By R. Scott Appleby and Martin E. Marty

FUNDAMENTALISM

For all the current focus on fiery Islamic extremists, religious fundamentalists are not confined to any particular faith or country, nor to the poor and uneducated. Instead, they are likely to spring up anywhere people perceive the need to fight a godless, secular culture—even if they have to depart from the orthodoxy of their traditions to do it. In fact, what fundamentalists everywhere have in common is the ability to craft their messages to fit the times.

"All Fundamentalism Is Religious"

Yes. It's true that many sorts of groups share basic characteristics of religious fundamentalists: They draw lines in the sand, demand unconditional obedience from the rank and file, expend enormous energies maintaining boundaries between the pure and impure, build impenetrable dogmatic fortresses around "the truth," and see their version of it as absolute, infallible, or inerrant. Indeed, some may be tempted to seek manifestations of "secular fundamentalism" in Marxism or Soviet-era state socialism, in the many virulent strains of nationalism in evidence today, or in the unqualified extremism of ideologically driven revolutionary or terrorist movements, from Peru's Shining Path to Germany's Baader-Meinhof gang. In a similar vein, one might speak of "scientific fundamentalism" to connote the assumption, held by many modern scientists, that empirically based knowledge is the only reliable way of knowing reality.

But we hesitate to call such secular groups "fundamentalist." They may call upon followers to make the ultimate sacrifice, but unlike the monotheistic religions, especially Christianity and Islam, they do not reassure their followers that God or an eternal reward awaits them. The absence of a truly "ultimate" concern affects how such secular groups think about and carry out their missions, and the belief in heaven or paradise serves as a very different kind of framework for and legitimation of self-martyrdom in the monotheistic religions.

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"Fundamentalism Is Limited to Monotheism"

No. Let us put aside for the moment the observation that Hinduism and Buddhism are not religions in the Western sense of the word and that Hindus and Buddhists do not believe in a personal God. Like another major South Asian religion, Sikhism, which has produced its fair share of candidates for the fundamentalist family, these great traditions of belief and practice orient devotees to a reality (or nonreality) that transcends or renders illusory the mundane world. And they have produced powerful modern, antisecular, antimodernist, absolutist, boundary-setting, exclusionary, and often violent movements that bear startling resemblances to fundamentalism within the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic worlds.

Indeed, the Hindutva movement in India has consciously borrowed elements from the theistic Western traditions, including a supernatural patron, the Lord Rama, with his own sacred birthplace, in order to give Hinduism the kind of prickly spine that allows Western theistic fundamentalists to get their backs up when threatened. Sikh radicals exhibit a sense of apocalyptic expectation more natural in non-Asian cultures. And Buddhist "warriors" in Sri Lanka have transformed segments of the *sangha*, or monastic order, into an implacable force for religious and cultural nationalism. These "synthetic" Asian variants of fundamentalism select and canonize sacred epics, poems, and other open-ended genres into the stuff of fundamental, inerrant scripture.

"Fundamentalists Are Literalists"

Not so. Fundamentalists lay claim to preaching and practicing "the unvarnished word of God" as revealed in the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, or the Koran. This claim undergirds the fundamentalists' larger assertion that their authority comes directly from God and thus their program for reform and transformation is, in principle, beyond criticism. Such claims are patently false. Religious traditions are vast, complex bodies of wisdom built up over generations. Their foundational sources (sacred scriptures, codified oral teachings, and commentaries) express and interpret the experiences of the sacred that led to the formation of their religious communities. Religious traditions are not less than these sources; they are always more. Interpretation is nine tenths of the law—even religious law—and the sources of religious law are often multivalent and contradictory. One verse of the Koran condemns killing while another commands the slaying of infidels. How to choose? The art is called hermeneutics—developing a theory that guides the interpretation.

Fundamentalists claim not to interpret, but they are the narrowest and most ideologically guided interpreters. West Bank settlers of Gush Emunim in Israel, the most prominent fundamentalist movement in Judaism, depend not only on one esoteric way of reading the Torah but on the mystical utterances of two 20th-century rabbis, Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook the Elder and his son. The rabbis selected one of the 613 mitzvahs, or Torah duties—to settle "the whole land of Israel"—and elevated it above all others. Similarly, one of American Protestant fundamentalism's main themes, "premillennial dispensationalism," a form of apocalypse that proclaims that the world is deteriorating morally and that Christ will soon return in vengeance, is not "traditional." It was developed in England in the middle of the 19th century.

Fundamentalists are eager to adapt to the exigencies of the moment if it suits the movement's needs. In Lebanon, the militant Hezbollah benefited in the 1980s from Muslim clerics' promotion of the injunction to "be fruitful and multiply": From 1956 to 1975 the Shiite minority population tripled, so that in 20 years the Shiite representation in the population jumped from 19 to 30 percent. In postrevolutionary Iran, by contrast, officials argued that modification of birth control teaching did not violate traditional norms. Ministry of Health officials publicized how unchecked population growth hurt families and lauded the virtues of the small family and its quality of life. Officials then promoted birth control measures, a serious step given what had been interpreted as Islamic injunctions against such measures.

To gain support beyond small cadres of followers,

fundamentalist leaders must persuade ordinary believers to suspend existing teachings that condemn violence and promote peacemaking. Believers who are theologically informed and spiritually well formed tend not to be susceptible to such arguments. Unfortunately, ordinary believers are not always sufficiently grounded in the teachings and practices of their traditions to counter fundamentalists' selective reading of sacred texts. Thus religious extremists tend to prey upon the young and untutored.

"Fundamentalism Attracts the Poorest"

A common misperception. Without question, fundamentalist groups often recruit among and appeal to people on the short end of economic development. Often the followers are poor, jobless people, lacking worldly prospects. But they are not the poorest of the poor, who do not have the luxury of becoming disciples—much less leaders of fundamentalist movements—and are more preoccupied with "the fundamentals" of basic survival. More commonly, recruits come from the educated unemployed or underemployed, or from gainfully employed teachers, engineers, medical technicians, and other professionals in the applied sciences, areas of specialization in which modernizing societies are playing catch-up.

In Algeria, "the young men who hold up the walls" swelled the ranks of Islamist cadres in the 1980s and 1990s. The Algerian state had educated a generation of young men but had not developed an economy that could employ novice engineers and technocrats. Un- or underemployed, these young men, entering their sexual prime but frustrated because they could not support brides, hung out on street corners in Algiers and other urban centers,

What's in a Name?

While the word "fundamentalism" is here to stay, not everyone is at ease with it, and maybe no one ever should be. Clustering movements, for comparative purposes, that share broad "family resemblances" may lead untutored onlookers to wrongly conclude that all believers are fundamentalists, that all fundamentalists are terrorists, and therefore that every form of orthodox religion should be banished from public expression. Phrases like "the rage of Islam" don't help.

For a time, some newspapers chose to avoid the term and referred to fundamentalist movements only as "extremist," "militant," or "fanatic." Readers had a hard time making out just what people were "extremist" about. Militias are militant but not often fundamentalist. Football fans can be fanatic.

Yet many who shunned the word fundamentalist did so with good reason, and what they say gives pause to those who would use it casually. The main argument has been that the term belonged only in the United States, where Protestant fundamentalist Curtis Lee Laws coined the term and where a famous nonfundamentalist minister, Harry Emerson Fosdick, once defined a fundamentalist as "a mad evangelical."

Substitutes have not been satisfying. Call something "neoreformist radical revolutionary Islamism" and you may well point to the features of one movement. But how then may it be compared to others?

Some who attack the use of the word fundamentalism will use "capitalist" or "liberal" without batting an eye, even though both terms were born somewhere in some specific circumstance. Careful scholars and publics will take care to see exactly how various fundamentalist groups invest their movements with meaning and what particular meanings give life to their movements. They will pick their language with care. But to deny use of the term "fundamentalist" because it did not exist in other languages a century ago is not distinctive. It did not exist in English either. A new phenomenon was on the scene, and it needed a name.

–R.S.A., M.E.M.

awaiting social salvation. They were thus particularly receptive to the slogan, "Islam is the solution."

Across the Middle East, such desperate but capable men signed on to destroy the corrupt, repressive, ineffective, and nominally Muslim leadership of the Arab world. The daring joined the ranks of the transnational mujahedin—the Islamist "freedom fighters" dispatched to Afghanistan in the 1980s to thwart the godless Soviet invaders. The graduates of that campaign made their way into the ranks of al Qaeda, Islamic Jihad, and other terrorist networks.

The second category, gainfully employed but spiritually unfulfilled, swells the ranks of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic fundamentalist groups. As conservative Christian denominations in the United States split and fundamentalists left them during the 1920s and 1930s, many rural, culturally sheltered, traditionally religious people joined the newly formed independent churches, and fundamentalists got typed and dismissed as redneck, dirt-poor, backwoods people who had nothing to gain on earth and everything to gain by hope of heaven. But identifying Christian fundamentalists with hillbillies and rednecks is a half-truth, at best. Protestant fundamentalist leaders have included Princeton professors and "creationists" boasting Ph.D.'s. Today, Christian fundamentalists live in Dallas suburbs as well as in the Tennessee hill country. They drive BMWs in Nashville and own malls and Bible-based radio stations and cable channels.

The Jewish movements attracted affluent American Jews who made aliyah and upon their return to Israel turned super-Orthodox. The Islamic cadres hail from a variety of backgrounds, including extremely wealthy families, and have advanced degrees from Western universities. Mohammed Atta, the Hamburg-based student who learned to pilot jetliners in preparation for American Airlines Flight 11 (which crashed into the World Trade Center), is typical of the 21st-century fundamentalist—the illiterate or semiliterate peasant is not.

The fact that fundamentalist movements' middle management and rank and file frequently have educational and professional backgrounds in applied sciences, technical, and bureaucratic fields helps explain why fundamentalists tend to read scriptures like engineers read blueprints—as a prosaic set of instructions and specifications. In fundamentalist hands, the complex, multivocal, ambiguous treasury of mysteries is reduced to a storehouse of raw materials to be ransacked as needed for building a political program. Few poets or cosmologists find their way into fundamentalist cadres.

"Fundamentalism Leads to Violence"

Not necessarily. Social context and the local or regional political culture have much to say about the directions that fundamentalism takes. Within the abode of Islam, nation-states are either weak or failing, on the one hand, or dictatorial and repressive, on the other. Both contexts encourage violent variants of fundamentalism bent on replacing the state (as the Taliban did in Afghanistan) or overthrowing it (as the Shiites did in Iran and as radical Islamic groups have hoped to do in Egypt, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere).

American Christian fundamentalists would argue they are and always have been law-abiding citizens. "Why do you compare us to extremist Arabs and gun-toting Jewish settlers?" a fundamentalist friend once demanded. "We do not stockpile arms in the basement of Moody Bible School in Chicago!" Although they may sometimes be associated with abortion-clinic bombers and white supremacist or antigovernment militias—neither of which qualify as fundamentalists because of their tenuous connections to organized Christianity—American Christian fundamentalists do not resort to violence. But that may have more to do with the character of their society—open, pluralist, governed by the rule of law, and tolerant of moderate expressions of fundamentalism—than with their principled rejection of violence.

Many hard-bitten policymakers assume there is no such thing as a moderate fundamentalist—especially in the Islamic cases. Such a view allowed the U.S. government, the putative champion of democracy and free elections, to turn a blind eye to the 1991 invalidation and subsequent cancellation of democratic elections in Algeria, when the Islamic Salvation Front won at the ballot box and appeared poised to assume control of the parliament. The Islamic form of democracy, according to the conventional wis-

dom in the State Department, means "one man, one vote—one time."

There is insufficient evidence to support such a conclusion. Indeed, the majority of fundamentalist Muslims, including Islamists who serve in the parliaments of Jordan, Indonesia, and Malaysia, have consistently refused to identify their movements with the terrorist fringe.

Deadly violence does occur, however, when brands of fundamentalism clash, as in the case of religiously motivated Jewish settlers and Islamic militants fighting for the same territory on the West Bank and Gaza. In Africa, a bitter contest for souls between Christianity and Islam has led to the torture, murder, and, reportedly, the crucifixion of Christians by Islamic extremists. In Pakistan, blasphemy laws putatively based in Islamic law are used to justify the persecution of Christians and other religious minorities.

"Fundamentalists Oppose Change"

Hardly. Fundamentalists are dedicated to changing a world they see as godless, but their remedy is not to preserve or recreate the past. Amish they are not. In an odd way, they are "progressives," not conservatives; most people simply do not agree that the world they envision could be called "progress." They have inhabited the modern material and technical world while attempting to cast off its pernicious, dehumanizing, materialistic philosophy.

How does this profile of the thoroughly modern, change-oriented fundamentalist square with the image of the angry rebel? Fundamentalists are, indeed, reactive: Their independent churches, mosques, and yeshivas and their cadres, networks, and movements originated in heated, defiant opposition to some trend—be it the invasion of Bible criticism and evolutionists into Protestant seminaries and churches, the narrowly secular vision borne out in Israeli policies, or the corruption of "establishment" imams in Cairo and across the Sunni world.

But notice how they reacted. Not by yearning for the return of the golden age of medieval Islam, but by transforming the Prophet into an icon of global jihad who delivers modern nation-states to Islam. Not by hiding out in the ultra-Orthodox enclave of Mea Sharim in Jerusalem, but by forming political parties and playing power politics in the Knesset. Not merely by invoking 16th-century Protestant reformers such as Martin Luther and John Calvin, who defended the supreme authority of the Bible, but by inventing the concept of strict inerrancy.

Likewise, Sayyid Qutb, the major ideologue of the Muslim Brotherhood before his 1966 execution in Egypt, claimed that reputed Muslim societies had descended into a state of *jahiliyya* (pre-Islamic barbarism and ignorance). Under Qutb's teaching, everyone had to pass litmus tests designed to separate the true believer from the infidel, in order to wage jihad against the latter. He thereby displaced the concept of jihad as a believer's internal struggle against his profane passions with jihad as an external war against the unbeliever.

The examples abound: Fundamentalists do not oppose change; they specialize in it.

"Cults of Personality Drive Fundamentalism"

No. It would be comforting to think so. Unfortunately for those who would like to see their influence diminished, fundamentalist movements are not cults. Fundamentalist leaders may be charismatic, as is Sheik Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah, Hezbollah's spiritual guide, or they may not be, but they are always authoritarian. In other words, such leaders' appeal for potential recruits is their continuity with the ancient religious tradition, which they claim to uphold and defend. Thus, fundamentalist leaders, even the firebrands, must be perceived as acting and interpreting within the bounds of the tradition. And although Osama bin Laden pushes the envelope in this regard, he still argues his case on traditional grounds.

Scholars thus avoid lumping fundamentalists with cult leaders such as Branch Davidian leader

David Koresh, Jim Jones in Guyana, or Aum Shinrikyo's Shoko Asahara because the cultic leaders have decisively broken with tradition, in rhetoric as well as behavior. They claim the ancient prophecies are being fulfilled in their persons; apocalypse is now, and because they say so. Cult leaders have a problem, then, that most fundamentalist movements avoid. When cult leaders die, sometimes at their own beckoning, and the End does not arrive, most of their movements flare out as well. Fundamentalists, by contrast, aspire to be fixed stars in the firmament.

Accordingly, Fadlallah may deliver a radical ruling and support it with a fiery homily, but he always genuflects in the direction of Islamic law. And when he departs the scene, the Shiite community will raise up another leader, authoritarian, yes, and charismatic, perhaps. But fundamentalism doesn't require it. Certainly many of the early leaders of U.S. Protestant fundamentalism—Curtis Lee Laws and J. Gresham Machen—lacked charisma.

Most congregations have relied on their local pastors to decree what "the Bible says." Islam, too, is a village religion. It is true that electronic communications make it easier for leaders to reach many congregations. But technology is not the primary impetus for such movements. Fundamentalism appears almost as if by spontaneous combustion, or as if spread by capillary action, under the guidance of leaders who mumble, stumble, and falter but who are tagged as authorized agents of God because they properly interpret "the word." FP

Want to Know More?

From 1988 to 1993, the **Fundamentalism Project**, directed by Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, convened 10 conferences involving more than 100 scholars with expertise in fundamentalist movements around the world. The project produced five volumes of case studies and analytical essays edited by Marty and Appleby and published by the University of Chicago Press between 1991 and 1995. Marty and Appleby also produced a distillation of the Christian, Jewish, and Islamic cases in ***The Glory and the Power: The Fundamentalist Challenge to the Modern World*** (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992). ***Spokesmen for the Despised: Fundamentalist Leaders of the Middle East*** (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), edited by Appleby, profiles many prominent fundamentalists. In ***The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation*** (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), Appleby places the findings of the Fundamentalism Project within the wider context of religious violence and peacemaking.

One important, single-volume study of comparative fundamentalism is Bruce Lawrence's pioneering ***Defenders of God: The Fundamentalist Revolt Against the Modern Age*** (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989). In addition, there are many first-rate works on individual movements, including George Marsden's ***Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of 20th-Century Evangelicalism*** (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982). William Martin looks at **"The Christian Right and American Foreign Policy"** (FOREIGN POLICY, Spring 1999). Two scholarly but still accessible works on Sunni and Shiite movements are Emmanuel Sivan's ***Radical Islam: Medieval Theology and Modern Politics*** (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990) and Said Arjomand's ***The Turban for the Crown: The Islamic Revolution in Iran*** (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). A detailed account of Hindu movements' politics and organization is in Christophe Jaffrelot's ***The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*** (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

The **Religious Movements Home Page** of the University of Virginia has a fundamentalism section that discusses problems in analyzing fundamentalism and provides links to the sites of prominent U.S. fundamentalist groups.

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