

DEFENDING THE FUNDAMENTALS

by Shirley W. Madany

Do you find yourself more than ordinarily interested in the Muslim World? Then you may be interested in the book: DEFENDERS OF GOD, The Fundamentalist Revolt Against the Modern Age, by Prof. Bruce B. Lawrence, professor of the history of religion at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina.

Prof. Lawrence has taken Christianity, Judaism and Islam and made a brilliant study of the radical group within each religion and the way in which each has decided to fight for tradition against modernism. He quickly points out that "fundamentalists are moderns" even though they are not "modernists." There is a big difference. He begins by stating that fundamentalists do relate to the public sphere, and that they do care about political power, economic justice and social status. "But they are above all religiously motivated individuals, drawn together into ideologically structured groups, for the purpose of promoting a vision of divine restoration." It makes for fascinating reading. He considers that the fundamentalist group within each of these three theistic religions is something to be reckoned with. In his preface he says: "One cannot rest content with the analysis that fundamentalism as someone else's problem." A few lines later he says: "Fundamentalism is coextensive with our world. It will change, adapting to new circumstances, but it will not disappear."

Fundamentalists tend to make it into the day's news because they are constantly taking action about some issue which they consider of great importance. We have the example of the Salman Rushdie affair, as far as Muslims are concerned, or the protests against the movie, The Last Temptation of Christ, or the emergence of religious parties as power groups in the last Israeli elections.

Modernism is the villain and the traditionalist feels that his faith is under attack and that he must do something about it. "The fundamentalists with whom we concern ourselves are caught in a peculiar tension: they accept implicitly the benefits of modernity, often thriving through their use of technology, while explicitly rejecting modernism as a holistic ideological framework. They are moderns but not modernists."

By putting Christianity and Judaism side by side with Islam, Mr. Lawrence forces the Christian reader to face the fact that he is living in a milieu which is modernist to the core. "To the extent that the new religion of the American republic is civil, it reflects its modernist origins. It is a child of what we called the modernist hegemony." On the next page he defines it this way: "The Supreme Court became the ecclesiastical arm of the Religion of the Republic, public officials its high priests, patriotic Americans its laity, and the fundamentalists--its heretics."

For those who might be looking for bridges, here is one they may have overlooked. We have in common with both Jew and Muslim, an inherent distrust of modernism

and a desire to share our faith and see it being lived out without the stumbling blocks which arise through the ministrations of modern media.

Quite recently I contributed an article to a Christian Women's periodical. I behaved like a fundamentalist and took issue on the subject of "women's dress" as it related to an even deeper subject of immorality -- what I called the latest all-American sport -- sexual activity. Certainly to criticize this is almost to put oneself in the position of a "dodo."

The attitude of Christian morality when held up critically against this current immoral activity of the young moderns of the western world, is considered to be archaic, repressive and even harmful. "Being involved in bringing the Gospel to the Arabic-speaking Muslim world has made me super-sensitive to their criticisms of the West. Can you guess why Muslim men feel that their women should be totally covered from head to toe and only free from this stricture when they are within the confines of their home? I'm not advocating that we follow them to the letter but since we are living in a global situation, if we do not dress in a Christian way, we would be contradicting the very message that we are bringing--of salvation by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Clothes advertise more than we think. Even some public schools in the southern suburbs of Chicago are being forced to consider a simple dress code or uniform in order to combat the frightening power of teen gangs--who require a certain dress code themselves."

Copying from this article: "So, I look around me and ponder. I grieve over some of the clothes I see chosen for worship services. Can Christian mothers really be so naive about themselves and their daughters? Surely mini-skirts and plunging necklines or bare backs are not conducive to concentration in mixed company and are definitely not suitable for worship."

This is what DEFENDERS OF GOD is all about. Groups and individuals who take issue in defence of their God and their traditions. You may be very sure that Muslim immigrants are fighting hard to keep their girls from becoming "Americanized".

"I believe with all my heart that Christian women should exemplify a lifestyle that can be described as becoming, wholesome, demure, etc. Do we, or do we not call Jesus our Lord? Do we offer our bodies as a sacrifice and clothe them in a way which will advertise the state of our hearts and not the trends of the world? Isn't it time for us to be Christian trend setters? Let's not be mere "pro-life" or "anti-abortion." Let's be pro-abstinence and pro-chastity and do our best to guard our children from the evils which surround them. The escalation of sexually transmitted diseases makes any kind of promiscuity a frightening thing. There is no room for naivete on this subject. Our young people will have to be told in no uncertain terms that Christians do not participate in "sexual activity" until they have found and married the partner God has planned for them."

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