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Fanaticism means biased, machiavellian advocacy of a cause that is experienced to be valuable. A fanatic has lost his true picture of reality. His reality becomes distorted and starts serving the cause he is advocating and the means he has chosen to achieve its fruition.

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27 May 1991

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# ON FANATICISM

## A PERSONAL VIEW

BY SEPPO KANERVA

Fanaticism, this Latin origin word, is derived from the word *fanum*, which means "temple." Originally, fanaticism must have denoted religious zealotry; in more recent times its meaning has been extended to include any type of one-eyed, biased zealotry for a good cause, with no respect for the consequences. A fanatic believes that his view is the only true one and that he has the right to force his view upon others, at any cost. And that leads up to dictation. On the other hand, we must be careful not to label all behaviour in defense of the truthful and rightful as fanaticism; truth of course must be defended! Anyhow, fanaticism must be viewed as a negative, avoidable and discardable phenomenon. It constitutes an opposite to tolerance and forbearance, and in many cases it is a disservice to the defenses of that which is truthful and rightful.

### 1. Psychological and Social Grounds of Fanaticism

The underlying psychological factors of fanaticism must be several. A prerequisite for all progress, even spiritual progress, is dissatisfaction with that which has been achieved. Dissatisfaction leads to attempts to correct either oneself or one's environment so that they might better correspond to one's wishes, i.e. to transform them less dissatisfactory. This quality is, in my view, inherent in us. In case the corrective measures are focused mainly or primarily on the environment, it results in attempts to produce desired changes also in other persons, i.e. in attempts to dictate one's preferences and ideas to others, so to force them to adopt one's views, ways of living and so on and so forth. This is the same as to turn everyone else into one's slave. A human being is constantly under this kind of enforcing influence. We speak about "social pressure," when this conforming and uniforming enforcement stems from a larger group, not just from an individual. If the compulsion is acted out with the use of force and violence,

and if there tends to be suppression of all deviating thinking, it is proper to call it fanaticism.

Whereas man is a being with a gregarious instinct, i.e., a desire to belong to a social group and there to become recognized and acknowledged, social pressure in most cases results in his compliance and adaptation, which, on the other hand, is also the prerequisite for social existence. Society can exist only in circumstances where its components comply with certain limitations, with common ideas, and consent to limit their personal freedom.

Apart from his need to be socially accepted, man has likewise a need to be superior, to be an object of admiration, to be honoured and respected. This is the vanity desire. Not far from this desire is the desire to subject, the desire to wield power. And this is the mentality of a fanatic; a fanatic always seeks to dictate his views upon others, to subject others, to force others to honour and adore him.

If again an individual experiences that he is not accepted, admired, or respected within his group, his vanity desire causes what we call, frustrations. The individual then stamps a label of no-good, wrong, ridiculous, or worthless on the ideas and views that the social group holds in esteem. He denies them, disputes their validity. To escape from the pain of his being unaccepted, he may even deny the value of the whole of the social environment that failed to acknowledge him. In this way he denies and rejects the importance of his non-acceptance by the group; the non-acceptance loses its meaning. But whereas the desire to be accepted and recognized did not vanish, he has to seek for other sources for its satisfaction. He works out, or more likely he copies from someone else who is equally frustrated, doctrines, philosophies, ideas and views on how a society, a social environment, should look like. And the truthfulness of these tenets does not necessarily play any central role in his thinking. Frustrated individuals may then band themselves into organizations, political parties, terrorist cells, or anything analogous, and then take measures to change the social environment into their liking, with no respect for the opinion of the social environment itself. While the values, ideas, and truths repre-

mented by the social environment have been denied, there is nothing to beware; all means are permissible; the change must be brought about at any cost. A fanatic and a fanatical group has been born. This subject is discussed in Paper 88: *A doctrinal fetish will lead mortal man to betray himself into the clutches of bigotry, fanaticism, superstition, intolerance, and the most atrocious of barbarous cruelties.* [88:2:7 pg. 969] The doctrine need not be a mischievous one nor dishonest; very often it is a concoction of the best of motives, good intentions and purposes; its adherents may be true idealists. An idealist turns into a fanatic when he begins to force others to adopt his superb ideas. It may though happen that the idealist nurtures doubts about truthfulness, validity, or practicability of his ideas, and in fear of his ideas becoming exposed as untrue, impossible, or impractical if submitted to a critical analysis, he tries to prevent and suffocate all criticism. He finds it necessary, at any cost, to defend his ideas even if facts tend to speak against them, for he cannot survive the pain of his ideas being proven wrong. Again, an idealist turns into a fanatic.

A fact also is that inside a group of fanatics there is bound to be a constant struggle for power. At stake is the question of who it is that dictates the policies and methods of the group.

The fanatic regards that he enjoys a supreme understanding, knowledge or even a divine revelation as to how things should be, and that he has been chosen -- either he has chosen himself, his group has chosen him, or the superhuman beings have chosen him -- to change the society, the world, so that it would be in line with this understanding, knowledge or revelation.

Whereas the readers of *The URANTIA Book* and the believers in its teachings do have in their possession this supreme understanding, knowledge and revelation, it places an enormous responsibility upon us, and may be one of the reasons why the dissemination of this message, *The URANTIA Book* teachings, must proceed slowly, and along with evolution. About Jesus it is said: *But in all his intense mission and throughout his extraordinary life there never appeared the fury of the fanatic nor the superficial frothiness of the religious egotist.* [196:0:8 pg. 2088] We do well should we try the same.

In Paper 134, in a context where Jesus' Urmia lectures are discussed, there is this statement: *Freewill beings who regard themselves as equals, unless they mutually acknowledge themselves as subject to some supersovereignty, some authority over and above themselves, sooner or later are tempted to try out their ability to gain power and authority over other persons and groups... The Urmia religionists lived together in comparative peace and tranquility because they had fully surrendered all their notions of religious sovereignty. Spiritually, they all believed in a sovereign God; socially, full and unchallengeable authority rested in their presiding head -- Cymboytan. [134:4:9-10 pg. 1487]* Could this serve as a guideline in the formation of reader organizations?

## 2. The Philosophic Grounds of Fanaticism

In Paper 196 there is also this statement about Jesus: *The all-consuming and indomitable spiritual faith of Jesus never became fanatical, for it never attempted to run away with his well-balanced intellectual judgments concerning the proportional values of practical and commonplace social, economic, and moral life situations. [196:0:7 pg. 2088]*

There can be no doubt about Jesus not having unswervingly defended the truth and having sought to eliminate error. In my opinion the best way to counteract fanaticism is to recall Jesus' teaching methods and to seek to apply them. We are told about the methods that Jesus employed in his teaching that, among other things, he never highlighted the error by his focusing on what was wrong in his pupil's views, but that he always grasped at what was true in those views, and then by illuminating and elaborating those aspects that were right, he made his pupil himself, observe his errors and untruthful ideas.

Of Amadon, the human hero of the Lucifer rebellion, who was unmoved in his defense of the truth and in his place at the side of Van, it is told in Paper 67: *From Edentia up through Salvington and even on to Uversa, for seven long years the first inquiry of all subordinate celestial life regarding the Satania rebellion, ever and always, was "What of Amadon of Urantia, does he still stand unmoved?" [67:8:3 pg. 762].* Yet, no

statement is made of Amadon having been a fanatic, even if he was firm in his alignment with truth.

Religious fanaticism is the wrong kind of defense of truth. The fanatical attitude is built upon the philosophical notion of bipolarity, which admits only two alternatives, right and wrong, truth and error, righteousness and sin. In most cases this is valid, and in final analysis, it is so in all matters. Such a simple approach is adequate when one has to make the most crucial decision of one's lifetime. But it is inadequate if one is to yield fruits of the spirit; it is good just as far as it eliminates the fruits of error. The philosophy of a fanatic is one of "either/or"; yet a more fruitful philosophy is that of "both/and." A "both/and" philosophy admits that even in error there may, in most cases, be a seed of truth. Even the Lucifer Manifesto had some elements of truth in it; everything that he was after, he would have achieved in the due course of time. A fanatic's approach ignores the fact that it is God's will that we live in a state of imperfection and in circumstances, where the truth is only gradually expressing itself; it grows up and out from error, along with the progress of evolution. A fanatic condemns the error and attempts, at any cost, to destroy and eliminate it. Fanaticism means that evolution would be denied its opportunities for presenting itself.

In the light of the quote from Paper 196, Jesus' approach and attitude was well-balanced and founded on a judgment of the proportional values of social, economic, and moral life situations. What we need is an ability to judge the proportional values of various things; to assess the amount of truth that they hold, and to estimate to what extent error can be translated into truth. Jesus always preached temperance-relativity-conscious adjustment of life problems. A fanatic reduces all situations into an issue in the struggle of good and evil; truth and error. He craves clean-cut and uncompromising instructions, rules and definitions. Reality, however, is complex, and seldom lends itself to simple definitions.

We are constantly facing problems like: How far should we tolerate error? Where does the line go between justified and unjustified tolerance? What would be a productive and effective way to transmute error into truth? In

what issues are compromises permissible; in what issues are compromises impermissible? There are no simple and easy answers to these questions. The fanatic's answers are always simple, even simplistic. It constitutes a part of our growth and development that we seek answers to these very questions; it is a way to expand our wisdom. Jesus, on the other hand, *pointed out that overmuch sympathy and pity may degenerate into serious emotional instability; that enthusiasm may drive on into fanaticism.* [149:4:3 Pg. 1673]

### 3. The Grounds of Religious Fanaticism

Jesus discussed in his Urmia lectures also the subject of religious fanaticism and its consequences. Through these teachings we know that there can be no peace between religions, nor can the world be free from religious wars, as long as religions cling to their ecclesiastical authority and spiritual superiority, and fail to recognize God the Father's spiritual sovereignty. *The kingdom of heaven, the divine government, is founded on the fact of divine sovereignty--God is spirit. Since God is spirit, this kingdom is spiritual... If different religions recognize the spirit sovereignty of God the Father, then will all such religions remain at peace...* [134:4:2-3 pg. 1486]

As long as religions fanatically advocate their concepts which claim that the dogmas, doctrines, holy books, ceremonials, hierarchies, moral codes, gods, etc. are singularly the only rightful ones, so long will that dogma, that doctrine, that holy book, that hierarchy, that moral code, those gods, and not God the Father, remain as their supreme sovereigns, and so long will they fight one another. In making this statement, we need, however, to remember that not all religions are of equal value; some religions are more truthful than others, yet none of them may make a claim on all truth. Religious tolerance does not presuppose uncritical approval of the tenets and ceremonials of all religions; instead it is a quest for the common Supreme Sovereign, God the Father, and a search for him in the dogmas, worshipful ceremonies and spiritual activities of each and every religion.

On mysticism, which constitutes an essential part of many a religion, there is this

statement in Paper 91: *Mysticism, as the technique of the cultivation of the consciousness of the presence of God, is altogether praiseworthy, but when such practices lead to social isolation and culminate in religious fanaticism, they are all but reprehensible.* [91:7:1 pg. 1000] Even this is a fact to be constantly kept in mind.

### 4. Political and National Fanaticism

The Urmia lectures include a statement that *"war is not man's great and terrible disease; war is a symptom, a result. The real disease is the virus of national sovereignty."* [134:6:7 pg. 1491] And then there is another statement that *"political sovereignty is innate with the peoples of the world."* [134:5:12 pg. 1489]

The political sovereignty and both national and linguistic fanaticism have been the cause of innumerable wars. Nor needs a *URANTIA* Book reader be much teased with any subject that hurts his national pride or affects his linguistic identity, or that underlines the superiority of another nation or another language, for him to be ready fanatically to defend what is his own. The Urmia lectures teach us that warfaring will not come to an end through the conventional means of peace efforts, alliances, diplomacy, disarmament or others; warfaring stops only after the world sovereign nations have democratically, intelligently and fully surrendered their sovereign rights to a world government, to a global government, i.e., to a body that represents mankind sovereignty. Only then may we nurture hopes for an end to national fanaticism.

In one of the passages on the Urmia lectures we may read: *Under global government the national groups will be afforded a real opportunity to realize and enjoy the personal liberties of genuine democracy. The fallacy of self-determination will be ended. With global regulation of money and trade will come the new era of world-wide peace. Soon may a global language evolve, and there will be at least some hope of sometime having a global religion--or religions with a global viewpoint.* [134:6:11 pg. 1491]

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cial, etc., tolerance, or an absence of fanaticism, does not mean that there is a need to consider all nations, races, languages, etc., to be of equal value.

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