Chapter 10
Religious Fundamentalism

1. Origins and development
2. Back to basics – central themes
3. The family of fundamentalisms
4. Religious fundamentalism in the twenty-first century

Origins and development

The word 'fundamentalism' derives from the Latin fundamentum, meaning base. The term was first used in debates within American Protestantism in the early twentieth century. Between 1910 and 1915 evangelical Protestants published a series of pamphlets entitled The Fundamentals, upholding the inerrancy or literal truth of the Bible in the face of 'modern' interpretations of Christianity. In its contemporary usage, however, fundamentalism (see p. 299) is associated with all the world's major religions – Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism, as well as Christianity – and is viewed as a particular kind of religio-political movement or project, rather than as simply the assertion of the literal truth of sacred texts (although this remains a feature of certain forms of fundamentalism).

The term fundamentalism is highly controversial. For many, it implies repression and intolerance, fundamentalism being seen as the enemy of liberal values and personal freedom. This tendency was intensified by the collapse of communism, which encouraged many in the developed West to believe that religious fundamentalism, and especially Islamic fundamentalism, had displaced Marxism as the principal threat to world order. The end of the Cold War had thus given rise to a global 'clash of civilizations' (Huntington, 1993). As fundamentalism has come to be associated with inflexibility, dogmatism and authoritarianism, many of those who are classified as fundamentalists reject the term as simplistic or demeaning. However, unlike alternative terms such as 'traditionalism', 'conservatism', 'orthodoxy' and 'revivalism', fundamentalism has the advantage that it conveys the distinctive character of the political phenomenon.

The upsurge in religious fundamentalism in the final decades of the twentieth century has confounded advocates of the so-called secularization thesis (the belief that modernization, and particularly industrialization, is invariably accompanied by the victory of reason over religion and the displacement of spiritual values by material ones). In many parts of the world, religious movements have gained a renewed potency. Moreover, in its fundamentalist guise, this religious revivalism has assumed an overtly political form. The claim that religious fundamentalism should be treated as an ideology in its own right is based upon its assertion that religion is inseparable from law and politics, reflected in attempts to regenerate and comprehensively reconstruct society.

Despite its backward-looking emphasis and evident anti-modernism, religious fundamentalism is very much a creature of the modern world. Indeed, most commentators treat it as a distinctively modern phenomenon and deny that it has historical parallels. Possible exceptions to this include

the German preacher and Anabaptist, Thomas Müntzer (1489–1525), who led the Peasants' War, and the French Protestant reformer, Jean Calvin (1509–64), who founded a theocracy in Geneva that allowed him to control almost all the city's affairs. Similarly, the Puritans played a major role in initiating the English Revolution of the seventeenth century, and demonstrated their 'this-worldly' concern to establish a new political and social system by sailing to North America to found a New England.

It is difficult to generalize about the causes of the fundamentalist upsurge that has occurred since the late twentieth century because in different parts of the world it has taken different doctrinal forms and displayed contrasting ideological features. What is clear, nevertheless, is that fundamentalism arises in deeply troubled societies, particularly societies afflicted by an actual or perceived crisis of identity. Amongst the factors that have contributed to such crises, three are particularly relevant to religious fundamentalism: secularization, postcolonialism and globalization. Secularization – the spread of worldly or rationalistic ideas and values in place of religious or sacred ones – has contributed to a decline of traditional religion and a weakening of what is seen as the 'moral fabric' of society. In that sense, fundamentalism represents a moral protest against decadence and hypocrisy; it aims to restore 'rightful' order and re-establish the link between the human world and the divine. Such moral conservatism has been very evident in the so-called new Christian right in the USA, prominent since the 1970s, and has been an important component of Islamic fundamentalism in countries such as Iran, Egypt, Turkey, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The impact of postcolonialism helps to explain why, although fundamentalism can be found across the globe, its most potent and influential manifestations have been found in the developing world. Postcolonial societies have grappled with a series of acute problems. For instance, colonial rule invariably devalued and often suppressed indigenous cultures, meaning that postcolonial societies inherited a weakened sense of identity, compounded by a debilitating attachment to western values and institutions, particularly among elite groups. Moreover, once independence was achieved, the unifying anticolonial struggle, usually associated with some brand of socialism, gave way to the more complex tasks of nation building and regime consolidation. Political independence also failed to bring about social emancipation; rather, traditional imperialism was replaced by neo-colonialism, ensuring continuing global inequality and subordination to western powers and interests. In such circumstances, religious fundamentalism has been attractive both because it offers the prospect of a non-western, and often specifically anti-western, political identity, and because, particularly since the decline of revolutionary socialism in the 1970s, it articulates the aspirations of the urban poor and the lower middle classes.

Finally, fundamentalism has drawn strength from the advance of globalization. Globalization has undermined the capacity of 'civic' nationalism to establish secure and stable political identities. Religion has therefore tended to replace the nation as the principal source of collective identity, meaning that fundamentalism has emerged as a sub-variety of ethnic nationalism. This has been particularly significant in parts of the world where national identity has been challenged or threatened. Fundamentalism as ethnic mobilization can, for instance, be seen in the militant Buddhism of the Sinhalese in Sri Lanka, in the Jewish settler movement in Israel, in Hindu and Sikh extremism in India, and in the resistance of Ulster Protestants to a united Ireland. The

implications of globalization for fundamentalism are nevertheless complex. In an increasingly interdependent world the capacity to reconstruct society according to particular national, religious or indeed political blueprints is limited. The emergence of so-called 'pragmatic fundamentalism' in Iran since the death in 1989 of Ayatollah Khomeini (see p. 307) highlights the practical constraints upon fundamentalist in power. The point at which pragmatism (see p. 11) calls the fundamentalist credentials of a regime into question is, however, another matter.

Back to basics – central themes

Religious fundamentalism is an untypical political ideology in two senses. First, it cuts across a variety of, perhaps all, religions, regardless of their doctrinal and structural differences. To study religious fundamentalism as a single, coherent entity is to treat as secondary the substantial differences that divide the religions of the world – whether they believe in a single god, many small gods or no god at all; whether they have a holy book, a variety of scriptures or place faith in an oral tradition; how they view morality and social conduct, and so forth. Moreover, while some fundamentalisms have been associated with violence and anti-constitutional political action, others have supported law-abiding and peaceful behaviour. Such differences draw attention to the fact that religious fundamentalism is essentially a style of political thought rather than a substantive collection of political ideas and values. For example, while most forms of fundamentalism are entirely at odds with liberal individualism, Protestant fundamentalism in North America embraces 'rugged individualism' as an article of faith. In the same way the Koran's rejection of usury and interest-based banking makes it difficult for Islamic fundamentalists to accept market economics, while the new Christian right in the United States have enthusiastically endorsed laissez-faire capitalism. To the extent that religious fundamentalism's central or core themes can be identified, they follow from its tendency to recognize certain principles as essential or unchallengeable 'truths', regardless of their content.

Second, given religion's traditional concern with sacred, spiritual or 'other-worldly' matters, it is odd to suggest that religious doctrines and values can constitute a political ideology. Of course there is nothing new about ideology drawing from the pool of religious ideas. Ethical socialists have often looked to Christianity, Islam, Judaism and other religions to provide a basis for their value system, and conservatives have applauded religion as a form of 'social glue'. However, fundamentalism is different in that it treats religious ideas not as a means of defending or embellishing political doctrines, but as the very stuff of political thought itself. As a programme for the comprehensive restructuring of society on religious lines and according to religious principles, fundamentalism deserves to be classified as an ideology in its own right. Nevertheless, some interpret fundamentalism as a subspecies of nationalism, and it is difficult to deny that in certain cases fundamentalism operates as a form of religious nationalism. However, at least in its more radical forms, religious fundamentalism goes well beyond the reassertion of national or ethnic distinctiveness, and in the case of Islam in particular it has a marked transnational dimension. The characteristic themes of religious fundamentalism are the following:

- Religion and politics
- The fundamentalist impulse
- Anti-modernism

- Militancy

Religion and politics

The core theme of fundamentalism is a rejection of the distinction between religion and politics. In effect, in Khomeini's words, 'Politics is religion.'

Religion may be the basis of politics, but what is religion? In its most general sense a religion is an organized community of people bound together by a shared body of beliefs concerning some kind of transcendent reality, usually expressed in a set of approved activities and practices. What transcendent means here is difficult to define, for it may refer to anything from a supreme being, a creator God, to the experience of personal liberation, as in the Buddhist concept of nirvana, literally meaning 'extinction'?

The impact of religion on political life has progressively been restricted by the spread of liberal culture and ideas, the industrialized West, naturally, having the taken the lead in this process. Nevertheless, liberal secularism is by no means an anti-religious tendency. Rather, it is concerned to establish a 'proper' sphere and role for religion. A key feature of liberal culture is the so-called public/private divide. This establishes a strict separation between a public sphere of life regulated by collective rules and subject to political authority, and a private sphere in which people are free to do as they like. The great virtue of this distinction, from a liberal perspective, is that it guarantees individual liberty by constraining government's ability to interfere in personal or private affairs. However, it also has important implications for religion, which is fenced into a private arena, leaving public life to be organised on a strictly secular basis. In bringing about the 'privatization of religion', secularization has extended the public/private divide into a distinction between politics and religion. The clearest manifestation of this is the separation of church and state, which is constitutionally enshrined in the USA and elsewhere, and even substantially observed in states such as the UK, where 'established' churches continued to enjoy formal privileges in relation to the state.

Much of the spirit of religious fundamentalism is captured in its rejection of the public/private divide. On one level, fundamentalism is a manifestation of the politics of identity. The expansion of a public realm organized on a secular and rationalistic basis has gradually weakened traditional social norms, textures and values and has left many bereft of identity, or, as Eric Hobsbawm (1994) put it, 'orphans' in the modern world. The intensity and zeal that typically characterizes fundamentalism establishes religion as the primary collective identity, giving its members and supporters a rootedness and sense of belonging that they would otherwise lack. More significantly, it is precisely religious fundamentalism's refusal to accept that religion is merely a private or personal matter that establishes its ideological credentials. To treat religion only as a personal or spiritual matter is to invite evil and corruption to stalk the public domain, hence the spread of permissiveness, materialism, corruption, greed, crime and immorality. The fundamentalist solution is simple: the world must be made anew, existing structures must be replaced with a comprehensive system founded upon religious principles and embracing law, politics, society, culture and the economy.

However, the perceived corruption of the secular public realm may give rise to one of two responses. The first, sometimes called 'passive' fundamentalism, takes the route of withdrawal and attempts to construct communities of believers untainted by the larger society. Groups such as the Amish in the USA and the Haredim, the ultra-orthodox Jews of Israel, undoubtedly believe that religion dictates social, economic and political

Perspectives on …

Religion

Liberals see religion as a distinct 'private' matter linked to individual choice and personal development. Religious freedom is thus essential to civil liberty and can only be guaranteed by a strict division between religion and politics, and between church and state.

Conservatives regard religion as a valuable (perhaps essential) source of stability and social cohesion. As it provides society with a set of shared values and the bedrock of a common culture, overlaps between religion and politics, and church and state are inevitable and desirable.

Socialists have usually portrayed religion in negative terms, as at best a diversion from the political struggle and at worst a form of ruling-class ideology (leading in some cases to the adoption of state atheism). In emphasizing love and compassion, religion may nevertheless provide socialism with an ethical basis.

Anarchists generally regard religion as an institutionalized source of oppression. Church and state are invariably linked, with religion preaching obedience and submission to earthly rulers while also prescribing a set of authoritative values that rob the individual of moral autonomy.

Fascists have sometimes rejected religion on the grounds that it serves as a rival source of allegiance or belief, and that it preaches 'decadent' values such as compassion and human sympathy. Fascism nevertheless seeks to function as a 'political' religion, embracing its terminology and internal structure – devotion, sacrifice, spirit, redemption and so on.

Religious fundamentalists view religion as a body of 'essential' and unchallengeable principles, which dictate not only personal conduct but also the organization of social, economic and political life. Religion cannot and should not be confined to the 'private' sphere but finds its highest and proper expression in the politics of popular mobilization and social regeneration.

principles, but they are generally more concerned with their own observation of these principles than with the comprehensive regeneration of society. The second response is 'active' fundamentalism, which takes the route of opposition and combat, and which alone should be considered an ideology on the ground that only it adopts an overtly political stance. However, the notion of politics that it adopts is a distinctly conventional one. In marked contrast to feminists, who have also challenged the public/private divide, religious fundamentalists view politics in terms of government policy and state action. Far from regarding politics as inherently corrupt, they usually look to seize, or at least exert influence over, the modern state, seeing it as an instrument of moral regeneration. Critics of fundamentalism nevertheless argue that it is

precisely this determination to remove the distinction between religion and politics that invests in fundamentalism a totalitarian impulse. A state founded upon religious principles is, almost by definition, unencumbered by constraints that arise out of the notion of the public/private divide. However, the degree to which particular fundamentalisms have succumbed to this totalitarian impulse varies greatly.

The fundamentalist impulse

In its broadest sense, fundamentalism refers to a commitment to ideas and values that are seen as 'basic' or 'foundational'. Since fundamental beliefs are regarded as the core of a theoretical system, as opposed to peripheral and more transitory beliefs, they usually have an enduring and unchanging character, and are linked to the system's original or 'classical' form. Fundamentalism can therefore be seen as the opposite of relativism, the denial that there are any objective or 'absolute' standards, as reflected in the belief that statements can only be judged in relation to their contexts. By this standard, certain political ideologies, notably fascism and communism, can be placed nearer the fundamentalist end of the fundamentalism–relativism spectrum, while liberalism in particular, disposed as it is towards scepticism by its commitment to reason and toleration, can be placed near the relativist end. All ideologies, however, contain elements of fundamentalism. In the sense, that fundamentalism implies keeping faith with original or 'classical' ideas, it is also possible to classify some traditions within an ideology as fundamentalist and others as not. In this respect, fundamentalism is the opposite of revisionism. Classical Marxism, which aimed to abolish and replace capitalism, has thus been seen as a form of fundamentalist socialism, while social democracy is portrayed as revisionist socialism by virtue of having modified its opposition to private property, the market, material incentives and so on.

In the case of religious fundamentalism, the 'fundamentals' have usually, but not always, been derived from the content of sacred texts, supported by the assertion of their literal truth. Indeed, scriptural literalism was a central feature of American Protestant fundamentalism, which, for example, has continued to preach creationism or 'creation science', the belief that humankind was created by God, as described in the Book of Genesis, and the outright rejection of the Darwinian theory of evolution. Such tendencies can be found in all three 'religions of the book' – Christianity, Islam and Judaism – each of which possesses sacred texts that have been claimed to express the revealed word of God. Nevertheless, though often related, religious fundamentalism should not be equated with scriptural literalism. In the first place, all sacred texts contain a complex and diverse range of ideas, doctrines and principles. To treat a sacred text as a political ideology, as a moral and political programme for the regeneration of society and the mobilization of the masses, it is necessary to extract out its 'fundamentals'. These are a set of simple and clean principles that provide an exact and unambiguous definition of religious identity. In John Garvey's (1993) words, fundamentalism constitutes 'a kind of stripped-down religion that travels light and fast'.

Second, in contrast with the ultra-orthodox, whose principal goal is to 'live by the book', fundamentalists have supported an 'activist' reading of texts that enables them to reduce the complexity and profundity of scripture to a theo-political project. In Islam this is described as 'dynamic interpretation'. Selectivity and interpretation, however, create the problem of how one

version of scripture or doctrine can be upheld over other versions. Fundamentalists have usually resolved this problem by reflecting on who is doing the interpreting. In this respect, clerical position and religious office may be of secondary importance; more significantly, the 'true' interpreter must be a person (invariably male) of deep faith and

Fundamentalism

Fundamentalism is a style of thought in which certain principles are recognized as essential 'truths' that have unchallengeable and overriding authority, regardless of their content. Substantive fundamentalisms therefore have little or nothing in common, except that their supporters tend to evince an earnestness or fervour born out of doctrinal certainty. Although it is usually associated with religion and the literal truth of sacred texts, fundamentalism can also be found in political creeds. Even liberal scepticism can be said to incorporate the fundamental belief that all theories should be doubted (apart from its own). Although the term is often used pejoratively to imply inflexibility, dogmatism and authoritarianism, fundamentalism may also give expression to selflessness and a devotion to principle.

moral purity, as well as an activist whose spiritual insight has been deepened through the experience of struggle. This is why religious fundamentalism is invariably associated with charismatic leadership, which gives it, critics argue, an implicitly authoritarian character.

The great strength of fundamentalism, as demonstrated by the proliferation of fundamentalist movements since the late twentieth century, is its capacity to generate political activism and mobilize the faithful. Fundamentalism thus operates on both psychological and social levels. Psychologically, its appeal is based upon its capacity to offer certainty in an uncertain world. Being religious, it addresses some of the deepest and most perplexing problems confronting humankind; being fundamentalist, it provides solutions that are straightforward, practical and above all absolute. Socially, while its appeal has extended to the educated and professional classes, religious fundamentalism has been particularly successful in addressing the aspirations of the economically and politically marginalized. Together with offering a secure identity and the prospect of social order, in the developing world in particular, it has displaced socialism as the creed of political renewal and social justice. However, amongst the limitations of fundamentalism is the fact that its simplicity and stripped-down character prevent it from dealing with complex problems or developing comprehensive solutions. Lacking a political blueprint, fundamentalists in power, as in Iran, have been forced to improvise and borrow from existing political traditions, and nowhere have fundamentalist movements and leaders been able to develop a coherent form of 'fundamentalist economics'.

Anti-modernism

The most prominent feature of religious fundamentalism is that it dramatically turns its back on the modern world. Modernization appears to be equated with decline and decay, typified by the spread of godless secularism, and regeneration can only be brought about by returning to the spirit and traditions of some long-past 'golden age'. Unfortunately, however, this image is simplistic and in certain respects misleading. Religious fundamentalism is selectively traditional but also selectively modern; a mixture of resentment and envy characterizes its relationship to

modernity. One face of fundamentalism is undoubtedly its strident anti-modernism. This is most evident in its endorsement of 'traditional' values, which amounts to a form of moral conservatism. Western society, having succumbed to the cult of the individual and a passion for personal gratification, is seen as amoral at best and thoroughly degenerate at worst. Permissiveness, adultery, prostitution, homosexuality and pornography are only some of the symptoms of this moral pollution. Nothing less than a moral gulf divides liberal individualism from religious fundamentalism, the former encouraging people to make their own moral choices while the latter demands that they conform to a prescribed and divinely ordained moral system. Islamic fundamentalists therefore call for the reintroduction of ancient shari'a law and Christian fundamentalists attempt to combat the spread of permissiveness and materialism by a return to 'family' or 'religious' values.

Fundamentalism should not be mistaken for conservatism or traditionalism, however. Despite overlaps between conservatism and fundamentalism and the ease with which they have sometimes constructed alliances, notably in the USA through organizations such as Moral Majority and within the Republican Party, the two differ in terms of both temper and aspirations. Conservatism is modest and cautious, where fundamentalism is strident and passionate; conservatism is disposed to protect elites and defend hierarchy, while fundamentalism embodies populist and egalitarian inclinations; conservatism favours continuity and tradition, while fundamentalism is radical and sometimes openly revolutionary. Traditionalism is the belief that inherited institutions and practices, particularly those with a long and continuous history, provide the best guide for human conduct. As such, fundamentalism has little in common with traditionalism, inclined as it is to favour 'novel' interpretations of religious teachings and to call for comprehensive social regeneration. There is a closer affinity between fundamentalism and the reactionary radicalism of the new right. Nevertheless, fundamentalism is more clearly reactive than reactionary: behind the rhetoric of moral traditionalism, it is perhaps orientated more towards a purified future than towards an idealized past. The tendency within fundamentalism towards charismatic leadership, populism and

Populism

Populism (from the Latin populus, meaning 'the people') has been used to describe both distinctive political movements and a particular tradition of political thought. Movements or parties described as populist have been characterized by their claim to support the common people in the face of 'corrupt' economic or political elites. As a political tradition, populism reflects the belief that the instincts and wishes of the people provide the principal legitimate guide to political action. Populist politicians therefore make a direct appeal to the people and claim to give expression to their deepest hopes and fears, all intermediary institutions being distrusted. Although populism may be linked to any cause or ideology, it is often seen as implicitly authoritarian, 'populist' democracy being the enemy of 'pluralist' democracy.

Psycho-social regeneration has also led some to suggest parallels with fascism; however this risk ignoring the degree to which fundamentalism is animated by genuinely religious passions.

The clearest evidence that fundamentalists are not just dyed-in-the-wool reactionaries is found in their enthusiasm for particular aspects of modernity. For instance, fundamentalists across the

globe have shrewdly exploited the advantages of modern techniques of mass communication, not least in the case of the 'televangelists' of the USA. This contrasts markedly with the revivalist and ultra-orthodox movements that have turned against the 'unredeemed' world and retreated from it by resurrecting pre-modern ways and practices. The fundamentalist accommodation with modernity is not merely a cynical exercise. The willingness to accept technology, science, the machinery of the modern state and even nuclear weapons suggests sympathy for the spirit of modernity, respect for 'this-worldly' rationalism rather than a descent into 'other-worldly' mysticism. Early interest in Iran, for instance, in the idea of 'Islamic science' quickly gave way to an acceptance of conventional, and therefore western, science. Similarly, the search for 'Islamic economics' soon developed into the application of market principles derived from economic liberalism. Finally, it is significant that fundamentalists advance an essentially modernist view of religion, relying more heavily upon 'dynamic' interpretation than upon faith in inherited structures and traditions. As Parekh (1994, p. 121) put it, fundamentalism 'reconstitutes religion within the limits of modernity, even as it copes with modernity within the limits of religion'.

Militancy

While religious fundamentalists have embraced a conventional, state-centred view of politics, they have pursued a highly distinctive style of political activity: one that is vigorous, militant and sometimes violent. Fundamentalists are usually happy to see themselves as militants, in the sense that militancy implies the zeal and passion of one who is engaged in combat. Where does this militancy come from, and what are its implications? Fundamentalist militancy derives from a variety of sources. In the first place, there is a tendency for conflicts involving religion to be intense because religion deals with core values and beliefs. Those who act in the name of religion are inspired by what they believe to be a divinely ordained purpose, which clearly takes precedence over all other considerations. This perhaps helps to explain why religious wars have been so common throughout history.

A second factor is that fundamentalism in particular is a form of politics of identity: it serves to define who a people are and gives them a collective identity. All forms of politics of identity, whether based on social, national, ethnic or religious distinctiveness, tend to be based upon divisions between 'them' and 'us', between an 'out-group' and an 'in-group'. Certainly, religious fundamentalism has been associated with the existence of a hostile and threatening 'other', which serves both to create a heightened sense of collective identity and to strengthen its oppositional and combative character. This demonized 'other' may take various guises, from secularism and permissiveness to rival religions, westernization, the USA, Marxism and imperialism. A third and related factor is that fundamentalists generally possess a Manichean world view, one that emphasizes conflict between light and darkness, or good and evil. If 'we' are a chosen people acting according to the will of God, 'they' are not merely people with whom we disagree, but a body actively subverting God's purpose on Earth, representing nothing less than the 'forces of darkness'. Political conflict, for fundamentalists, is therefore a battle or war, and ultimately either the believers or the infidels must prevail.

One of the consequences of this militancy is a willingness to engage in extra-legal, anti-constitutional political action. Nonetheless, although God's law outranks human law,

fundamentalists do not necessarily disregard the latter, as the new Christian right's firm support for law and order demonstrates. The most controversial issue, however, is the fundamentalist use of violence. While the popular image of fundamentalists as suicide bombers and terrorists is unbalanced and misleading as it ignores the fact that fundamentalist protest is overwhelmingly peaceful and usually legal, it is impossible to deny a link with terrorism and violence. The most dramatic example of this was the devastating al-Qaeda terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001. Other examples include the assassinations of the Egyptian president, Anwar Sadat, by Islamic fundamentalists in 1981, Indian prime minister, Indira Gandhi, by militant Sikhs in 1984, and Israeli prime minister, Yitzak Rabin, by a Jewish fanatic in 1995; campaigns of terror in Israel carried out by Islamist groups such as Hezbollah (Party of Allah) and Hamas; communitarian violence perpetrated by, amongst others, militant Buddhists in Sri Lanka, Jewish fundamentalists in Israel's occupied territories and Islamic terrorists in Algeria; and anti-abortion extremists in the USA who have furthered their crusade through bombings and murder.

The most common fundamentalist justification for such acts is that, as they are intended to eradicate evil, they fulfil the will of God. Islamic suicide bombers, for example, believe that in sacrificing their lives in the cause of Allah they will immediately be despatched to heaven. The incidence of violence amongst fundamentalist groups is almost certainly Terrorism

Terrorism, in its broadest sense, refers to the use of terror for furthering political ends; it seeks to create a climate of fear and apprehension. The term, nevertheless, is highly controversial. First, the distinction between terrorism and other forms of violence or warfare is blurred by the fact that the latter may also aim to strike fear into the wider population. Second, as the term is highly pejorative, it tends to be used selectively and often subjectively (one person's ‘terrorist’ is another person's ‘freedom fighter’). Third, although terrorism is usually conceived of as an anti-government activity, governments can also use terror against their own or other populations, as in the case of ‘state terrorism’.

increased by the heightened expectations and revolutionary fervour provoked by apocalypticism, the belief that we are living in what is seen as ‘end-time’. Fundamentalist movements have often subscribed to millenarianism, a belief in the imminent establishment of a thousand-year Kingdom of God, and articulated messianic expectations that are based on the hope of the return of God to Earth.

The family of fundamentalisms

As Marty (1988) pointed out, the various fundamentalisms can be seen to constitute a hypothetical ‘family’. Nevertheless, its family members differ from one another in at least three crucial ways. First, they derive from very different religions. Although all religions have spawned fundamentalist or fundamentalist-type movements, certain religions may be more prone than others to fundamentalist developments, or place fewer obstacles in the way of emerging fundamentalism. In this respect, Islam and Protestant Christianity have been seen as most likely to throw up fundamentalist movements, as both are based on a single sacred text and hold that believers have direct access to spiritual wisdom, rather than this being concentrated in the hands of accredited representatives (Parekh, 1994). Second, fundamentalisms emerge in very different

societies. The impact and nature of fundamentalist movements is thus conditioned by the social, economic and political structures of the society in which they arise. Third, fundamentalisms differ according to the political causes they are associated with. These broadly fall into three categories. Religious fundamentalism can be used as a means of achieving comprehensive political renewal, which is particularly attractive to marginalized or oppressed peoples; as a way of shoring up an unpopular leader or government by creating a unified political culture; or as a means of strengthening a threatened national or ethnic identity. The main forms of fundamentalism are the following:

- Islamic fundamentalism
- Christian fundamentalism
- Other fundamentalisms

Islamic fundamentalism

Islam is the world's second largest religion and its fastest growing. There are approximately 1.3 billion Muslims in the world today, spread over more than seventy countries. The strength of Islam is concentrated geographically in Asia and Africa; it is estimated, for example, that over half the population of Africa will soon be Muslim. However, it has also spread into Europe and elsewhere. Islam is certainly not, and never has been, just a 'religion'. Rather, it is a complete way of life, with instructions on moral, political and economic behaviour for individuals and nations alike. The 'way of Islam' is based upon the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (ca. 570–632 AD), as revealed in the Koran, which is regarded by all Muslims as the revealed word of Allah, and the Sunna, or 'beaten path', the traditional customs observed by devout Muslims and said to be based upon the Prophet's own life. There are two principal sects within Islam, which developed within fifty years of Muhammad's death in 632 AD. The Sunni sect represents the majority of Muslims, while the Shi'ite or Shia sect contains just over one tenth of Muslims, concentrated in Iran and Iraq.

Throughout the history of Islam there has been a conflict between religion and politics, between Islamic leaders who were often secular-minded and flexible in their application of Islamic principles to political life, and fundamentalists who believed in strict adherence to the principles and life-style of the Prophet. Fundamentalism in Islam does not mean a belief in the literal truth of the Koran, for this is accepted by all Muslims, and in that sense all Muslims are fundamentalists. Instead, it means an intense and militant faith in Islamic beliefs as the overriding principles of social life and politics, as well as of personal morality. Islamic fundamentalists wish to establish the primacy of religion over politics. In practice this means the founding of an 'Islamic state', a theocracy ruled by spiritual rather than temporal authority, and applying the shari'a, divine Islamic law, based upon principles expressed in the Koran. The shari'a lays down a code for legal and righteous behaviour, including a system of punishment for most crimes as well as rules of personal conduct for both men and women. In common with other religions, Islam contains doctrines and beliefs that can justify a wide range of political causes. This is particularly true of Islamic economic ideas. The Koran, for example, upholds the institution of private property, which some have claimed endorses capitalism. However, it also prohibits usury or profiteering, which others have argued indicates sympathy for socialism.

The revival of Islamic fundamentalism in the twentieth century commenced with the founding of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in 1928. Although Egypt had gained nominal independence in 1922 and full independence was recognized in 1936, the UK retained a powerful economic and military presence in the country. The Brotherhood was founded by Hassan al Banna (1906–49) with a view to revitalizing what he believed to be a corrupted Islamic faith and providing the faithful with a political voice, a party of Islam. The Brotherhood sought to found an Islamic government that would provide an alternative to both capitalist and socialist forms of development. Such a government would transform the social system by applying Islamic principles to economic and political life as well as personal morality. This process of spiritual purification would also involve the final liberation of Egypt from foreign control, and the Brotherhood envisaged the ultimate liberation and unity of all Islamic peoples. The Brotherhood spread into Jordan, Sudan and Syria, where it set up branches containing mosques, schools, youth clubs and even business enterprises. It trained young people physically and militarily to prepare them for the coming jihad, crudely translated as 'holy war', through which they would achieve their objectives.

However, fundamentalism remained on the fringe of Arab politics while Arab leaders either looked to the West or, after the rise of Gamal Nasser in Egypt, supported some form of Arab socialism. Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal in 1956 and, after surviving military intervention from the UK, France and Israel, became the undisputed leader of the Arab world. Nasser's socialism encouraged him to forge a close diplomatic relationship with the Soviet Union and to suppress the Muslim Brotherhood. However, Egypt's defeat in the Arab–Israeli war of 1967 greatly discredited the ideas of Arab socialism and provided an opportunity for the growth of the fundamentalist movement. Despite the ending of colonial rule, the countries of the Middle East and North Africa were acutely aware of their continued economic dependence on the West or the Soviet Union, and of their political impotence, symbolized by the survival of the state of Israel. In those circumstances, resurgent nationalism once again took the form of Islamic fundamentalism. Since the 1970s fundamentalist groups sprang up in most Islamic countries and attracted growing support amongst the young and the politically committed.

The focal point of this process has been Iran, where in 1979 a popular revolution brought Ayatollah Khomeini to power and led to Iran declaring itself an 'Islamic Republic'. The Iranian example, which is examined more Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (1900–89)

Iranian cleric and political leader. The son and grandson of Shi'ite clergy, Khomeini received a religious education and was one of the foremost scholars in the major theological centre in Qom until being expelled from Iran in 1964. His return from exile in 1979 sparked the popular revolution that overthrew the shahdom, leaving the Ayatollah (literally, 'gift of Allah') as the supreme leader of the world's first Islamic state until his death.

Although Khomeini raised the idea of Islamic government as early as the 1940s, his notion of institutionalized clerical rule, the basis of an 'Islamic republic', did not emerge until the late 1960s. Khomeini's world-view was rooted in a clear division between the oppressed, understood largely as the poor and excluded of the Third World, and the oppressors, seen as the twin Satans: the USA and the Soviet Union, capitalism and communism, the West and the East. Islam thus

became a theo-political project aimed at regenerating the Islamic world by ridding it of occupation and corruption from outside.

Fully in the next section, in connection with Shi'ite fundamentalism has inspired fundamentalist groups in many parts of the world. In 1981 the Muslim Brotherhood assassinated president Sadat of Egypt; and the leaders of several Islamic countries, for example Pakistan and Sudan, under growing pressure from fundamentalists, introduced shari'a law. Fundamentalism was particularly prominent in the Lebanon in the 1980s, divided as it was by a civil war between Christians and Muslims, and occupied by Israel in the south and by Syria in the north. Parts of Beirut fell under the control of fundamentalist groups such as the Iranian-backed Hezbollah, which carried out a number of well-publicized kidnappings of western hostages.

The subsequent advance of Islamism has taken a variety of forms. In Turkey, a constitutional form of fundamentalism has gained prominence through the electoral success in 2002 of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), formed the previous year from previously banned Islamic groups. In Afghanistan, however, the strength of revolutionary fundamentalism was demonstrated by the Taliban regime, established in 1997 but overthrown by US-orchestrated military action in 2001. The Taliban exemplified a radical new fundamentalism that refused to compromise with any ideas, Islamic or otherwise, which departed from their world-view. This was based upon an extreme form of Deobandism, a brand of Sunni Hanafi Islam that developed in British India but had its deepest roots in Pakistan. The Taliban attempted to root out all forms of 'non-Islamic' corruption and to enforce a harsh and repressive interpretation of shari'a law. Women were entirely excluded from education, the economy and from public life in general. Censorship was so strict that all forms of music were banned. Taliban rule was highly authoritarian, with political power being concentrated in the hands of a small group of senior Taliban clerics, under the supreme leadership of Mullah Omar.

A range of new 'jihadi' groups that have emerged since the 1990s – the most significant of which has been al-Qaeda, led by Osama bin Laden – have also given expression to this radical new fundamentalism. For these groups, commitment to Islam takes the form of jihad, understood as a holy war, carried out in particular against the USA and Israel (the 'Jewish-Christian crusaders') and with the removal of foreign influence from Saudi Arabia as a key goal. Such militant Islamism portrays terrorism and suicide attacks, such as those which took place on September 11, 2001, and the bombing in Bali in 2002, as legitimate, indeed purifying, expressions of political and social struggle. Critics of Islam have seen such developments as evidence of a basic incompatibility between Islamic values and those of the liberal-democratic West. From this perspective, Islam is inherently totalitarian, in that the gaol of constructing an 'Islamic state' based upon shari'a law is starkly anti-pluralist and incompatible with the notion of a public/private divide. The use of terror and violence, it is argued, is merely an extreme manifestation of this totalitarian potential.

However, such a view of Islam seriously misrepresents its central tenets, which offer no support for terrorism but, instead, are committed to peace, respect and justice. According to the Prophet Mohammad, for instance, the 'greater jihad' is not a political struggle against the infidel, but an inner struggle: the struggle to become a better person though moral discipline and commitment to Islam. In common with all religious traditions, Islam contains such a variety of views and is

open to such a range of interpretations that it could be used to justify almost any cause or action. What distinguishes religious fundamentalism, after all, is that it advances a novel interpretation of religious teachings and then claims for it unquestionable authority.

Shi'ite fundamentalism

Iran comes to symbolize the revival of political Islam, with fundamentalist groups in countries such as the Lebanon, Pakistan, Afghanistan and the UK looking to Iran for spiritual and political leadership. The majority of Iran's population are members of the Shi'ite sect, the smaller of the two Islamic sects. The division of Islam into two sects is politically significant because the temper and political aspirations of the two have traditionally diverged. The split was provoked by differences over the question of the Prophet Muhammad's successors. The Sunnis believed that only the first four caliphs or deputies who succeeded Muhammad, the 'Rightly Guided Caliphs', had received divine wisdom. The last of these was the Prophet's cousin, Ali, and the Sunnis thought that Ali's successors should be determined by a consensus amongst the ulama, or religious scholars. However, a leader so chosen could no longer be regarded as divine or infallible. In contrast, the Shi'ites believed that divine wisdom continued to be transmitted to the descendants of Ali and Fatima, one of the Prophet's daughters. As a result, the Shi'ites have held that each succeeding imam, or religious leader, is immaculate and infallible, and therefore commands absolute religious and political authority.

Sunnis have tended to see Islamic history as a gradual movement away from the ideal community, which existed during the life of Muhammad and his four immediate successors. Shi'ites, though, believe that divine guidance is always available in the teachings of the infallible imam, or that divine wisdom is about to re-emerge into the world with the return of the 'hidden imam', or the arrival of the mahdi, a leader directly guided by God. Shi'ites see history moving towards the goal of an ideal community, not away from it. Such ideas of revival or imminent salvation have given the Shi'ite sect a messianic and emotional quality that is not enjoyed by the traditionally more sober Sunnis. The religious temper of the Shi'ite sect is also different from that of the Sunnis. Shi'ites believe that it is possible for an individual to remove the stains of sin through the experience of suffering and by leading a devout and simple life. The prospect of spiritual salvation has given the Shi'ite sect its characteristic intensity and emotional strength. When such religious zeal has been harnessed to a political goal it has generated fierce commitment and devotion. The Shi'ite sect has traditionally been more political than the Sunni sect. It has proved especially attractive to the poor and the downtrodden, for whom the re-emergence of divine wisdom into the world has represented the purification of society, the overthrow of injustice and liberation from oppression.

In 1979, following a growing wave of popular demonstrations that forced the Shah to flee the country and prepared the way for Khomeini's return, Iran was declared an Islamic Republic. Power fell into the hands of the Islamic Revolutionary Council, comprising fifteen senior clerics, dominated by Khomeini himself. All legislation passed by the popularly elected Islamic Consultative Assembly has to be ratified by the Council for the Protection of the Constitution, on which sit six religious and six secular lawyers, to ensure that it conforms to Islamic principles. Iran exhibited a fierce religious consciousness, reflected in popular antipathy to the 'Great Satan', the USA, and the application of strict Islamic principles to social and political life. For

example, the wearing of a headscarf and chador, loose-fitting clothes, became obligatory for all women in Iran, Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Restrictions on polygamy were removed, contraception was banned, adultery punished by public flogging or execution, and the death penalty was introduced for homosexuality. Both Iranian politics and society were thoroughly 'Islamized' and Friday prayers in Tehran became an expression of official government policy and a focal point of political life. The religious nationalism generated by the Islamic Revolution reached new heights during the Iran–Iraq war, 1980–88.

However, the survival of revolutionary zeal in Iran was closely tied up with the patriotic war fought against invading Iraq and the continuing messianic influence of Khomeini himself. The end of the war and the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989 paved the way for more moderate forces to surface within Iran. The Iranian economy had been devastated by the massive cost of the eight-year war and the lack of foreign trade and investment. There was a growing recognition that economic revival would be impossible unless Iran's diplomatic isolation from the industrialized West was brought to an end. This was reflected in the emergence of Hashemi Rafsanjani, speaker of the Iranian parliament (the Islamic Consultative Assembly), and his election as president in 1989 marked a more pragmatic and less ideological turn in Iranian politics. Despite its continued links to, and support for, radical Islamic groups in Palestine and elsewhere, the history of Iran's Islamic Revolution appears to suggest that exclusive and militant fundamentalism is unworkable in an increasingly globalized world. However, it is notable that greater pragmatism in political and economic life in Iran has not so far been matched by a decline in religious observance or commitment.

Christian fundamentalism

With about two billion adherents, Christianity is the world's largest religion. From its origins in Palestine, it was spread via the Roman Empire throughout Europe and was later exported to the Americas and elsewhere by European settlers. Despite attempts to extend Christianity further by conquest and missionary endeavour, by 1900 about 83 per cent of the world's Christians still lived in the West. However, while during the twentieth century Christian belief declined in the West, especially in Europe, vigorous growth occurred in the developing world, meaning that the majority of Christians now live in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Christianity began as a movement within Judaism. It was distinguished by the belief that Jesus was the messiah prophesied in the Old Testament, and his life and teachings are described in the New Testament. Although all Christians acknowledge the authority of the Bible, three main divisions have emerged: the Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant churches. Roman Catholicism is based on the temporal and spiritual leadership of the pope in Rome, seen as unchallengeable since the promulgation of the doctrine of papal infallibility. Eastern Orthodox Christianity emerged from the split with Rome in 1054 and developed into a number of autonomous churches, the Russian Orthodox Church and the Greek Orthodox Church being the most significant. Protestantism embraces a variety of movements that during the Reformation of the sixteenth century rejected Roman authority and established reformed national forms of Christianity. The most influential Protestant movements were Lutheranism in Sweden and parts of Germany, Calvinism in Geneva and Scotland, and Anglicanism in England. Although there are many doctrinal divisions amongst Protestants, Protestantism tends to be characterized by the

belief that the Bible is the sole source of truth and by the idea that it is possible for people to have a direct relationship with God.

Since the Reformation the political significance of Christianity has declined markedly. The advance of liberal constitutionalism was in part reflected in the separation of church and state, and in the thoroughgoing secularization of political life. Christianity, at least in the developed West, adjusted to these circumstances by increasingly becoming a personal religion, geared more to the spiritual salvation of the individual than to the moral and political regeneration of society. This, in turn, helped to shape the character of Christian fundamentalism since the late twentieth century. Confronted by stable social, economic and political structures, rooted in secular values and goals, fundamentalists have been mainly content to work within a pluralist and constitutional framework. Rather than seeking to establish a theocracy, they have usually campaigned around single issues, or concentrated their attention on moral crusading.

One of the causes that Christian fundamentalism has helped to articulate is ethnic nationalism. This has been evident in Northern Ireland, where an upsurge in evangelical Protestantism has been one of the consequences of 'the troubles' since 1969. Largely expressed through Ian Paisley's breakaway Free Presbyterian Church and organized politically by the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), Ulster fundamentalism equates the idea of a united Ireland with the victory of Catholicism and Rome. Although Paisley himself has never actively promoted violence, he has warned that, should reunification go ahead, it would lead to armed resistance by the Protestant community. By appealing to working-class Protestants as well as fundamentalists, Paisley and his supporters have succeeded in keeping 'the iron in the soul of Ulster unionism' and blocking political moves that might ultimately lead to the establishment of a united Ireland (Bruce, 1993). However, the theological basis of Paisleyite resistance is drawn heavily from the USA, the birthplace of evangelical Protestantism and home of the most influential Christian fundamentalist movement, the new Christian right.

The new Christian right

In terms of the number of church-going Christians, the USA is easily the most religious of western countries. About 60 million American citizens claim to have been 'born again' and half of these describe themselves as fundamentalists. This largely reflects the fact that from its earliest days America provided a refuge for religious sects and movements wishing to escape from persecution. During the nineteenth century, a fierce battle was fought within American Protestantism between modernists, who adopted a liberal view of the Bible, and conservatives (later 'fundamentalists') who took a literal view of it. Nevertheless, such religious passions and views were largely confined to the private world of the family and the home. Religious groups were rarely drawn into active politics, and when they were, they were rarely successful. The introduction of prohibition, 1920–33, was a notable exception to this. The new Christian right, which emerged in the late 1970s, was therefore a novel development in that it sought to fuse religion and politics in attempting to 'turn America back to Christ'.

The 'new Christian right' is an umbrella term that describes a broad coalition of groups that is primarily concerned with moral and social issues and are intent on maintaining or restoring what they see as 'Christian culture'. Two main factors explain its emergence. The first is that in the

post-1945 period the USA, as elsewhere, experienced a significant extension of the public sphere. For instance, in the early 1960s the Supreme Court ruled against the use of prayers in American schools (because it was contrary to the First Amendment, which guarantees religious freedom), civil rights legislation led to employment quotas and the enforced desegregation of schools through bussing, and, particularly as part of Lyndon Johnson's 'Great Society' initiative, there was a proliferation of welfare, urban development and other programmes. The result of this was that many 'God-fearing' southern conservatives felt that their traditional values and way of life were being threatened, and that the Washington-based liberal establishment was to blame.

The second factor was the increasingly political prominence of groups representing blacks, women and homosexuals, whose advance threatened traditional social structures, particularly in rural and small-town America. As the new Christian right emerged in the 1970s to campaign for the restoration of 'traditional family values', its particular targets thus included 'affirmative action' (positive discrimination in favour of blacks), feminism (particularly the proposed Equal Rights Amendment) and the gay rights movement. In the 1980s and 1990s this politics of morality increasingly coalesced around the anti-abortion issue.

A variety of organizations emerged to articulate these concerns, often mobilized by noted televangelists. These included the Religious Round Table, Christian Voice, American Coalition for Traditional Values and the most influential of all, Moral Majority, formed by Jerry Falwell in 1980. Although Catholics were prominent in the anti-abortion movement, new Christian right groups drew particularly from the ranks of evangelical Protestants who as 'Bible believers' subscribed to scriptural inerrancy, and often claimed to be 'born again' in the sense that they had undergone a personal experience of conversion to Christ. Divisions nevertheless exist amongst evangelicals, for instance between those who style themselves as fundamentalists and tend to keep apart from non-believing society, and charismatics, who believe that the Holy Spirit can operate through individuals giving them the gifts of prophecy and healing. Since the 1980s Moral Majority and other such groups provided campaign finance and organized voter-registration drives with a view to targeting liberal or 'pro-choice' Democrats and encouraging Republicans to embrace a new social and moral agenda based on opposition to abortion and calls for the restoration of prayers in US schools. Ronald Reagan's willingness to embrace this agenda in the 1980s meant that the new Christian right became an important component of a new Republican coalition that placed as much emphasis on moral issues as it did on traditional ones such as the economy and foreign policy. However, although Reagan eagerly adopted the rhetoric of the Christian right and made 'pro-life' appointments to the Supreme Court, he generally failed to deliver on its moral agenda.

Since the end of the Reagan era, the influence of the new Christian right has fluctuated significantly. Reagan's successor, George Bush Sr, was not 'one of them' (until 1980, for instance, he supported abortion) and also broke his campaign promise not to put up taxes. This prompted the Christian right to put up its own candidate for the presidency, leading to televangelist Pat Robertson's unsuccessful 1992 bid for the Republican nomination. Robertson's failure and Reagan and Bush's unwillingness to deliver highlight the two principal stumbling blocks encountered by the movement. In addition to the Christian right's inability to extend its political base beyond the white evangelical Protestant community, mainstream parties in pluralistic societies such as the USA cannot afford to be exclusively linked to any single social,

ethnic or religious interest. In response to these problems, elements of the evangelical movement have adopted more militant strategies. The extreme example of this was the emergence of the so-called militias, which claim to be influenced by shady groups such as the Christian Patriots, and which have resorted to a campaign of terrorism, exemplified by the Oklahoma bombing in 1995.

However, the Christian right received a major boost from the election of George W. Bush in 2000. Not only are a number of members of Bush's cabinet, including Bush himself and his vice-president, Dick Cheney, 'born again' Christians, but the leading evangelical, John Ashcroft, was appointed attorney general. It has been argued that this has, for example, strengthened the Bush administration's support for Israel in the aftermath of September 11, based upon the Old Testament portrayal of Palestine as the 'land of the Jews'.

Other fundamentalisms

Islam and Protestant Christianity have been distinguished by their capacity to throw up comprehensive programmes of political renewal, albeit with very different characters and ambitions. In most cases, however, other fundamentalist movements have been more narrowly concerned with helping to clarify or redefine national or ethnic identity. In this sense, many fundamentalisms can be seen as sub-varieties of ethnic nationalism. This has usually occurred as a reaction to a change in national identity, occasioned by the growth of rival ethnic or religious groups or actual or threatened territorial changes. The attraction of religion rather than the nation as the principal source of political identity is that it provides a supposedly primordial and seemingly unchangeable basis for the establishment of group membership, which is why it tends to be associated with the emergence of an enclave culture. The fundamentalism of Ulster Protestants – whose religion gives their national identity, their 'Britishness', an ethnic substance – is very different from the fundamentalism of US evangelicals, which has little bearing on their ethnicity. Hindu, Sikh, Jewish and Buddhist fundamentalism also resemble forms of ethnic mobilization.

Hinduism, the principal religion of India, appears on the surface to be relatively inhospitable to fundamentalism. It is the clearest example of an ethnic religion where emphasis is placed on custom and social practice rather than formal texts or doctrines, which are anyway remarkably diverse. Nevertheless, a fundamentalist movement emerged out of the struggle for Indian independence, achieved in 1947, although this was modest by comparison with the support for the secular Congress Party. However, it has flourished in India since the decline of Congress and the collapse of the Nehru–Gandhi dynasty in the mid-1980s. Its key goal is to challenge the multicultural, multi-ethnic mosaic of India by making Hinduism the basis of national identity. This is not expressed in demands for the expulsion of 'foreign' religions and culture so much as in a call for the 'Hinduization' of Muslim, Sikh, Jain and other communities. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has been the largest party in the Indian parliament since 1996, articulating, as it does, the newly-prosperous middle class's ambivalence towards modernity and, particularly, its concerns about a weakening of national identity. The more radical World Hindu Council preaches 'India for the Hindus', while its parent body, the RSS, aims to create a 'Greater India', stretching from Burma to Iraq, and establish India's geo-political dominance across central Asia. The most dramatic demonstration of Hindu militancy came in 1992 with the destruction of the ancient Babri Masjid (mosque) in Ayodhya, believed to have been built on the birthplace of the

god Rama. This has led to on-going communal violence between Hindus and Muslims in the state of Gujarat.

Sikh fundamentalism is different, in that it is associated with the struggle to found an independent nation-state, not with the remaking of national identity within an existing one. As such, it overlaps with the concerns of liberal nationalism, and is distinguished from the latter only by its vision of the nation as an essentially religious entity. Sikh nationalists thus look to establish 'Khalistan', located in present-day Punjab, with Sikhism as the state religion and its government obliged to ensure its unhindered flourishing. Just as Hindu nationalism has a markedly anti-Islamic character, Sikh nationalism is in part defined by its antipathy towards Hinduism. This was evident in the seizing of the Golden Temple in Amritsar in 1982 by the Damdami Taksal, under its militant leader, Jarail Singh Bhindranwale, and in the assassination of Indira Gandhi two years later, following the storming of the temple. The separate upsurges in Hindu, Sikh and Islamic fundamentalism in the Indian subcontinent are undoubtedly interconnected developments. Not only have they created a chain reaction of threats and resentments, but they have also inspired one another by closely linking ethnic identity to religious fervour.

Both Jewish and Buddhist fundamentalisms are also closely linked to the sharpening of ethnic conflict. In contrast with the ultra-orthodox Jews, some of whom have refused to accept Israel as the Jewish state prophesied in the Old Testament, Jewish fundamentalists have transformed Zionism into a defence of the 'Greater Land of Israel', characterized by territorial aggressiveness. In the case of Israel's best known fundamentalist group, Gushmun Emunim (Bloc of the Faithful), this has been expressed in a campaign to build Jewish settlements in territory occupied in the Six Day War of 1967 and then formally incorporated into Israel. More radical groups such as Katch (Thus) proclaim that Jews and Arabs can never live together and so look to the expulsion of all Arabs from what they see as the 'promised land'. Although small, Israel's collection of ultra-orthodox parties tend to exert disproportional influence because their support is usually necessary for either of the major parties, Likud and Labour, to form a government.

Zionism

Zionism (Zion is Hebrew for the Kingdom of Heaven) is the movement for the establishment of a Jewish homeland, usually seen as located in Palestine. The idea was first advanced in 1897 by Theodore Herzl (1860–1904) at the World Zionist Congress in Basle, as the only means of protecting the Jewish people from persecution. Early Zionists had secularist and nationalistic aspirations, often associated with socialist sympathies. Since the foundation of the state of Israel in 1948, however, Zionism has come to be associated both with the continuing promise of Israel to provide a home for all Jews and with attempts to promote sympathy for Israel and defend it against its enemies. In the latter sense it has been recruited to the cause of fundamentalism, and according to Palestinians it has acquired an expansionist, anti-Arab character.

The spread of Buddhist nationalism in Sri Lanka has largely occurred as a result of growing tension between the majority and largely Buddhist Sinhalese population and the minority Tamil community, comprising Hindus, Christians and Muslims. Although on the surface – by virtue of

its commitment to individual responsibility, religious toleration and non-violence – Buddhism is the least fundamentalist of the major religions (Dalai Lama, 1996), the Theravada Buddhism of Southern Asia has supported fundamentalist-type developments when nationalism and religious revivalism have been intertwined. In Sri Lanka, the drive for the 'Sinhalization' of national identity, advanced by militant groups such as the People's Liberation Front, have been expressed in the demand that Buddhism be made a state religion. Such pressures, however, merely fuelled Tamil separatism, giving rise to a terrorist campaign by the Tamil Tigers, which commenced in the late 1970s.

Religious fundamentalism in the twenty-first century

Is religious fundamentalism destined to survive throughout the twenty-first century, or will it ultimately be viewed as a temporary phenomenon, linked to the conjunction of particular historical circumstances? The question of the future of fundamentalism raises two starkly different scenarios. The first questions the long-term viability of any religiously-based political creed in the modern world, and highlights the particular limitations of fundamentalism as a political project. According to this view, fundamentalist religion is essentially a symptom of the difficult adjustments that modernization brings about, but it is ultimately doomed because it is out of step with the principal thrust of the modernization process. Modernization as westernization is destined to prevail because it is supported by the trend towards economic globalization and the spread of liberal democracy. Religion will therefore be restored to its 'proper' private domain, and public affairs will once again be contested by secular political creeds.

This analysis suggests that the theo-political project that lies at the heart of fundamentalism will gradually fade, with religious groups becoming mere components of broader nationalist movements. The emergence of a western-dominated global system may allow for the survival of civic nationalism, orientated around the goal of self-determination, but it suggests that there is little future for militant ethnic nationalisms, especially when they are based upon religious distinctiveness. The limitations of fundamentalism will thus become particularly apparent if fundamentalists succeed in winning power and are confronted with the complex tasks of government. Lacking a clear political programme or a coherent economic philosophy, fundamentalism as an ideology of protest will survive, if it survives at all, only as rhetoric or as the 'founding myth' of a regime.

The rival view holds that religious fundamentalism offers a glimpse of the 'postmodern' future. From this perspective, it is secularism and liberal culture that are in crisis. Their weakness, dramatically exposed by fundamentalism, is their failure to address deeper human needs and their inability to establish authoritative values that give social order a moral foundation. Far from the emerging global system fostering uniformity modelled on western liberal democracy, this view suggests that a more likely scenario is that the twentieth-century battle between capitalism and communism will give way to some form of clash of civilizations. Competing transnational power blocs will emerge, and religion is likely to provide them with a distinctive politico-cultural identity. Fundamentalism, in this version, is seen to have strengths rather than weaknesses. Religious fundamentalists have already demonstrated their adaptability by embracing the weapons and spirit of the modern world, and the very fact that they are not

encumbered by tradition but travel 'fast and light' enables them to reinvent their creeds in response to the challenges of postmodernity.

Further reading

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