



BY GREG ALBRECHT

The Gathering Storm of FUNDAMENTALISM

It is one of the most explosive issues facing our world in the early years of this 21st century. Political and religious agendas around the world are bullied and coerced, reacting to a virus-like spiritual plague of religious fundamentalism. The Islamic fundamentalist reaction to Western imperialism and decadence is said to be a counter-attack on the “great Satans” of our culture (materialism, immorality, secularism, humanism, science and technology), all of which are blamed for taking our world to hell in a handbasket.

Though the eyes of the world are currently focused on Islamic fundamentalism, the seeds of radical religious fundamentalism are found in virtually all of the world’s major religions. Fundamentalism, whatever its outward attire might be, is convinced that society wants

to wipe out its faith and practice. Fundamentalists tend to see the world as “them” and “us”—they feel trapped, with their backs against the wall, and obligated to fight for their faith under their fundamentalist flag.

Extreme Islamic beliefs and practices are, without a question, a dangerous, turbulent storm of fundamentalism that overshadows our entire western world. But while it lurks in the shadows, extreme fundamentalism in the name of Jesus also portends a clear and present spiritual danger. Fundamentalism is fostering dramatic changes, forcing us to rethink our moral priorities, whether we like it or not.

When Calls for Peace are Dismissed

Hate-filled rhetoric and passionate appeals for bloodshed in the name of God are not accurate reflections

of Christianity or Islam. They are instead the manipulative interpretations of teachers who are warmongers thirsting for blood, yearning for revenge and violence. Terrorists who torture and maim, fueled by anger and lust (James 4:1-3) hide like cowards behind the skirts of God (or Allah), desperately trying to remake divinity into their own violent image.

Jesus, by contrast, called for his followers to pray not only for their friends, but also for their enemies (Matthew 5:43-45). While loving one’s enemy does not require Christians to be filled with warm affection for those who seem determined to annihilate them, Jesus did teach peaceful co-existence. The teachings of Christianity call for Christians to leave vengeance to God (Romans 12:19) and to renounce retributive justice (“an eye for an eye”—see Matthew 5:38-42).

Fundamentalism has nothing to do with the fundamentals of Christianity.

Hate spewing, war-mongering radical religious fundamentalists have their own agenda, and it involves trading on fear and ignorance. Insisting that radical beliefs and practices are the only way to please God, fundamentalism preys on the irrational fears and superstitions of its followers.

Religious fundamentalism, in its efforts to both gain and keep its followers:

- Corrupts and perverts human freedom, decency and dignity.
- Impoverishes the lives of its followers in a downward spiral of poverty and ignorance, marginalizing them, making them more embittered and disenfranchised “true believers.”

- Creates a fertile breeding ground for hatred and prejudice.

- Fosters human misery through religious bondage. Extreme religious fundamentalism encourages and commends isolation within colonies and communes, sponsoring education and training (also called brainwashing) that is dominated by propaganda. By severely restricting freedoms, fundamentalism effectively limits options for escape from its oppression.

- Interprets its holy writ though wooden literalism, leading to illogical and fanatical views and contributing to the intellectual bankruptcy of its followers.

Love and compassion are often demonized by fundamentalists

Fundamentalism is rigid, uncompromising teaching and practice about the absolute necessity of being in the right place, at the right time, wearing the right clothing, singing the right songs and saying the right prayers.

as soft-headed responses to situations they believe demand “tough love” at the very least. When confronted with a choice between love and compassion or conformity to its rules, rituals and regulations, fundamentalism inevitably defaults to its law codes.

Fundamentalism—The Polar Opposite of Jesus’ Teachings

From a Christian perspective, it is necessary to understand that fundamentalism within Christendom is not one and the same as the fundamentals of our faith. The fundamentals of our faith include biblical teachings such as:

Fundamentalism is the fanatical pursuit and exaltation of human performance, insisting that everyone else perform the same religious rituals and rules while arbitrarily and irrationally giving blind loyalty to religious authority.

1) One God who exists eternally as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

2) Jesus, the second Person of the Godhead, the God-man, took

What is Fundamentalism?

Fundamentalism offers appeals to the ego (join us and be one of the only true believers) as well as fear (you are lost without our teachings and membership within our group). Fundamentalism is attractive because it offers a clear-cut, simple and convenient world-view. No complexities or ambiguities—everything is either right or wrong, good or bad. Fundamentalists, regardless of the religious or political uniform they wear, usually share the following viewpoints:

- 1) **Exclusivism:** Our way is the only way.
- 2) **Demonization of Enemies:** Everyone who disagrees with us is seen as an enemy. “You are either with us or against us”—there is no neutral ground.
- 3) **Subjective, Esoteric Truth Claims:** Truth is not objectively realized, but usually revealed in some special way to individual leaders. While fundamentalists often put their faith in a holy book, it is usually the interpretation of that book by a human interpreter that results in radicalism.
- 4) **Authoritarianism:** Leadership is usually male and authoritarian. Fundamentalists invariably view women as unequal, without the dignity, rights or respect given to men.
- 5) **Reactionary Traditionalism:** Distrust of and reaction against scientific and technological advances. Independent and critical thinking is not encouraged, sometimes prohibited. Fundamentalism is often characterized by campaigns to restore “traditional” values, an appeal which is often nothing more than a manipulation of history in an attempt to impose strict and narrow restrictions.

In *Defenders of God: The Fundamentalist Revolt Against the Modern Age*, Bruce Lawrence defines fundamentalism as “the affirmation of religious authority as holistic and absolute, admitting of neither criticism or reduction; it is expressed through the collective demand that specific credal and ethical dictates derived from scripture be publicly recognized and legally enforced.”



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human flesh, becoming one of us, to save us and rescue us.

3) The Bible constitutes the accurate, infallible and divinely inspired word of God.

4) The body of Christ, the church, is universal. No single denomination or group is all of the church—only part of it.

5) Salvation is God's free gift, not earned by any combination of human deeds, ceremonies, rituals or performances.

Fundamental teachings of the Christian faith are based on God's love and the love he gives to us that we might, in turn, share with others.

These, among others, are core teachings of Christianity—they are the foundation, the fundamental beliefs, upon which our faith stands. *Fundamentalism*, however, has nothing at all to do with the fundamentals of Christianity. The fundamentals of Christianity point followers of Jesus to one inescapable conclusion—that God alone is holy, that God loves us because of his goodness and not our own and that human merit and devotion cannot earn God's favor.

Fundamental teaching about God's grace is the divine safeguard against *fundamentalism*, but the *fundamentalism* that thrives within Christendom often minimizes God's grace, dismissing it as a weak and even potentially permissive teaching.

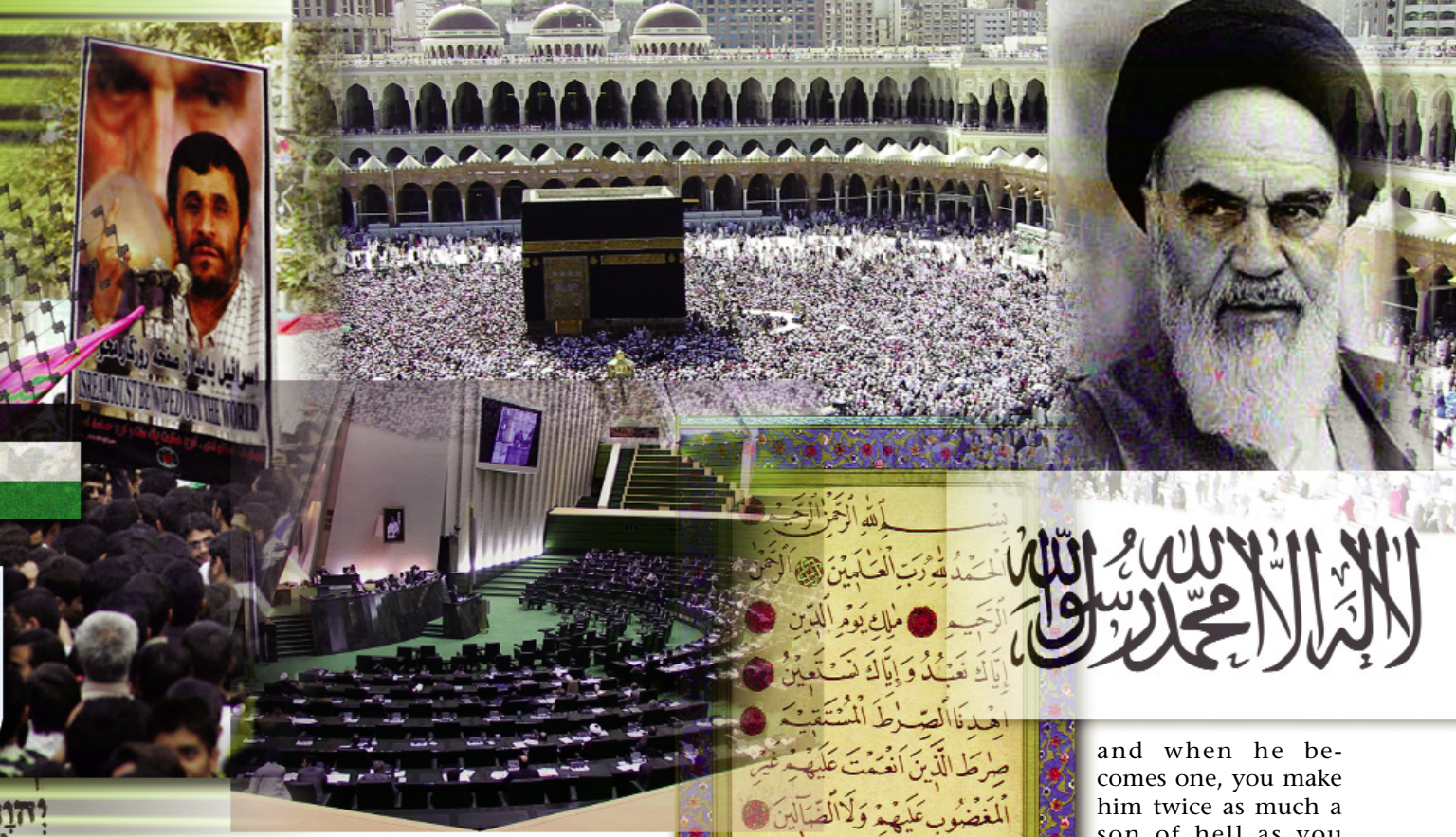
Fundamentalism is all about keeping the right rules in the right way in order to please the right people. *Fundamentalism* is rigid, uncompromising teaching and practice about the absolute necessity of being in the right place, at the right time, wearing the right clothing, singing the right songs and saying the right prayers. *Fundamentalism* is the fanatical pursuit and exaltation of human performance, insisting that everyone else perform the same religious rituals and rules while arbitrarily and irrationally giving blind loyalty to religious authority.

Thus, to be a religious Christian fundamentalist is an oxymoron, for religious *fundamentalism* is the enemy of Jesus Christ. *Fundamentalism* (fueled by legalism) and authentic Christianity (based on God's grace) are mutually exclusive.

Religion, including much that masquerades within Christendom as Christianity, insists that human performance of religious duties and obedience to religious laws gains humans a higher standing with God than they would have otherwise enjoyed.

Authentic Christianity insists that no human may boast before God, that no human deed is good enough to obligate God to treat them differently than he would have, apart from human behavior. Authentic Christianity is all about Jesus—religious *fundamentalism* is all about human performance.

Fundamentalism is actually a denial of the God of the Bible and of the gospel of Jesus Christ, for it proposes that God needs our efforts. Of course, when *fundamentalism* convinces its followers that God is on their side if they do what he wants (in the guise of that particular form of *fundamentalism*) then fundamentalists feel good about themselves. They feel that God is waiting for their efforts, that he needs what they can humanly pro-



duce and that they alone are God's chosen people.

It is critically important to make a distinction between fundamentalists, who have been bewitched and deceived, and the religious methodology called *fundamentalism* that has them in its grip. We must not demonize unfortunates who are trapped by oppressive religion, but we must not shrink from identifying the cause of their misery and suffering. In so doing we are reflecting God's love to and for them, for their eventual freedom will be based on a clear picture of their current religious enslavement.

Taking Our Eyes Off Jesus

The big sin of *fundamentalism* is that it attempts to take God off his throne and replace him with human attempts at righteousness. *Fundamentalism* includes several distinctives that place the focus of faith and practice on human efforts, including:

- Uncompromising insistence that its rules and regulations are the only acceptable practice and belief.
- Distrust of logic, reason, schol-

arship and knowledge—the mortal enemies of *fundamentalism*.

- Absolute, unflinching demands on its followers to obey all cultural, traditional and accepted rules and regulations.
- Creation of its own in-house

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vocabulary and terminology, symbols and codes which only initiates and true believers can fully understand.

- Ongoing and unceasing efforts to proselyte and evangelize, so that outsiders who do not now believe can somehow be convinced to do so. Within Christendom many fundamentalists confuse evangelism to faith in Jesus with conversion to their own performance-based religion. Jesus condemned the rabid evangelical efforts of the religion of his day, "You travel over land and sea to win a single convert,

and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are" (Matthew 23:15).

Fundamentalism is a sworn enemy of authentic Christianity and the gospel of Jesus Christ. *Fundamentalism* within Christendom is truly a wolf in sheep's clothing, preying upon the sheep of God's pasture. Sadly, many who are not Christians

believe that religious *fundamentalism* stands for all of Christianity, and having seen or heard several examples, want nothing to do with real Christianity. The 18th-century English poet, Samuel Taylor Coleridge astutely observed, albeit with some cynicism, that "he who begins by loving Christianity more than truth will proceed by loving his own sect or church better than Christianity and end in loving himself better than all."

Fundamentalism produces the environment in which extremists and zealots minimize and even dis-



Dutch protest assassination of filmmaker Theo van Gogh

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tolerance was shaken to its core with the murder of van Gogh. Before November 4, 2004, criticism of Muslim culture was generally regarded as outright racism in tolerant Holland. Theo van Gogh was a harsh critic of religion in general, and his rhetoric against immigrant Mus-

lims in Holland was, beyond a doubt, inflammatory. But his treatment of his subject in *Submission* was well within the acceptable freedoms given and expressed in a democratic society.

Submission addressed the abuse of Muslim women under the guise of radical religious teaching. *Submission* included scenes of Muslim women being beaten as a narrator read Muslim teaching about the need to subjugate and control women. Another scene included naked women on whose bodies passages from the Koran were inscribed.

While van Gogh has been accused of inciting Muslim passion, with some suggesting that he even deserved the brutal gang-like execution he received (multiple stab wounds with a note explaining the necessity of his death), his murder provides an example of the lengths to which extreme fundamentalists will go to protect their faith.

Whether in Holland, France, Germany, Belgium or England, European countries whose Islamic populations have mushroomed are learning that radical fundamentalism seeks to take advantage of democratic freedoms in order to eventually obliterate them. The western world at large, since 9-11, has learned that religious fundamentalists are more dangerous than secular counterparts, for religious radicals rarely change or moderate their views.

Religious fundamentalism can

miss virtues like love and mercy while engaging in the pursuit of victory for their cause. Fundamentalism attempts to recast "truth" as synonymous with its own vision and message, while demonizing those who hold differing views—casting them as enemies to be overcome. Reasonable discussions are difficult with hard-core fundamentalists for the simple reason that fundamentalism is adversarial and views anyone outside of its belief system as suspect.

Truth, of course, is not an enemy of authentic Christianity. In fact, Jesus is "the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6). While there are those who, in the name of God, encourage church-goers to check their brains at the door, such mindless indoctrination is not a hallmark of grace-based Christianity. There are those who are known as Christians who are not Christ-centered, and, as one consequence, can come to love their religious group more than Jesus, who is Truth personified.

Religious Fundamentalism Meets Tolerant Secularism

Religious ideas have consequences. The toxic impact of religious fundamentalism is not limited to the four walls of a church or a mosque. Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh was murdered in Amsterdam on November 4, 2004 by Mohammed Bouyeri,

a radical fundamentalist Muslim. Bouyeri was the child of Moroccan immigrant workers who moved to Holland in the 1970s. Born and raised in Europe, Bouyeri was a Dutch citizen who was angered by van Gogh's movie, *Submission*, which exposed the abuse of women in Islam.

The brutal murder of van Gogh, called Holland's 9-11 by some, provided a stark contrast of cultures, a culture war that is today simmering around the world, as Islamic values collide with Christian-based culture.

It's a story of the social earthquake that takes place when a liberal and tolerant anything-goes secular society is challenged by rigid, rabid religious fundamentalism. And it's a story of how religious fundamentalism intimidates through various forms of terrorism.

Holland has for decades been touted as one of the most progressive democratic and free societies on earth, a culture in which all were welcome and all lifestyles accepted and tolerated. No one would suggest that the Netherlands is a hotbed of any form of fundamentalism, but it is a country whose laws and civility are historically based in Christian values. The Dutch have historically welcomed large numbers of immigrants—of recent date huge numbers of Muslim immigrants. Muslims today represent just over 15 percent of the population in Holland.

The historic Dutch multi-cultural acceptance of religious and cultural



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easily turn into religious fascism—in the case of extreme Muslim extremists like the Taliban, Al-Qaeda, Hamas and Hezbollah, it certainly has.

Characteristics of religious fascism include:

- Glorification of religion which is seen as above question, beyond accountability.
- Utter disdain for individual needs or rights—the religious empire is the only reality that matters.
- Sexism—the rights of women are minimized or ignored.
- Demonizing of the enemy—the “Great Satan” is scapegoated, providing a means to divert attention from other problems.

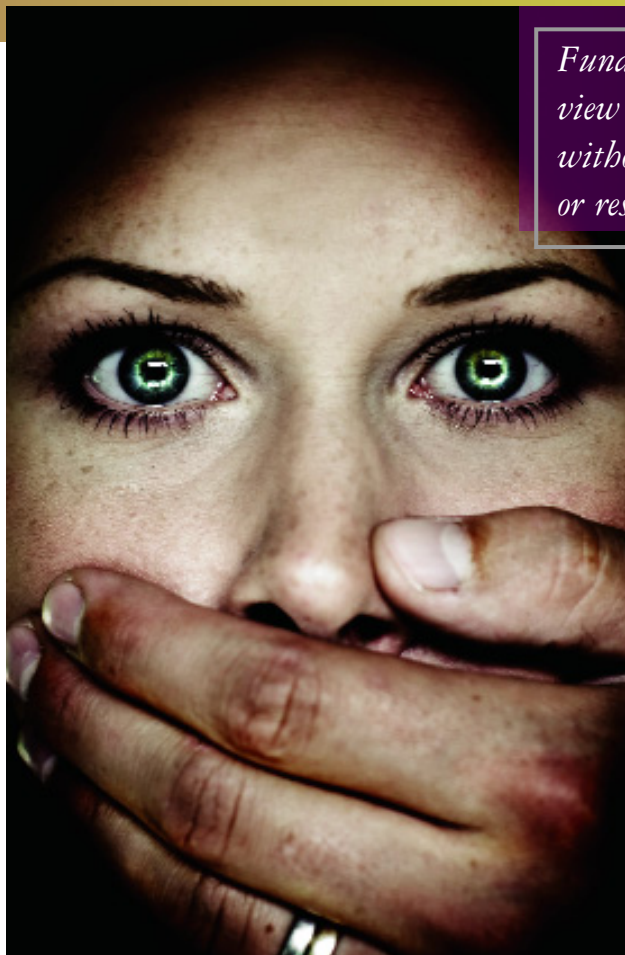
The Solution

As an American who believes in democracy and capitalism, I am tempted to react in kind to the extremism of Islamic *fundamentalism*. I have noted, along with many others, that it seems Islam lacks the willingness to be self-critical. We have heard few, if any, condemnations of terrorists by Muslims who claim that Islam is moderate and peaceful.

However, as reported by CNN chief international correspondent Christiane Amanpour, the day before Islamic radicals killed 52 people in the London subway and bus bombings of July 7, 2005, more than 100 Islamic *imams* joined together in Jordan to denounce radical Islamic terrorists.

As a Christian who believes that every human being (Christian and non-Christian) is loved by God and equal before the cross of Christ, I see the real problem to be religious *fundamentalism*, and therefore any lasting solution must be found within the spirit and soul, rather than external devices or methodology.

As a Christian I must ask what my responsibility is to those who, as the King James so colorfully



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Let's break down that passage and consider its implications:

1) Believers in Jesus are heirs of the covenant God made with Abraham, proclaiming that Abraham's offspring would bless all people on earth.

2) Abraham—looked to by both Muslims, Jews and Christians as a patriarch—fathered Ishmael and Isaac, the forefathers of the Arab and Jewish peoples.

3) Is this passage saying that either the Arabs or the Jews have blessed all people on earth? No, this passage is not about race—it's not about nations, national blessings or physical circumstances.

4) This passage is about “his servant”—the Servant that God raised up—Jesus, who came to be one of us, who died on the cross and was raised from the dead. It is in Jesus that all nations can be blessed.

It is not in Jews, Arabs, Islam, Judaism or even in Christendom that all nations will be blessed. Spiritual corporations and denominations don't fulfill this blessing. Political ideologies don't fulfill this blessing. Religious empires don't

terms it, “despitefully use” me (Matthew 5:44, KJV).

The answer to the judgmentalism that ultimately leads to hatred, intolerance, violence and war is God's grace. Jesus personified God's grace, and he demonstrated that a life of opposition to religious *fundamentalism* can be victorious.

In one of the earliest recorded Christian sermons, the apostle Peter invited people to embrace Jesus, to accept him and believe in

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him. “And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, ‘Through your offspring all peoples on earth shall be blessed.’ When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways” (Acts 3:26).

bless all people on earth. They usually do just the opposite. Religious empires and corporate entities chew people up and spit them out. They “despitefully use” people.

Humans are blessed as they individually realize who Jesus is for them personally, the relationship they can have with him and how he can transform their “wicked

On the Lighter Side

You might be a fundamentalist if:

- *When your pastor says he has studied the text “in the original language” you think he means the King James Version.*
- *The announcement bulletin for your church services includes a time to put the snakes away.*
- *The mere sight of a KFC bucket makes you think of taking up an offering.*
- *Your pastor sweats when he preaches.*
- *Everybody sweats when your pastor preaches.*



While Jesus proclaimed and practiced love, he repeatedly engaged one particular segment of his society in spiritual combat. Jesus consistently

resisted the religious leadership who preferred confrontation and condemnation over relationship and grace—Jesus never allowed legalistic religion to emerge spiritually

unscathed. Jesus always clearly delineated false religion over against the gospel he brought—and in that model we as authentic Christians today can find heart and a mandate.

While we are outnumbered and overwhelmed by hate and condemnation, we must not cave in. We must not fail to spiritually confront the enemy of fundamentalism as it assails our own communities and it infiltrates our own churches. We must not join forces with hatred, deceived into thinking that we are “taking back” America.

Instead, we must encourage and foster peace and reconciliation. As a Christian, do you personally know any Muslims? Have you talked with (as opposed to talking about) a Muslim? Recently, while I was in Europe talking with Muslims about Islamic terrorism, I also visited Stephen Sizer, who has written for *Plain Truth* (see the May-June 2007 *PT*, “American Apocalypse: Anxious for Armageddon?”). Stephen told me about a speaking engagement he had in Leicester, a city in the English Midlands that is now heavily populated by Muslims.

He needed a quick meal and pointed out a fish and chips shop they were driving by to some with whom he was meeting. “Oh no,” came the quick reply. “You don’t want to go there! This is an Islamic area of town, and you know how

those people are. The shop is probably dirty—who knows what kinds of germs you might pick up?”

Stephen is becoming known as a Christian willing to dialogue with Muslims, so he decided to purchase fish and chips from that very shop. When the owner gave him his food he also returned Stephen’s payment for the food, saying something to the effect, “You honor me by visiting my establishment.”

A few months later, Stephen was once again in Leicester, this time speaking to a church. As a part of the sermon he related the kindness of the Muslim proprietor of the fish and chips shop. He then gave the congregation the name and address of the establishment, urging them to pick up their next to-go order of fish and chips there, and to tell the owner why they were patronizing his business.

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Reconciliation involves meeting people where they are and trying to understand them, rather than blindly accepting stereotypes. Reconciliation means listening and learning.

As Christians, we are reconciled to God because of Christ. We are reconciled to God because God the Son became one of us so that, among other things, he might know us. Jesus came to this earth to serve us, rather than seeking our service. Having been reconciled to God, we are now ambassadors of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:19-20).

We must not stoop to the level of crass emotionalism driven by lust and jealousy, but bow before Jesus and ask that he use us to help shine the light of his heavenly kingdom into the dark places of fundamentalism. We must reflect the love of God to those who are trapped by the dark forces of fundamentalism. □

CARTOON BY MONTE WOLVERTON—PTM

ways.” When that happens in many lives, then the people of the entire earth are blessed, both directly as they live in Jesus and he in them, and indirectly by believers who, as they yield to Jesus, bring peace and love to the lives of others.

There is no doubt that the fruit of religious zealots, of radical religious fundamentalists, whether they are acting under the guise of Islam, Judaism or Christianity, is wicked. Terrorism, bigotry, suicide bombers, racial hatred and murderous mayhem are wicked. Jesus, by contrast, brings us his rest and his peace.

Jesus triumphed over fundamentalism. He did so ultimately, of course, by his cross and the glorious victory of his resurrection, which demonstrated that torture and death, the ultimate weapons of fundamentalism, are powerless in the face of the power of God’s

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love and amazing grace. While fundamentalist extremists wearing any uniform scoff at grace as weak and inferior, Jesus’ cross and empty tomb stand as stark contrasts to hatred and religious authoritarianism.