

Qhutbah, Insha Allah, Friday, May 23, 2008

Alhamdu lillah, wa ash hadu ala ila ha ill lallah

Bismillah hir Rahman nir Rahim

Since a long time now, we hear a word frequently being used – “fundamentalism”. It is being used per se for Muslims in the media. This term has detrimental and perverse implications and it may be desirable to trace its genesis, purpose and scope of its use. The Encyclopaedia Britannica defines the terms as: *conservative movement in American Protestantism arising out of the millenarian movement of the 19th century and emphasizing as fundamental to Christianity the literal interpretation and absolute inerrancy of the Scriptures, the imminent and physical Second Coming of Jesus Christ, the Virgin Birth, Resurrection, and Atonement. Fundamentalism came into its own in the early 20th century in opposition to modernist tendencies in American religious and secular life. In the late 20th century numerous church bodies, educational institutions, and special-interest organizations represented the movement. The roots of fundamentalism are found in the history of the American millenarian movement. In the 1830s and '40s, much excitement was generated in the United States by expectations of the Second Advent of Christ and an ensuing thousand years of peace (“the millennium”). The initially scattered interest in the subject was concentrated and built into a movement largely through the Niagara Bible Conference.*

So this definition and description of fundamentalism brings out in unambiguous terms that the word “fundamentalism” was first used in the 19th century for a group of Christians who had developed differences from other Christians in matters of belief. This term was coined in America to put a tag of distinction on orthodox Christians. These differences continue unabated and can be traced even in present day churches.

The sectarian assortments among Muslims pale into insignificance if we compare them to the different sects of say Christianity for example. The Roman Catholic Bible has six additional chapters than the Protestant Bible and they have different sects like Brazilian Catholic Apostolic Church, Community of the Lady of All Nations, Free Catholic Church, Palmarian Catholic Church, Philipine Independent Church, and Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God. The Protestants are of infinite variety like Anglicans, Baptists, Calvinists, Charismatics, Coptics, Eastern Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Lutherans, Methodists, Mormons, Pentacostalists, Presbyterians, Seventh Day Adventists, Trinitarians, Unitarians, First Church of Christ Scientist, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and Quakers (Friends) never going to any church. These differentiations have led to massacres, persecutions and religions wars in 17th Century Europe and the differences continue.

What happened later was the number of Christians adhering to the conservative belief (or fundamentals) were much less when compared to modernists who constituted the majority so Americans were attracted to a liberal and secular way of life and the term “fundamentalists” was downgraded to a rather prejudiced connotation.

At the end of World War II, two main antagonistic forces - the capitalists and the communists emerged on the global political scenario and locked horns. The Cold War raged in full swing and afterwards there was the resultant collapse of the Berlin Wall, the Iron and Bamboo Curtains. Due to behaviour totally opposite to what the Quran preaches, Islam began to be associated with terms like fundamentalism, militancy and terrorism. It is growing in vehemence and intensity. The word now is blatantly used and abused for Muslims as said earlier. At times, people who are a little more lenient say - okay, don't use the term “*fundamentalist*” but use the word “*fanatic*”. But there is no sense in saying “fanatic Muslim” because a Muslim cannot be a *fanatic* per se.

To be a Muslim, one has to follow certain rules and regulations. Primarily, it is belief in God alone, the Day of Judgment and Hereafter, the Quran and all other revealed Scriptures, the Angels, the Prophets and Messengers, Fasting and the Haj Pilgrimage when and where possible and leading a righteous life etc. One cannot enter into its embrace without them. No one in his right frame of mind would deny having faith in this set of beliefs that form the *fundamentals* of Islam. Conversely, how could someone be reckoned a Muslim (Submitter) if he or she does not believe in even one of these beliefs. It is entirely another matter as to the quality and quantity of the job we do. For this we have God's great gift – to repent and reform but we cannot take liberty out of license.

In fact, Islam, Judaism and Christianity have many things in common. The followers of all these religions believe in God, heavenly guidance and accountability, the principles of equity and justice, and entertain the same view of humankind, life and ethics. They all acknowledge a democratic process and institutions and share concepts and ideas of human rights, liberty and rule of law.

The Ten Commandments are found in the Books of Exodus Chapter 20: 2-17 and Deuteronomy Chapter 5:6-21. Excerpts: -

1. You shall not worship any other god.
2. You shall not make any graven images.
3. You shall not take the name of God in vain.
4. You shall not break the Sabbath.
5. You shall not dishonor your parents.
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not commit perjury.
10. You shall not covet.

We too have our list of commandments and have a respect for life, marriage, property; we respect our parents and should be truthful in public statements about other people. Of course, there will be variation in detail that perhaps could be ascribed to differences in cultural environments.

Major Commandment [17:22] You shall not set up any other god beside GOD, lest you end up despised and disgraced. [17:23] Your Lord has decreed that you shall not worship except Him, and your parents shall be honored. As long as one or both of them live, you shall never say to them, "Uff" (the slightest gesture of annoyance), nor shall you shout at them; you shall treat them amicably. [17:24] And lower for them the wings of humility, and kindness, and say, "My Lord, have mercy on them, for they have raised me from infancy." [17:26] You shall give the due alms to the relatives, the needy, the poor, and the traveling alien, but do not be excessive, extravagant. Stinginess Condemned [17:29] You shall not keep your hand stingily tied to your neck, nor shall you foolishly open it up, lest you end up blamed and sorry. Abortion is Murder [17:31] You shall not kill your children due to fear of poverty. We provide for them, as well as for you. Killing them is a gross offense. [17:32] You shall not commit adultery; it is a gross sin, and an evil behavior. [17:33] You shall not kill any person - for GOD has made life sacred - except in the course of justice. If one is killed unjustly, then we give his heir authority to enforce justice. Thus, he shall not exceed the limits in avenging the murder; he will be helped. [17:34] You shall not touch the orphans' money except for their own good, until they reach maturity. You shall fulfill your covenants, for a covenant is a great responsibility. [17:35] You shall give full measure when you trade, and weigh equitably. This is better and more righteous. Crucial Advice [17:36] You shall not accept any information, unless you verify it for yourself. I have given you the hearing, the eyesight, and the brain, and you are responsible for using them. [17:37] You shall not walk proudly on earth - you cannot bore through the earth, nor can you be as tall as the mountains. [17:38] All bad behavior is condemned by your Lord.

The important thing to understand is what exactly is meant by *Islamic fundamentalism* and whom does it refer to when calling and addressing people as *fundamentalists*. Should terrorists and militants called *Islamic fundamentalists*? It has to be noted that true Islam does not approve or support any type of terrorism even though people might believe that it is used to "support" Islam.

Grossness of Murder [5:32] Because of this, we decreed for the Children of Israel that anyone who murders any person who had not committed murder or horrendous crimes, it shall be as if he murdered all the people. And anyone who spares a life, it shall be as if he spared the lives of all the people. Our messengers went to them with clear proofs and revelations, but most of them, after all this, are still transgressing.

The etymology of the root word of Islam springs from peace and true Islam preaches peace. Just look at our greeting. So if anyone indulges in terrorist activities it is in clear violation of Islamic tenets. A clear contradiction is apparent here and true Muslims cannot support any of these unlawful activities. Many nations have their own groups of

people who indulge in terrorist activities for example U.L.F.A. in Assam, Bodoland in North Bengal, Naxalites, Maoists, Tamil Tigers of Sri Lanka, Irish Republican Army, Ku Klux Klan, Neo Nazis, Skinheads, Dotbusters and the erstwhile Baader Meinhof Gang (the Red Army Faction) of Germany, etc. Why are they not branded as fundamentalists? What about the blind and bearded Shoko Asahara's Aum Supreme Truth cult who put *Sarin* – a poison gas on the Tokyo subway. Why are they not called Buddhist fundamentalists?

Christianity has its cloistered and hooded monks and this was never a part of the Islamic doctrine. The Quran prohibited hermitism as a form of worship of and devotion to the Almighty and thoroughly discourages it. The Buddhists have their hermits too and run away to the mountains and / or commit suicide on the slightest pretext. You cannot escape and abandon your role on earth.

Deterioration of Religion [57:27] Subsequent to them, we sent our messengers. We sent Jesus the son of Mary, and we gave him the Injeel (Gospel), and we placed in the hearts of his followers kindness and mercy. But they invented hermitism which we never decreed for them. All we asked them to do was to uphold the commandments approved by GOD. But they did not uphold the message as they should have. Consequently, we gave those who believed among them their recompense, while many of them were wicked.

Have you heard of the Italian “Saint” San Bernardino da Siena? We got the term “Bonfire of the Vanities” from him. It refers to the burning of objects that are deemed to be occasions of sin. The most famous one took place on 7 February 1497, when supporters of the Dominican priest Girolamo Savonarola collected and publicly burned thousands of objects in Florence, Italy on the Shrove Tuesday festival. The focus of this destruction was on objects that might tempt one to sin, including vanity items such as mirrors, cosmetics, fine dresses, and even musical instruments. Other targets included immoral books, manuscripts of secular songs, and pictures. Such bonfires were not invented by Savonarola, however; they were a common accompaniment to the outdoor sermons of San Bernardino da Siena in the first half of the century.

All of us Muslims believe in the fundamentals of Islam and we practice them Masha Allah and so then we should all be called fundamentalists. But the term has a very derogatory connotation that is not only objectionable but also detestable. Why should practicing Muslims be given a bad name if they are practice commandments of God and not interfere with those following other faiths?

It is evident that the Quran has concisely defined Islam, which has been elaborately preached by the Prophets and Messengers from time to time. Does the Quran not define for us what is Islam in unambiguous terms? Is not the Quran available for us in the same form in which it was revealed to the Prophet and communicated by him to the community? Is not the Quran a public document ever since Prophet Muhammad first recited its contents? Do you find any other version of the Quran in circulation like

numerous versions of the Bible (the Mormons have their own Bible) to confuse and confound our understanding of what is Islam? Is the Quran not valid for all nations and peoples in all ages and times? What else could be the binding force that brings 1.6 billion together? (At least on paper !)

If God says He created the human, we accept if cheerfully other than people who are not called *fundamentalists* and are still searching for Darwin's elusive ape whose final "link" with humans is still missing. It is their own Bible that says that Adam was created in God's own image. How come they don't accept it? We accept anything that the Bible says provided it does not go against the spirit of the Quran.

If one asks the propagators of the word *fundamentalist* a direct question as to what do they mean by this term, the answer will invariably be evasive and cause further confusion. We have strict laws as to what we can eat and drink. These days even people who strictly adhere to these laws like not eating pork / drinking and gambling are termed as *fundamentalists*.

When all Muslims adhere to Islamic beliefs (fundamentals) – then we are all *fundamentalists* but not in the sense the media try to portray. In fact, Muslims have numerous sects and argue with one another even as to the time of the day but as far as basic fundamentals are concerned there is no argument. It is unfortunate that sometimes even Muslims themselves use this term unwittingly about their brethren not realising the implication it carries.

Therefore, it is important that a distinction should be made before using the term *fundamentalist* and it must not be tagged along with the word "Islamic" if it is to be used in its present belittling sense. Today, the world is in the grip of violence, terrorism, ethnic strife, women victimization, child abuse, infanticide, murder kidnapping, drug addiction, disease and poverty. These are common enemies of all of us alike. We should co-operate, Insha Allah, to fight against these heinous crimes being committed against humanity and wipe them out to make this earth a place of peace and prosperity.