or Ockham, ca. 1285-1349) gave the "modern way" the alternative appellation "nominalism." Shaking the theological assumptions of the edifice of scholasticism, rejecting the narrow premises on which such was erected, and proclaiming (often under heavy persecution) the infinity of the universe, the plurality of worlds, and the arbitrary (non-central) position of the earth in the universe, Occam was an early critic of the papacy, and is cited, though not always without irony, by Luther as "my dear master."

13. The term "fideism" will be used in this essay as an umbrella term for a form of faith-orientation extending from Occam, through Erasmus (and tempered by his humanism) to Kierkegaard and Unamuno in the nineteenth century. See Gardner.

14. Shaw 21. He continues: "Luther did not know what he was doing in the scientific sociological way in which we know it; but his instinct served him better than knowledge could have done; for it was instinct rather than theological casuistry that made him hold so resolutely to Justification by Faith as the trump card by which he should beat the Pope, or as he would

put it, the sign in which he should conquer. He may be said to have abolished the charge for admission to heaven" (27).

15. "The way to salvation was through the acceptance of norms of beliefs and behaviour extrinsic to the mind's need to understand its experience and to the moral aspirations of the individual" (A.H.T. Levi, in Erasmus 25).

16. "[A]nd the Christian faith and the grace of freedom [will] be ours again. Then we shall be able to say: 'A Christian is a faithful servant of all things and subject to every man', no less than: 'A Christian is a free master over all things and subject to no man' for both will be true, and that is how we should think of true freedom" (Broch 421).

17. This emphasis on the living Christ, evident as it may seem to non-Christians like Shaw, is in fact rarely considered by most Western Christians. Anecdotal evidence indicates that most contemporary Christians emphasize the "Christ-Event"—i.e., the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ the Messiah. Shaw would call this yet another victory for Paul, and Salvationism over what may have been the message of the man Jesus.

18. Reardon 36. Compare this with the effusions of Walt Whitman ("This is what you should do…"), and Don Quixote's speech on the virtues of chivalry: "[N]ow, a poor knight has no other way of signalizing his birth, but, the practice of virtue, being affable, well bred, courteous, kind, and obliging, a stranger to pride, arrogance, and slander, and, above all things, charitable" (Cervantes 457).

19. Küng *Theology* 22. Erasmus denounces the Lutheran mode of biblical interpretation: "Whatever men read in the Bible they distort into an assertion of their own opinion, just as lovers incessantly imagine that they see the object of their love wherever they turn" (cited in Reardon 82). According to Wallace Ferguson, "Erasmus introduced a new note into biblical interpretation by demonstrating the part played by human authorship and error. He insisted on treating the Bible as a human document to be studied in the light of modern historical and philological knowledge."

20. "Luther's abusiveness can be condoned only on the ground that perhaps our sins deserved to be scourged with scorpions" (Erasmus, cited in Reardon 1981, 39).

21. Reardon xv. Also see Zweig: "The tragedy of his life, and one which binds him to us in closer brotherly affection, was that he sustained defeat in the struggle for a juster and more humanized shaping of our mental world" (1). Küng laments: "Poor Europe, how much trouble it would have spared if people had listened more to Erasmus instead of to Martin Luther" (*Theology* 34). But history followed Luther, the Jesuits, Descartes and Machiavelli, bypassing Erasmus, Pascal, Lessing.

22. Here Erasmus can be viewed as a direct ancestor of Tolstoy; and through him Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.

Bibliography

Berlin, Isaiah. 1978. *The Hedgehog and the Fox: An Essay on Tolstoy's View of History*. London: Orion, 1978.

Broch, Hermann. *The Sleepwalkers*. Trans. by M. Tanner. London: Quartet Encounters, 1986.

Bruce, Steve. *The Rise and Fall of the New Christian Right*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Cervantes, Miguel de. *The Adventures of Don Quixote de La Mancha*. Trans. by T. Smollett. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1986.

Cohen, Norman, ed. *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon: a view from within; a response from without*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990.

Coleman, John A. "Catholic Integralism as a Fundamentalism." In L. Kaplan, ed. *Fundamentalism in Comparative Perspective*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992.

Dales, Richard C. *The Intellectual Life of Western Europe in the Middle Ages*. Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1980.

Dalrymple, William. "India's Warrior Queen." *The Sunday Times Magazine,* May 9, 1993.

DeMolen, Richard L. "Introduction." In R. DeMolen, ed. *Essays on the Works of Erasmus*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978.

Dewey, John. *Freedom and Culture*. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1989.

Erasmus, Desiderius. *Praise of Folly*. London: Penguin Books, 1971.

"Fundamentalism unlimited." *The Economist*. March 27th-April 2nd, 1993.

Gardner, Martin. *The Whys of a Philosophical Scrivener*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983.

Gellner, Ernest. *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*. London: Routledge, 1992.

James, William. *The Will to Believe and other essays in popular philosophy / Human Immortality*. New York: Dover Publications, 1956.

———. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. New York: Penguin, 1982.

Kaplan, Lawrence. "Introduction." In L. Kaplan, ed. *Fundamentalism in Comparative Perspective*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992.

Küng, Hans. *Theology for the Third Millennium: An Ecumenical View*. Trans. by P. Heinegg. New York: Bantam Doubleday Bell, 1988.

Kurtz, Lester. *The Politics of Heresy*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986

Luther, Martin. *Selections from his Writings*. J. Dillenberger, ed. New York: Anchor Books, 1961.

MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue: a study in moral theory*. London: Duckworth, 1981.

Marty, Martin E. "Fundamentals of Fundamentalism." In L. Kaplan, ed. *Fundamentalism in Comparative Perspective*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992.

Niebuhr, Reinhold. *Reinhold Niebuhr: Theologian of Public Life—Selected Writings*. L. Rasmussen, ed. London: Collins Liturgical Publications, 1988.

Reardon, Richard M.G. *Religious Thought in the Reformation*. London: Longman Group, 1981.

Ribuffo, Leo P. "American Fundamentalism to the 1950s: A Guide for New Yorkers." In L. Kaplan, ed. *Fundamentalism in Comparative Perspective*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992.

Ruthven, Malise. "The audio-vision of God." *The Guardian,* May 1, 1993, p. 31.

Shaw, G. Bernard. "Preface on the Prospects of Christianity." In Shaw, *Androcles and the Lion*. London: Penguin Books, 1957.

Stout, Jeffrey. *Ethics After Babel: The Languages of Morals and their Discontents*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1988.

Zweig, Stefan. *Erasmus and The Right to Heresy*. Trans. by E. and C. Paul. London: Souvenir Press, 1979.