

Beyond Secularism and Fundamentalism

Reinventing Global Citizenship

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Abstract: *The author presented a version of this article at the Sixth Buddhist-Christian Colloquium of the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, November 13–16, 2017, in Taiwan. The topic of that dialogue was “Buddhists and Christians Walking Together on the Path of Nonviolence.” The author begins by tracing the origin of the term “Fundamentalism” to the South of the United States; it called for a “battle royal” for conservative Christianity against other religions and points of view. It was tied to the first American Christian terrorist group, the Ku Klux Klan. He then quotes Pope Benedict’s rejection of all forms of Fundamentalism. Next the author traces the origin of “secularism” to England and explains its theory concerning the need to push religion out of social institutions and political decision-making. He quotes Paul Carus’ rejection of secularism. Finally, he explores both*

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Buddhist and Christian scriptural sources and the words of modern religious scholars and leaders calling for transcendence of both Fundamentalism and secularism in order to reach a deeper spiritual foundation supporting global citizenship for the good of all humanity.

The term “Fundamentalism” was first used by an American Baptist Christian named Curtis Lee Laws in 1920 to describe those Christians who were ready “to do battle royal for the fundamentals” of their faith, which they felt were threatened by the modern world.¹ However, the roots of Fundamentalism grew after the American Civil War ended in 1865. In the 1800s, biblical scholars studied the composition and historicity of biblical texts and were presenting their work in ways that did not affirm that literal truth of everything in the Bible.² For example, the biblical narrative suggests that the world was created in only six days just six thousand years ago. This account clashes with modern science. Also, beginning with Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), theology had become more liberal. While these changes were welcomed in the northern part of the United States, which had been victorious in the Civil War, in the defeated southern states they were seen as another threat to what they considered the fundamentals of Protestant faith, which was closely associated with what was considered the culture of the South.

1. Curtis Lee Laws took this term from a series of articles published between 1910 and 1915, collected in *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, eds. Edited by R. A. Torrey, A. C. Dixon, et. al. (Los Angeles: Bible Institute of Los Angeles, 1917).

2. Howard Clark Kee, Emily Albu, Carter Lindberg, J. William Frost, and Dana L. Roberts, *Christianity: A Social and Cultural History* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1998), 484.

Thus, Fundamentalism had a kind of “fighting style” against anyone who disagreed with the point of view it advocated. For example, Christian Fundamentalism teaches that Christ atoned for our sins and that only by accepting him as our savior can we be saved. All who do not accept Jesus will be doomed to eternal punishment in hell for their sins. This is not a view shared by the Roman Catholic Church or by other mainline Christian churches. For Fundamentalists, this belief represented a call to mission: the faithful were to spread throughout the world, converting individuals to this faith and saving people from eternal damnation.

In 1865, in the South, the first American Christian terrorist hate group emerged: the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). They created a ritual for swearing loyalty to Fundamentalist Christianity, embracing their “we-they” mentality. They used religion to justify hate, violence, terrorism, and mass killings against African Americans, Jews, Catholics, Asian Americans, and other immigrants. America was to be a White Protestant Anglo-Saxon country. This view reflects an element commonly found in Fundamentalist movements: the existence of a distinct group of “insiders,” against which all others are defined as “outsiders.” The insiders are to be supported, and the outsiders are to be rejected. Today, this kind of Fundamentalism and its violent overtones has taken root in other religions.

It should be clear that Fundamentalism is not a characteristic of a religion. It is rather an “institutional formation” within a religion that emerges at a historical moment in reaction to political, social, and cultural situations. This is true especially in parts of the world that experience traumatic situations, such as when nation-states emerged after the end of colonialism. In the Middle East, Africa, South Asia, and Southeast Asia, the desire to create a national identity that included the majority religion often pitted different

ethnic and religious groups against each other. This sometimes led to the formation of Fundamentalist organizations and led at times to violence on both sides.³

Addressing this situation, Pope Francis notes that “with intolerant generalizations, [Fundamentalisms] become stronger because they feed on hate and xenophobia.”⁴ This can, and often does, lead to violence. Pope John Paul II stated that “violence, in any form is opposed not only to the respect that we owe to every fellow human being: it is opposed also to the true essence of religion.”⁵ Pope Benedict XVI wrote:

Fundamentalism is always a falsification of religion. It goes against the essence of religion, that seeks to reconcile and to create God’s peace throughout the world. . . . The essential message of religion . . . must educate, illuminate and purify consciences so as to make them capable of dialogue, reconciliation and peace.⁶

Years ago, I gave a talk on Buddhist-Christian dialogue at a Fundamentalist university in Japan. After my talk, I asked a professor about his view of Buddhism. The professor told me that he had a young Buddhist student in his class. He discovered that she was a wonderful person, highly moral, and very kind and

3. For an excellent study of this situation around the world, see Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, eds., *Fundamentalisms Observed* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

4. Message of His Holiness Pope Francis on the Occasion of the World Meetings of Popular Movements, February 10, 2017.

5. Address of His Holiness John Paul II on the Occasion of the Sixth World Assembly of the World Conference on Religion and Peace, November 3, 1994.

6. Pope Benedict XVI, Press Conference, Lebanon, September 15, 2012.

compassionate. One day, this student was hit by a car and died. He was heartbroken and found himself in a religious crisis. His Fundamentalism taught him that she was in hell because she had not given her life to Jesus Christ. He struggled and finally rejected this view. He could not believe in a God who would send his student to eternal damnation. He began to dialogue with Buddhists and came to accept a more inclusive theology of religions. I asked the other Baptist professors if they agreed with his new view. They all said that they did.

The term “secularism” was first used by a British writer named George Jacob Holyoake in 1851. For Holyoake and others like him to this today, secularism means that society should exclude religion and religious considerations from the making of laws and political decisions. These thinkers see secularism as a hallmark of progress and religion as backward. To promote social order in the modern world, they believe that society must separate itself from the religions of the past. In political and legal terms today, this often means the “separation of church and state.”

Holyoake’s *English Secularism: A Confession of Belief* makes three things clear about secularism.⁷ The first is that human life is to be improved by material means, not by religious means. The second is that only science may be used to better the human condition. The third is that the human condition should be improved by the performance of good deeds for others in this life with no concern for an afterlife. In the foreword to Holyoake’s book, the publisher presents a contrary position:

7. George Jacob Holyoake, *English Secularism: A Confession of Belief* (Chicago: Open Court Publications, 1896), 37f.

Rather than abolish or paralyze its influence, the Open Court Publishing Company would advocate on the one hand to let the religious spirit pervade the whole body politic, together with all public institutions, and also the private lives of every single individual; and on the other hand to carry all secular interests into the church, which would make the church [serve] the real needs of mankind.⁸

I quote the publisher because of who he is: Paul Carus. Paul Carus was a pioneer of interreligious dialogue who helped introduce Buddhism to the West. He also translated the works of D. T. Suzuki into English. For Carus, secularism abolishes the public presence of religion, thus paralyzing its positive influence on society. It keeps religions from bringing out the best in humankind: compassion, tolerance, loving kindness, sympathy, and the affirmation of other peoples, races, cultures, and religions. Carus believed that only religions have the moral and spiritual tools to tap deeply into the hearts of people, where they can engage a common ground of universal brotherhood and sisterhood that unites all as one family. It is on this basis that people can more easily become global citizens. Paul Carus’s message, emerging from the Buddhist-Christian dialogue more than one hundred years ago, should be considered today.

At one point during the first Gethsemani Encounter of Buddhist and Catholic monastics, held at the monastery of Thomas Merton, we discussed the virtue of humility. Guo Chou Shih shared that in Chan practice, one encounters obstructions to

8. Ibid.

realizing the Dharma.⁹ Quoting Master Sheng Yen, he said that one needs humility to find a deeper and more “fertile ground” that is “beneath every living being” where one can hear and merge with the Dharma.¹⁰ He noted that the word “humus,” the good soil rich with organic nutrition for plants to grow to be what they already truly are, is related to “humility.” Humility in Buddhist practice reveals the fertile ground below divisions and obstructions that gives us the nourishment to become our True Selves at one with all living beings that share that same ground.

This reminded me of a parable Jesus told about a sower who went out to sow seeds.¹¹ Some seeds fell on the hard path, some on rocky ground, some among thorns, and some on rich soil. Jesus explained that the seed on the hard path refers to a person who hears the true “word” but does not understand so that what was sown can be stolen away. The seed on the rocky ground is like the person who hears the word but does not allow it to take root, so the person falls away when tribulations come. The seed among thorns is like the person who hears the word but is distracted by worldly anxieties and the lure of riches, so the word is choked and bears no fruit. But the seed that falls on “rich soil” represents the humble person who hears and understands the word and bears much fruit.

The person who has reached the deep and rich soil within can hear the “Word.” For Christians, humility makes us receptive to the Word and humble enough to cooperate with the Holy

9. Donald W. Mitchell and James Wiseman, OSB, eds., *The Gethsemani Encounter: A Dialogue on the Spiritual Life by Buddhist and Christian Monastics* (New York: Continuum, 1999), 192–93.

10. *Ibid.*, 192.

11. Mt 13:3–9 and parallels.

Spirit, who tills the soil so that we can “go and bear fruit that will remain.”¹² What is the fruit that remains? There are many answers to this question.

One important answer to this question, I believe, is global citizenship. This value can be found in the following parable. Jesus speaks of a king who assembles the citizens from all nations around the globe and judges them. To some he says:

“Come you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave me food, I was thirsty, and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.” Then the righteous will answer him and say, “Lord when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you ill or in prison and visit you?” And the king will say to them in reply, “Amen, I say to you whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.”¹³

This parable reminds me of a story of the Buddha. He, with his disciple Ananda, tended to a monk who was desperately ill, and the other monks were afraid to tend to him. The Buddha washed and cleaned the sick man with warm water. After reprimanding the other monks for not caring for their “brother monk,” the Buddha said, “He who cares for the sick cares for me.”¹⁴ From both

12. Jn 15:16.

13. Mt 25:34–40.

14. *Vinaya*, I:301ff.

stories, one can conclude that fruit that comes from the rich soil and remains in the hearts and actions of humble persons around the world, as is evident in their compassion and care for all humanity, especially those in need, as brothers and sisters. This is a Buddhist and a Christian basis for global citizenship.

Global citizenship has been defined as moving beyond the role of national citizenship in the “struggle for the good of all humanity.”¹⁵ The task of our religious traditions today is to guide our members beyond Fundamentalism so that they can discover the truth that we are all one humanity of brothers and sisters, one family of humankind. In this way, we can cultivate global citizens who work together unrestricted by secularism to negate the religious “isms” that divide us and engender hatred and violence. Achieving this goal can be greatly aided by the interreligious dialogue of fraternity, which is Pope Francis’s dialogue, that highlights our status as brothers and sisters in addressing the social ills of our times.

Today, Pope Francis is calling religions to join in what he calls a dialogue of fraternity as brothers and sisters. This is a call to overcome the features of Fundamentalism highlighted above:

We are called to [be] messengers of peace and builders of communion, and to proclaim, in opposition to all those who sow conflict, division and intolerance, that ours is a time of fraternity. That is why it is important for us to seek occasions of encounter [that] make us more open to dialogue, the better to know and understand one another;

15. Hans Schattle, *The Practices of Global Citizenship* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008), 1–2.

eliminate every form of closed-mindedness and disrespect; and drive out every form of violence and discrimination.¹⁶

And against secularism, Pope Francis writes:

May the religions be *wombs* of life, bearing the merciful love of God to a wounded and needy humanity; may they be *doors* of hope helping to penetrate the walls erected by pride and fear.¹⁷

Christians and Buddhists have defined true religion as “fertile soil” for the growth in insight that brings compassion, love, kindness, and mercy in the face of violence. Pope Francis here uses other metaphors for religious sources of healing the world and creating global citizens: “wombs” and “doors.” He notes that the Hebrew root RHM that expresses mercy and care also has to do with a mother’s womb: “the deepest source of human love, the feelings of a mother for the child to whom she will give birth.”¹⁸

In terms of wombs, I am reminded of the *Tathāgata-garbha* texts in Buddhism. The terms mean “womb of the Buddha” and in East Asia it is referred to as our “Buddha-nature.” It is the source of our innate potential for Buddhahood. The Buddhist philosopher Gishin Tokiwa has written that Lady Maya, the mother of the Buddha, can be seen as a model of humanity’s potential to overcome our “ordinary way of being” individuals and to give birth

16. *Misericordiae Vultus*, 23.

17. Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Representatives of Different Religions (italics mine).

18. *Ibid.*

to our “original way of being” one with all beings.¹⁹ Tokiwa says at one point, “In fact, I see in St. Mary what Buddhists call the Buddha’s womb.”²⁰ Mary was the bearer of Christ within her. So, too, the Apostle Paul writes, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”²¹

In terms of doors in walls, I am reminded of the frequency of the word “gates” in Buddhism. One of the four Bodhisattva vows is: “Dharma gates are boundless; I vow to enter them.” The Korean Master Hyujōng wrote about three gates: First is the gate to the teaching of the Dharma. Second is the gate to Awakening. And third is the gate to cultivating the awakened mind to realize fully our True Self.²² Jesus also uses the metaphor of a gate: “Whoever enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. . . . I am the gate.”²³

The good shepherd leads his sheep through the gate to pasture on grass grown in the rich soil. And he also is willing to lay down his very life for his sheep. This in turn reminds me of the words by Śāntideva: “For the sake of accomplishing the welfare of all sentient beings, I freely give up my body, enjoyments, and all my virtues of the three times.”²⁴ Jesus did lay down his life on the Cross, where he took on the sins and sufferings of all humankind, past, present, and future. In so doing, he could not experience his virtues or his enjoyment of union with God. Upon losing aware-

19. Donald W. Mitchell, *Spirituality and Emptiness: The Dynamics of Spiritual Life in Buddhism and Christianity* (New York: Paulist, 1991), 184.

20. *Ibid.*, 189–90.

21. Gal 2:20.

22. *Hanguk pulgyo chōnsō* 7:619–21.

23. Jn 10:2–3, 9, 11.

24. *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, III, 10.

ness of his union with God the Father, he cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”²⁵

I would suggest that today we need to go beyond Fundamentalism to develop “gates of fraternal dialogue.” By that I mean that all our people must be guided through the gates of dialogue leading to global citizenship and social harmony that are often blocked by walls of hatred and prejudice, fear, and terrorism. Indeed, Pope Francis asks that in the face of “acts of violence, conflict, kidnapping, terrorist attacks, killings and destruction” our dialogue of fraternity become “a path to be taken together, for the good of all, and with hope.”²⁶ In this way, our religions unite, beyond secularism, by wombs that give birth to global citizens who can build a united humankind living together in peace with all of creation.

Finally, I would like to conclude with words from Chiara Lubich, a pioneer in interreligious dialogue with Buddhism in Asia:

Rarely has our planet been subject to the suspicion, fear, and even terror of our time. We only have to remember September 11, 2001 . . . as well as all the other attacks in the past few years. . . . If this is how things are, in order to reduce and put an end to terrorism . . . we need to promote solidarity among everyone in the world [in a way that] guarantees the integrity and health of humankind and the entire ecosystem. . . . And [this goal] calls for universal fraternity.²⁷

25. Mt 27:46; Mk 15:34.

26. Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Representatives of Different Religions.

27. Chiara Lubich, *Essential Writings* (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2007), 259.

The profound need for peace expressed by humanity today indicates that fraternity is not only a value, not only a method, but also the global paradigm for active citizenship.²⁸

This kind of fraternal relationship enables religions, Lubich says, “to contribute to making our multicultural societies become intercultural, that is, made up of cultures open to one another and in a profound dialogue of unity.”²⁹

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28. Ibid., 262.

29. Ibid., 340.