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PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF EXTREMISM

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Two basic theories have been suggested in seeking an understanding of the psychological dimensions of extremism. They are summed up in the phrases: (1) the frustrated self, and (2) the authoritarian personality.

Extremists of the left are often frustrated revolutionaries, while the extremists of the right are often authoritarian conservatives.

Serious consideration of extremism as a phenomenon requires some definition of terms. The extremism with which we are concerned is more an attitude toward others than beliefs or viewpoints, no matter with what degree of conviction they are held. Such extremism might be defined as an over-response to a real or a supposed threat coming from others.

Extremism is most often characterized by a kind of cynical, pathological intolerance. In fact, all extremism is pervaded by intolerance, the very essence of extremism. Extremists are unwilling to endure the views, opinions and religious beliefs of others. They fence themselves in with their intolerance and live in a world of their own "ism."

This intolerance cultivates suspicion and breeds distrust. Radical intolerance often explodes in expressions of hatred and acts of violence. In all cases it fosters division.

Extremists almost seem to fear the views of others. They profess to have an exclusive claim on truth. They close their minds to ideas different from their own. Extremists are unable to respect those with strong convictions who hold different views.

Frustration is also a basic psychological characteristic of extremism. Extremists of the right are often frustrated because of rapid social changes they oppose. Black militants and extremists of the left are often frustrated because the changes they advocate come so slowly.

Just as frustration motivates most of the so-called New Left, so fear motivates most of the so-called Radical Right. Symptoms of paranoia abound in the life of the fearful extremist. He is suspicious of almost everyone and afraid of some "evil conspiracy."

Often the extremist of the right is characterized by a frustrated, authoritarian personality. Such persons seek and find a kind of security under the wing of an authoritarian leader or organization which, they feel, stands for orthodoxy. Extremists are more secure when they carry out orders, when they identify with an authoritarian person--the leader. Such leaders often have a kind of Messianic complex.

Some who stand as leaders of the Radical Right are really insecure people, although they stand as strong, authoritarian leaders.

We need to recognize that there is danger both in the New Left and in the Radical Right. We should make sure that fear of neither extreme is permitted to paralyze us in meeting the real issues of our time.

Extremism is a psychological sickness that will not be cured until lines of communication can be established with the extremists. Much more effort is needed in seeking to communicate with extremists of both left and right. Achieving a climate of free discussion with them will require little short of a miracle. But such a climate is essential if attitudes are to be changed.



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Secular, Religious Cooperation
Urged By Texas Welfare Official

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DALLAS (BP)--Baptist social workers attending an organizational meeting of the Southern Baptist Social Service Association heard speeches on ethnic group needs, welfare programs, and youth projects, and also toured the multi-ministry facilities of Buckner Baptist Benevolences here.

One major speaker, Herbert C. Wilson, deputy commissioner for the Texas Department of Public Welfare, reminded the Baptist social workers that cooperation of governmental and private social endeavors is imperative.

Defining the national trend in social welfare as "broadening the scope of serving poor people, regardless of category," he asserted that "most states have programs of old-age assistance, aid to the blind, aid to the totally disabled, and aid to families with dependent children. If a man doesn't fit into one of these categories, he is without help."

It is up to the private and public social units to co-operate in filling these gaps," he concluded.

Other speakers at the meeting were Sam Smith, Superintendent of Connie Maxwell Children's Home, Greenwood, S.C.; C. W. Scudder, professor of theology, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth; and Harold Dill, professor of youth education, Southwestern Seminary.

The workshop phase of the two-day meeting included interviews with five divorced mothers from Buckner Maternity Home plus other studies in child care, hospitals, Christian social ministries, and problems of the aging.

President-elect Bill J. Baker, director of child care services at Buckner Benevolences, commented on the origin of the association:

"This is the first conference meeting. We've been associated with other groups, but this is our first time to meet alone as Southern Baptist social workers. Plans are underway to make this an annual event, with meetings in the various Southern Baptist Convention States."

Previously, the association held small group meetings in conjunction with the annual Southern Baptist Counseling and Guidance Conference, which voted to disband in October of 1968 "in view of the conference's achieved objectives and goals." At that time the Social Service Association voted, however, to continue annual meetings.

Baker said that 75 members are now affiliated with the association. Its primary concern, he said, is "to promote the matter of social conscience in our churches." Another objective is to increase awareness among Southern Baptists of what is being done in the social welfare area.

Presiding was W. R. Wagoner, president of the Baptist Children's Homes of North Carolina, Inc., and outgoing president of the association.

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Billy Graham To Speak
For Baylor Anniversary

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WACO, Tex. (BP)--Evangelist Billy Graham will speak Feb. 1 at Baylor University as part of the Baptist school's year-long 125th anniversary commemoration.

The Southern Baptist minister and confidant of Presidents Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon will deliver the Sunday afternoon address in Waco's Heart O' Texas Coliseum.

Other state and national leaders in various fields are expected to participate in the anniversary observance during the year.

Graham holds an honorary degree from Baylor, the world's largest Baptist University and the oldest institution of higher education in continuous existence in the state.

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The school was chartered by the Republic of Texas in 1845.

Besides recalling Baylor's heritage, the year of celebration will be aimed at making a major contribution to Christian education and more widely indentifying Baylor as a church-related institution committed to excellence of Christian principles and social responsibility.

Theme for the year of emphasis is "Baylor Excellence--A Tradition, A Practice, A Promise."

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