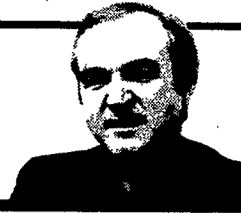


Father Richard P. McBrien

Essays in Theology



Catholic fundamentalism

The April 11 issue of America presented an exceedingly important article, "The Rise of Catholic Fundamentalism," by Father Patrick M. Arnold, SJ, assistant professor of religious studies at St. Louis University. The essay deserves a very wide readership — one that should include every member of the U.S. Catholic hierarchy.

Father Arnold argues that the recent outbreak of tensions between the Vatican and the Catholic Church in the United States (Curran, Hunthausen, et al.) must not be reduced to a matter of power politics or regarded simply as a replay of the ancient conflict between the desire for freedom and the need for order.

"A crisis as widespread as that facing the American church," he writes, "cannot be triggered simply by a few radical professors or powerful Vatican bureaucrats. The causes are rooted far more deeply in popular anxieties and social turmoil."

According to Father Arnold, "The single greatest force that precipitated the current crisis is related to the worldwide socioreligious phenomenon known as fundamentalism." He is careful, however, to distinguish fundamentalism from conservatism. The latter he describes broadly as "a philosophy that values established, traditional ideas and practices, and seeks to preserve a given community's historical heritage — especially in times of cultural change."

Conservatism protects the Church from modern ideas and practices that are "merely trendy," and it defends and preserves the Church's "lived experience against purely rational or emotional changes." As such, it is a necessary and constructive force within the Church, and the occasional excesses of conservatives notwithstanding.

Fundamentalism, on the other hand, is neither necessary nor constructive. Nevertheless, it is "a historically recurring tendency within Judeo-Christian-Muslim religious traditions that regularly erupts in reaction to cultural change."

Psychological studies describe fundamentalists of all traditions as "authoritarian personalities." They are individuals "who feel threatened in a world of conspiring evil forces, who think in simplistic and stereotypical terms and who are attracted to authoritarian and moralistic answers to their problems."

Religious fundamentalists include among their numbers Muslim Shi'ites, ultra-orthodox Jews (*haredim*) and orthodox Jews (*hasidim*), Bible-Belt Protestants, and increasingly, in the last few years, Catholic traditionalists.

Father Arnold identifies at least five unhealthy characteristics of religious fundamentalism in general, and of Catholic fundamentalism in particular:

1) Fundamentalism is marked by paranoia and self-righteousness. There is always some terrible enemy "out there" (the United States, the "Great Satan" for the Muslim extremists; "secular

humanism" for Protestant fundamentalists; modern technology and secularization for the Jewish *haredim*; modernism, secular humanism and Marxism for Catholics). The fundamentalist alone is pure. The fundamentalist alone is faithful.

2) Fundamentalism is marked by fear and rage that are directed not at the perceived enemy "out there," but at co-religionists inside, including bishops, nuns and theologians. Father Arnold calls this perhaps "the most revealing and dangerous characteristic" of all, because it leads fundamentalists to divisive activities. They spend an inordinate amount of time and energy trying to purge people, to get them fired, to destroy their reputations and, therefore, their influence.

3) Fundamentalists are captivated by the "myth of the Golden Age." They believe in "an imaginary past edited of its own actual terrors." For Catholic fundamentalists, Catholicism achieved "its final, immutable form in the glorious decades before Vatican II."

4) Fundamentalism roots all truth in a single source. For Muslims, it is the Koran; for Jews, the Torah; for Protestants, the Bible; for Catholic fundamentalists, the pronouncements of the Roman magisterium (pope and curia). In principle, every teaching from the Vatican is to be obeyed absolutely. In practice, of course, these fundamentalists pick and choose. Pronouncements on sexuality, for example, are welcomed; pronouncements on social justice are ignored or "interpreted" away.

5) Fundamentalists almost always link themselves with right-wing political regimes and movements, in the hope of advancing their own theocratic policies. Thus, Pope John Paul II, who is not a fundamentalist, criticizes the Pinochet government of Chile for its "dictatorial" policies, while Protestant televangelist Jimmy Swaggart calls General Pinochet "one of the world's great freedom fighters." Fundamentalists apparently have never met a right-wing government or politician they didn't like.

Not surprisingly, Catholic fundamentalists are unenthusiastic about Catholic social teachings. These Catholics do everything they can to avert attention from those teachings by focusing instead on "dissent," violations of traditional religious rules, homosexuality and the like.

Such Catholics are not preoccupied with the central tenets of the Bible, the Creed or defined Catholic dogmas, Father Arnold insists. On the contrary, they tend to harp on relatively subordinate issues as if they were primary. They rarely mention Jesus Christ or the kinds of moral issues that evidently most concerned Him: greed, religious hypocrisy or the misuse of authority.

"Their real concerns actually betray the theological and spiritual superficiality of the movement," Father Arnold concludes.

Father Paul J. Cuddy

On the Right Side



A letter from Alec Guinness

For years, my favorite actor has been Alec Guinness. In 1986, he wrote a quasi-autobiography, *Blessings in Disguise*, which I read while taking care of Wayland for Father Schnacky last June. To me, the most interesting chapter was about his becoming a Catholic.

Of his instructions by the English rector, Father Clarke — himself a convert to the Catholic Church — Guinness wrote that the instructions were so logical that he suspected some things were being hidden. "In some ways, I was troubled at how easily everything fell into place; all was so natural, apart from indulgences and papal infallibility, that I began to suspect Father Clarke must have missed on some essential which would turn out to be a major stumbling block. Finding no obstacle at St. Lawrence, I determined to seek the worst further afield. I wanted to see Catholicism at its grimmest and least sympathetic." So Guinness went to the Trappist Abbey of St. Bernard. His book gives a funny account of his experience.

A favorite author of mine is Graham Greene, also an English convert. In 1983, he wrote a whimsical novel, *Monsignor Quixote*, about a simple Spanish priest and his friend, the defeated communist mayor. This novel was made into a TV film starring Alec Guinness. It was shown over PBS stations last March. I was so pleased that I wrote to the actor, thanking him. He sent this prompt reply from Petersfield, Hampshire, England:

"How kind of you to have written, and so generously — both in your letter and in the Courier-Journal.

"An odd thing that may interest you: there are always a number of people

around when one is filming; perhaps fifty-odd, mostly technicians, carpenters, electricians and so on.

"When I did the scene of 'the dry Mass' in *Monsignor Quixote*, I was aware of an extra stillness and concentration among them, much more than one usually gets. When it was over, one of the men — aged perhaps 40 and a simple sort of chap — came up to me and said, 'Alec, I'm not a believer myself, but tell me — have I been to a Mass?' I assured him he hadn't. 'Well, then I must go one day, mustn't I?' he replied.

"Also as a result of the film, I've had three letters from total strangers saying they were lapsed Catholics but felt they could find their way back into the Church. Good for Graham Greene, I say, and for outweighing all brickbats on indifference that one encounters from time to time."

"Commenting on my wish that he might do a film on Cardinal Newman, he concluded his letter: 'I am far from right for Newman. I have long been a devoted admirer of his, but it was only last year for the first time that I went to visit his rooms at Littlemore, Oxford. I don't think I have ever been in a more numinous atmosphere as clings to the drab little chapel where he made his submission to Rome.

"Yours sincerely,
Alec Guinness"

I have a videotaped copy of *Monsignor Quixote*, featuring Alec Guinness and Frank McKern, which I will be glad to loan to responsible groups that promise to return it promptly. The format is VHS. Write me at Holy Trinity Church, 1460 Ridge Rd. E., Webster, N.Y. 14580.



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Thursday, June 4, 1987



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Included will be a listing of all graduates from the eight Catholic High Schools, a photo of the valedictorian and salutatorian from each school, and details of commencement ceremonies.

If you or your business would like to participate in the Courier-Journal's Graduation Supplement, special advertising rates and sizes are as follows:

1/4 page	5 x 4 inches	\$135.00
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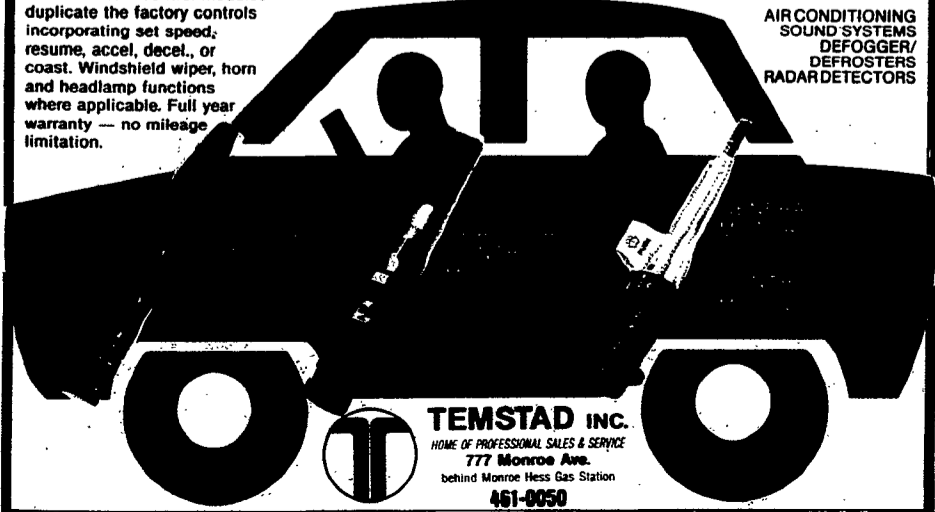
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