

## The Fear That Binds Us

The bubble of fear is already formed around us. As Scott Bayder-Saye outlined in his plenary sessions at this fall's Interdisciplinary Studies conference, fear is rampant not only in our media, it's alive in our schools, is a guiding factor in government, and it is even permeating our churches. We are almost constantly bombarded with fear-fuelled ideas that teach us that suspicion, pre-emption, and accumulation are the virtues we need to cultivate as a society. If we accept these virtues and embrace a so-called 'ethic of security', we are offered a feeling of escape from fear of the other, fear of the state, fear of death, and fear of chaos.

And for most of our waking lives, we buy into it. Cozy in the bubble, daily details about detained terror suspects, video cameras to be installed in busses, and stricter immigration laws intended to protect us have become a type of white noise – a constant spectacle that drowns out the details and blurs the line between our own thoughts and the things we are told we need to think about in order to 'stay safe'.

And that facilitates the ease by which a story can be manipulated and told to us in a certain way so that a full spectrum of perspectives becomes symbolically reconstructed as a strict dichotomy; one side to be trusted as 'official' and 'sanctioned Truth', and the other side as something to be feared. Presented with this kind of thinking, we are made to say "Yes!" to anything that appears to be on the 'sanctioned Truth' To-Do list. This fall, both plenary speakers Dennis Edney and Scott Bayder-Saye touched on this idea that fear puts us in a place where we are ready to do anything for the illusion of safety, even give up our own human rights.

For young minds at King's, this may mean that what is being discussed today with concern may only be the tip of the iceberg in terms of our future. If we think our government is reacting inappropriately now, using "fear of the other and 'us versus them' ideas to motivate resistance to the climate change idea," as Linda Duncan suggested in the *Fear in Public Policy* breakout session, it is worrisome to think about what the effects of this attitude will be on the global community 10-20 years from now. It will most certainly be worse for those "others" over in Southeast Asia and Africa; and where will they go when their neighbourhoods are turning into beaches? As a nation, in the past we have had a reputation for peace building and being willing to lead aid missions to countries that need our help. As our government prepares us for a tougher stance on federal immigration laws, where is that sense of social responsibility today? "We can't isolate ourselves from the realities of the implication of our behaviour," said Paul Dewar, the NDP critic for foreign affairs, and it seems that it is not only government, but also industry, media, and churches who are lacking the courage to reject ignorance and fear in favour of "solidarity and real security... helping other nations and our own interests at the same time." What may be distant concerns for the future now could turn into something much scarier once we start to see the moral consequences of our disordered bubble of fear turn into a cage that separates our society from the Rule of Law.

It is clear that the issue of fear is real and requires a sober response. But what can we do to act against this idea that inoculates us? First and foremost, I think, is to remember that it is a perceptual bubble we find ourselves in – an ideological way of thinking about power, responsibility, and threats which deserves careful consideration and critique. And it isn't real – the world will keep on turning even if it gets burst.

Second, as Dr. Bayder-Saye pointed out in his opening plenary session, “fear is not an evil in and of itself.” There is a way to ‘fear rightly’ and it involves three basic criteria:

1. That a proper love is threatened,
2. The threat is of great magnitude, and
3. The threat is imminent.

In order to assess something as a legitimate fear though, and to respond to it with courage and hope, it is necessary to have understanding. Students at King’s are in a great position because that is exactly what we are here to do: to learn and to be informed on a broad number of perspectives, especially when it comes to finding out what our role is as Christians so that we might make decisions out of love and not fear as we participate in society.

I can’t imagine being well-informed on any issue if I limited my enquiries to what I saw on the daily 6 o’clock news; I have to assume there is always an alternative from what is culturally presented to me, and this fall’s I.S. conference showed me how important it is to step beyond the train of popular fear-driven thought and have the courage to ask ‘What is really going on here? What can I do to address these problems in my community without fear?’ As Scott Bayder-Saye noted, “when we act locally, we affect globally”; being a part of the King’s community gives us the opportunity to be radical in the way that we learn to be particularly critical about any attributes of “the other” implied to us by those living constrained lives of fear, and to respond with constructive engagement to these issues that face us. Let’s take advantage of this relationship and continue a dialogue of understanding so that we can work on finding ways to act out against apathy while promoting responsibility for the future.