

## Religious Fundamentalism

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Fundamentalism, today, is one of the most important ways in which religion makes itself present in everyday life, in culture and in politics. Be it the Christian Right in the USA, or the Free Presbyterian Church in Ulster, the Jewish Gush Emunim or Kach, Islamic Hamas, Muslim Brethren or Islamic Jihad, the Catholic Opus Dei, Buddhist Sri Lankan monks, the Indian Baratiya Janata Party or Rashtriya Svayamsevak Sangh – the list of today’s movements and organizations deemed fundamentalist is long. However, there are huge differences between such movements and it is not clear what fundamentalist trait they share.

The very term “fundamentalism” is problematic. First, its use can be very polemical. To be a fundamentalist means to be outside the limits of modern common sense. Taking this into account, some religious believers of the Christian Right proudly call themselves fundamentalists, while others (e.g. Muslim or Jewish traditionalists) are not happy with this label, although they are in no way identified with Western modernity. What is the difference between traditionalism and fundamentalism? Are fundamentalists integrists? Is fundamentalism, in the end, only a Christian praxis, confined to conservative Christians? Is it a specific form of biblical literalism? Or is it a broader category of social and political habitus, so that it is even possible to think of a Western technocratic fundamentalism?

In this chapter, we will not come to define fundamentalism. Rather, we will try to focus on some family resemblances of fundamentalist praxis. These might help us to distinguish between what might be called fundamentalism and other, similar religious practices. We will examine some basic traits, using the example of Christian fundamentalism. We will do this for two reasons. First, this book is written from a Christian perspective; thus, we should begin with the log in our own eye rather than with the speck in our neighbour’s. Second, it was American Christianity that first brought forth the phenomenon labelled fundamentalism.

We can permit ourselves one general statement at the outset: in the contemporary framework of globalization and modernization, fundamentalism can be seen as a “thoroughly modern phenomenon”.<sup>1</sup> It arose as a modern answer to the core of modernity itself: reflexivity.

### **Modernity, reflexivity and fundamentalism**

According to Shmuel Eisenstadt, the

reflexivity that developed in the modern programme not only focused on the possibility of different interpretations of core transcendental visions and basic ontological conceptions prevalent in a particular society or civilization; it came to question the very givenness of such visions and the institutional patterns related to them. It gave rise to an awareness of the possibility of multiple visions that could, in fact, be contested.<sup>2</sup>

After the birth of modern subjectivity during the Renaissance and with Descartes and (in the religious sense) Luther, individuals became aware of themselves as able to decide and to be responsible for themselves. Religious wars, the subsequent learning of tolerance, and the secularization of political legitimation under the will of the people in the French revolution changed politics into a realm of decisions that had to be taken reflexively. Even the holy scriptures and human existence itself were seen as historical and in constant change, relative to other possibilities. Modernity spells itself out through feelings of autonomy, through the possibility to construct a variety of social identities and to consciously form social and political life by democratic procedures. It brings about new symbols such as freedom, solidarity, justice and identity. The task of granting legitimacy to given forms of life is transferred from transcendental agents and values to those who live in society. The awareness that individuals, their beliefs and their values are relative over against others led to pluralist tolerance, and an awareness of risk invaded the modern self-conception. So it became necessary for all social actors – individuals, institutions and even the democratic political system – continually to observe and correct themselves. Reflexivity thus became a crucial practice for modern identity construction as well as social and political life. Reflexivity is the central operator of political democracy, liberty, human rights and solidarity.

A second, equally important trait of modernity is instrumental reason, as well as technological and imperial political development. Economic and political action became emancipated from clerical and aristocratic rule. The logic of economic maximization unfolds an enormous power over social and political relations and private life. What

was once ruled by kings and bishops is now developing freely according to the laws of the market. Colonial wars, exploitation and domination of large parts of the world corroborated in politics the universalistic pretensions of instrumental reason. The modern West came to be known to other cultures as a universal warlord that ruthlessly exploited their property and dictated its conditions on social and political life. A reaction against "the West" goes primarily against *this* face of modernity.<sup>3</sup> The question is, what logic does this reaction follow?

Modernity can thus be distinguished by two types of reason. On the one hand, it is *reflexive*; on the other, it is *instrumental*.<sup>4</sup> Reflexive modernity tends to lead to democratic political practice, tolerance of plurality, human rights, open political discourse, etc. Instrumental modernity goes with technological development, colonial domination, cultural unification, expansion by war and the overall dominance of instrumental (economic) reason.

Both these characteristics of modernity acted upon religion. Reflexivity went hand in hand with the growing awareness of the "nasty gap" (Lessing's *der garstige Graben*) between the present and the time of the Bible. Historical research, hermeneutical thinking and an awareness of historicity changed the habitus of many Christians, but questioned age-old authorities. At the same time, instrumental reason emancipated more and more from traditional norms and values, and equally began to threaten religious authorities and believers. Social differentiation and secularization did not extinguish religion, but with a new distinction between the public and the private spheres, religion became a matter of private choice. In Western nations, religious authority lost its power over society.

As religion withdrew, freedom increased and technical management of the future became more and more mandatory. Risk became omnipresent. This means the future is consciously seen to be dependent upon present human action. "The concept of risk becomes fundamental to the way both lay actors and technical specialists organize the social world."<sup>5</sup> This, in turn, questions feelings of deep-rooted trust in the world's future. It is hard to believe that "He's got the whole world in his hands". Trust has to be gained as "ontological security" in individual socialization according to lucky circumstances, a caring mother's hand and individual faith.<sup>6</sup> Or it has to be restored in universalist ways by the claim to absolute truth for certain modes of organizing the social world.

This function has been fulfilled by the secular myths of modernity.<sup>7</sup> The narratives of holy scripture were replaced by the great tale of technical and social evolution, of revolution and eternal betterment. The old

prophecy of final fulfilment was given secular shape. History could now be seen as a teleological process culminating in whatever reign of perfection. Secular prophecies took the place of religious ones. However, when the limits of growth became visible towards the end of the 20th century, the quasi-religious timeframe of modern identity – the expectation of eternal fulfilment – turned into apocalyptic nightmares.

Fundamentalism seems to be a religious and political reaction to this overall situation. In fact, a closer look will show that it is the other face of modernity. It is anti-modern only in relation to reflexive modernity. It subverts the basic civilizational paradigm shift at the brink of modernity: reflexivity as consciously relative, procedural legitimation and organization of political and social life. Where modernity puts reflexivity, tolerance and pluralism in place, fundamentalism installs absolute “truths” as orientations for social organization.

Fundamentalism is a religious strategy to gain (or regain) perspectives for action in what is perceived as a crisis. This strategy identifies its supporters with the Absolute (God, scripture, the Qur’an, the Spirit, etc.), makes an exclusive claim to truth and validity, aims as far as possible to bring whatever differs from it wholly under its dominion, and goes along (up to a certain point) with strategies of defensive affirmation of cultural identity.

### **How fundamentalism works**

The theological roots of fundamentalism in the USA are in the 19th century: in the premillennialist movement and in “Princeton theology” with its Reformed background. For outright fundamentalism, however, it is Princeton theology that is determinative.<sup>8</sup> Premillennialism had its roots in white lower classes, while academic Princeton theology – and likewise the fundamentalism of the early 20th century – was a matter of the religious Establishment and the middle classes.

Fundamentalism was born in the 19th century amid social and economic crises in the USA. It is important to notice that the theologies generally attributed to fundamentalism have different emphases in different social classes. Common to all of them, however, are two characteristics. They operate so as to allow believers to dissociate themselves from the crisis they are experiencing. And they associate, on the level of religious content, specific and appropriate theological themes that contrast with the specific form of crisis according to the social status of their adherents.

## **Establishing absoluteness and absolutizing one's own position of power**

Fundamentalism is widely perceived as an ideology that grants its adherents the belief that they possess the absolute truth. However, we should note the difference between naive religious certainty and conscious absolutism.

The white lower and lower-middle classes of the Northern states of the USA found the second half of the 19th century to be a radical change from everything that had previously existed. The civil war, industrialization, urbanization and immigration drowned the "promised land" in the rising tide of modernity. The Bible, taken as it stood, became a rock amid the flood. It offered itself to naive biblicism as the old truth that remained as valid as ever. The main emphasis for believers lay in the fact that the Bible and "old-time religion" offered certainty, so that they were not swallowed up by the wave of social change. However, such certainty is not part of a universalistic strategy of social domination. To the contrary, this naive biblicism combines with a strong expectation of the imminent return of Christ within a premillennialist framework: the church will be raptured out of the world instead of being the main actor in the "restoration of the kingdom". This religious option allows the defence of social identity, but it does not tend to project its own logic upon society.

The evangelical theological elites and educated upper middle class were much more concerned with the influences of cultural modernity on theology, philosophy, the "moral foundations" of society and, in the end, political power. They were threatened by the Enlightenment rationalist critique, naturalist denial of God's guiding hand on world issues, historicist interpretation of the scriptures and, finally, Darwin's equation of man, the "crown of creation", with the fool of creation, the ape. It was time to defend the truth of the scriptures and, with it, their own legitimacy for claiming to have the correct definition of society's rules. These intellectuals were firmly grounded in Baconian empiricism and Scottish "common-sense" philosophy. So they developed their own brand of rationalism in order to defend their position against modernity. Thus, such fundamentalists were not anti-scientific or even anti-intellectual; they simply judged "the standards of the later scientific revolution by the standards of the first – the evolution of Bacon and Newton."<sup>9</sup> In other words, they countered reflexive, hermeneutical thinking with an instrumental concept of reason.

Theological truth thus was an object of correct scientific procedure, source and knowledge. The Bible became a book of natural and

supernatural facts. Alexander A. Hodge, one of the most important theologians in Princeton, could state that “all the affirmations of scripture of all kinds whether of spiritual doctrine or duty, or of physical or historical fact, or of psychological or philosophical principle, are without any error”.<sup>10</sup> All these facts, the natural and the supernatural, are accessible without distortion to reason; and reason works empirically and instrumentally. Thus, conceptual realism assumes that the supernatural truths are depicted in the Bible and that behind any concept of the Bible there is a supernatural reality. And, finally, every such thing is subject to the scientific knowledge of the theologian. In more pointed terms, fundamentalist epistemology and ontology relativize the absolute and identify it with the contents of the fundamentalist’s own understanding. This means that human beings claim their own cognition to be capable of the absolute. And as biblical knowledge is pertinent for any science, knowledge or social and political order, fundamentalists claim an absolute and universalistic authority over the definition of truth and practice in society.

Time and the mental dispositions to understand it were important issues for 19th-century fundamentalism in the USA. Modern sciences and biblical research are based upon the notion of the historicity of existence, symbolized in the theory of evolution. This raised a twofold problem for fundamentalist theologians. First, evolutionist thought was going to inherit and secularize the great biblical narrative of final perfection. This would deprive the church of important symbolic capital. Second, the teleological trait of history as such could not be denied without losing the great narrative itself. The doctrine of dispensationalism took up the challenge and offered a solution. Those theologians conceive of history – in accordance with evolutionism – as a teleological process towards fulfilment, but the process is not linear: it is subdivided into smaller circles (dispensations). Human agency (autonomy) brings every circle to a fatal end, and God’s mercy establishes a new opportunity, another circle. This goes on until the final judgment and restoration of the kingdom of God. Thus, the teleological sense of history is being saved, but human agency – the most important element of modern evolutionary thought – is only valid if it works according to fundamentalist precepts.

This brief look at early US fundamentalism allows us to make four observations. First, the basic cognitive strategy is to construct a sense of absoluteness and exclusivity of one’s own truth claims. Second, there is a difference between the offensive strategy of upper-middle-class intellectuals and the defensive retreat to old time religion in the lower classes. Both are triggered by perceived social and cultural crisis, but

the defensive strategy affirms the identity and (physical) integrity of people in a weak position, while the offensive strategy acts as a social power strategy in order to impose particular criteria and rules upon society as a whole.

Third, it is quite clear that the social position of adherents is crucial for the movement's performance in religious terms. Actors without real possibilities to influence major developments will concentrate on the construction of social spaces for survival with dignity. They confine themselves to their "enclave".<sup>11</sup> Actors with access to political, economic, cultural and social means will use these resources to influence society. They use their enclave as a base for authoritarian power strategies. Thus, the social effect of the claim to absolute knowledge is different. From a weak position it allows the affirmation of the space for retreat. From a strong position it is a rationale for social domination and oppression of different practices and points of view. The former creates a world for its adherents; the latter seeks to conquer the world on its own behalf.

Fourth, the dispensationalist schema for understanding time offers an applied strategy for risk management. As modern thought understood historical time as an evolutionary process with human agency, risk became visible (though not to the extent it is today). The fundamentalist proposal manages this situation by means of its own model that facilitates successful social and political action under the conditions of fundamentalist rule.

### **Different contents, one strategy**

These different basic strategies can combine with very different religious and political contents, furthered by discourse and practice. Thus, it is not necessarily so that fundamentalism depends upon the use of scriptures. It can pivot around virtually any emblematic practice with enough symbolic power to mobilize people.

Our observations showed that classical US fundamentalism aimed at countering cultural change into reflexive modernity by imposing an older, instrumental form of reason. Scripture was in this context not only a general security and point of reference for fundamentalist identity. Scripture, in its realist understanding, was itself the central contents of the message: there is no change to eternal truth; truth and reason coincide in the plain text. Dispensationalism answered the challenge of evolutionism. According to this doctrine, there is no progress in history by human agency. Thus, fundamentalists counter the theory of evolution and the notion of the historicity and relativity of human existence with their own (unhistoric) theory of history. Scriptures and dispensations,

in this sense, are not the “essence” of fundamentalism. They are simply religious themes of their time and place. The important thing is that they are operators that make the logic of fundamentalism work in an applied way.

Thus, it is not surprising that a century later the neo-Pentecostal movement in the USA operates the same logic with different contents.<sup>12</sup> From an upper-middle-class and upper-class perspective, the question is how to foster political change towards the betterment of the economic and political position (prosperity and power) of neo-Pentecostals within a strongly competitive industrial and post-industrial society. The stance of the movement is generally in favour of technological development, with a notable tendency against reflexive modernity. Neo-Pentecostals normally are strong supporters of technological, financial and cultural globalization in Western patterns and look with a very sceptical attitude at cultural and political pluralism. For example, they identify non-Western (non-Christian) cultures with demonic spirits and forces. Neo-Pentecostals construct their own absolute standpoint not so much on the Bible as on ecstatic experiences with the Holy Spirit that confer a direct “knowledge of the supernatural” and the “empirical reality of God”. Scripture loses importance to *rhema*, the direct inspirational discourse. Ecstatic experiences can even reveal truths contrary to the Bible. The identification of the believers with the Holy Spirit comes to be the standpoint from which they can wage “spiritual warfare” against everything and everybody they believe to be demonic. Exorcism turns out to be the major pattern of religious, social and political strategies. Here, the conquest of the world takes place by the expulsion of the other. Neo-Pentecostalism has no problem with historical progress. Its members want to have a big share of it. So empowerment for action by the Holy Spirit and God’s blessing by prosperity are the central operators for this particular fundamentalism.

In spite of considerable differences in content between classical fundamentalism and neo-Pentecostalism, the operational logic is the same: both create an absolute standpoint over against social challenges and present a rationale for a universalistic pretension of power. In both actors this operation excludes any notion of historical relativity and self-critical reflexivity. This means the same result for both, only under different historical circumstances and therefore with different contents.

### **Logic of power**

As we have seen, the most important ingredient of fundamentalism is a certain cognitive operation that aims against reflexivity and histor-



ical relativity. This logic can operate with different contents, objects or practices. Generally, it takes four steps. First, religious specialists establish a cognitive connection between the demands of a specific population in a situation of change and/or crisis and some agent of the divine. Second, they construct a stable collective relationship to the main religious object (e.g. a rational relationship to a book, an ecstatic relationship to a spirit, a juridical relationship to an ecclesiastical authority, etc.). Third, the religious actors identify with the object and ascribe to themselves the (supposed) absoluteness of the religious object. This means that they reappropriate their social claims in a new way: as religiously legitimate and with other means of pursuing them. Fourth, the actors claim – according to the absoluteness of the religious object with which they identify – absolute and universal validity for their own social and religious claims.

Thus, fundamentalism turns out to be a specific social strategy to extend power over other people, groups and society. The fact that this logic can generally go along with any set of contents and practices means that fundamentalism is very adaptable. It can work with a great variety of traditions, moulding some of their elements into an ideology with universal validity claims. It is not itself traditionalism, even if it builds on traditions. Christian fundamentalists, for example, do not have a particularly good knowledge of Christian tradition.<sup>13</sup> Instead, they condense some traditional terms into symbolic triggers that mobilize people into the logic of the fundamentalist power play.

However, it is important to notice that not every claim for the absoluteness of one's own position necessarily develops into a universalist politics of power. It might remain as a means of defending the last place for the survival of a group. Only where power is already accumulated and combined with opportunities for mobilization can defensive attitudes be mobilized into universalist fundamentalism and its strivings for power.

### **Different fundamentalisms**

If we consider the distinction between the operation of the practical logic of fundamentalism and its exchangeable contents, it is possible to identify fundamentalistic logic in different cultural and religious settings without risking an inflational use of the term.

Today, it is common to talk about different fundamentalisms, according to different religious and cultural backgrounds: Christian, Jewish, Islamic, Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist, etc. This is a response to the fact that fundamentalism is not so much a matter of content, as it

depends on the logic of producing the habitus of absoluteness and transforming it into an offensive strategy of domination.

Modernity expanded from Europe to other places in the world together with military, economic and political domination. The face of modernity abroad was thus primarily one of belligerent and technological instrumental modernity. The reflexive, self-correcting contents and procedures of modern identity were not so easy to perceive from outside Europe. To some extent, the dominant classes in some countries (e.g. India) took into account the benefits of secular government and democratic procedures for economic development. But this does not entail a thorough democratization of society (neither was it the overall effect in the West). Strong differences and contradictions between classes in society may remain (e.g. the caste system in India). If this happens, domination will be identified with a "Western" orientation of the political or social upper class in general; in India, this would be the secularized Brahman caste; in Iran, it was the Shah; and in Egypt, it was Nasser's brand of socialism. For most of the population, rationalist political strategies (e.g. leftist people's movements) are not the habitual way of opposing "Western" domination within their own societies. Instead, such options are thought to be another trick of the West. But religious and ethnic traditions have deep roots in the daily life of poor populations. Thus, religion and ethnicity become important for mobilizing opposition to economic exclusion, social domination and political rule. The first accusation against the ruling classes is that they are non-Hindu, non-Islamic or non-Christian, and so forth.

However, simple reference to traditional religious and ethnic values is not necessarily fundamentalist. In many cultures religious teachings govern the whole of human life (politics, economics, partnership and personal behaviour) without modern Western distinctions between public and private, secular and religious. Such patterns of social life are not simply models of political and economic organization. They are profoundly rooted in the habitus of any person who has grown up with them. Thus, they deeply influence any social practice, from the most personal to the most public. The traditional orientation in religious and ethnic forms of life is premodern or non-modern. It is not in itself anti-modern because it existed long before modern political and economic organization spread from the West to other cultures.

It is only the confrontation of traditional cultures with Western ways of organizing political and economic life that creates the necessity of pronouncing traditional values against modern ones. And it is not social classes that are capable of moulding a new specific modernity, but the social classes that suffer harm by the modernization of the economy and

politics that turn to a revitalization of traditional values. For example, they actively promote the Hindu way of life as the *Hindutva* against Muslim and Christian mission in India and against a secularized national government. Similarly, Sri Lankan Buddhists proclaim Buddhism as the national religion and the island of Sri Lanka as a sacred Buddhist realm over against a loss of importance in the process of globalization and the involvement of Christians, Hindus and Muslims in Sri Lankan society and politics. This kind of pronouncement requires a unifying effort in the articulation of religion. Neither Hinduism nor Buddhism has any orthodoxy as such, for both are traditionally very plural. But under the pressure of an outside challenge, the dynamics of an articulation and unification of implicit traditional religious and ethnic orientations take shape. As a consequence, activists formulate Hindu doctrines or proclaim the "Sinhala race as the chosen race for the preservation of Buddhism".<sup>14</sup> It is at this point that traditions can be drawn into the logic of fundamentalism analyzed above.

However, an attempt to establish one's own position as absolute does not strictly imply universal domination. In the Buddhist and Hindu cases, movements do not tend towards mission and world conquest, but claim reactively what they perceive as their territorial, economic and political rights by using religious terms in an ethnic way. In these cases religion might define ethnicity and corresponding territorial and social claims, but it does not instigate the subjugation of extra-territorial populations under religious legislation. This also seems to be the case with Jewish traditionalist groups. Only the interpretation of territorial claims against the Palestinian population and its religious legitimation can be interpreted as an expansionist policy. And in any case, Judaism does not focus on world mission. On the other hand, Christian and Islamic fundamentalisms possess strong universalistic missionary zeal. Their one basic idea is to make public law out of holy texts and extend domination worldwide.

If we compare both types of fundamentalism from a macro-sociological view of the impacts of globalization, we will find an important difference. The feeling of being culturally threatened seems to be much stronger among Muslim activists than among those of the American Christian Right. The colonial domination of Islam by Western powers is important in the history of the Muslim world and in Islamic fundamentalist thought. Thus, Islamic fundamentalism is likely to be understood as a counter-movement to Western domination. The Islamist movement developed armed militancy after the end of direct colonial domination, a general strengthening of Islamic countries and less direct repression of Islamist activists by secularist regimes. The exclusivistic

politics of governing national elites and rising social injustice fuelled conflictive constellations. Nevertheless, radical Islamic activism has all the traits of an outright fundamentalism. It sets its own position as absolute without any hesitation, claims universal validity for its own religious law and way of life, and actively promotes campaigns to subdue opponents, regardless of such modern inventions as international law and the sovereignty of states.

The Christian Right in the USA has a different point of departure and slightly different methods. After the first decades of open counter-culture fundamentalism at the beginning of the 20th century, the movement was partially absorbed in evangelicalism. It came back in a new guise (partly neo-Pentecostal) in the 1980s. Under President Reagan it identified with the governing system and it came to be a nationalist affirmative pro-culture movement. Active militancy did not attain the degree it did in some Islamist movements, but there was strong advocacy for US military supremacy against the “reign of evil”, as well as public support for US military expeditions such as the Gulf war. In addition, parts of the movement actively engaged in counter-insurgency warfare in Guatemala and the Contra-war against Nicaragua, showing the same disrespect for international law and the sovereignty of states as their Islamic counterparts. Moreover, there is notable affirmation of neo-liberal economics. Neo-Pentecostal emphasis on the so-called Prosperity Gospel stands out as an elaborate and mass-oriented apology for neo-liberal economics. This close identification with imperial politics and the satanization of non-Christian religions gives American missionary enterprises such as Youth with a Mission a strong “world conqueror” image. The programme is to evangelize the world, to give it a unitary religious and cultural outlook, and to bring everybody under the rule of scripture in its one and only true version.

As American fundamentalism turned into a pro-culture movement, the scriptures were shaped much more to cultural conditions. The idea is not so much to shape US public institutions according to a precooked Christian shari’a, as it is to legitimate existing social structures and to foster some minor changes within them. As Jerry Falwell stated, the “free enterprise system is clearly outlined in the Bible”.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, for the time being, US fundamentalism possesses the two most important factors of fundamentalism in general: setting as absolute its own position and striving (not just in fantasy) to dominate the world. The same is true of Islamic fundamentalism. Both are utterly modern: they have developed “overarching totalitarian and all encompassing world ideologies, which emphasize a total reconstitution of the social and political order, and which espouse a strong universalistic,

missionary zeal".<sup>16</sup> The difference is that Muslim fundamentalism acts out of a defensive setting and the identity of its protagonists is moulded by this condition. Both these fundamentalisms are modern in the sense of instrumental, technocratic modernity, in order to be effectively anti-modern in the sense of reflexive modernity and the abolition of the separation between religion and state.

The logic of fundamentalism today works under complex conditions. First, there are the dynamics of modernization in different cultures which, at the same time, create multiple modernities and maintain within each one of them a tension between Western influences and traditional ways of life. These tensions exist on social and cultural fault lines. Ethnic and religious tensions can be mobilized for opposition to "Westernization". Whether or not they develop into a fundamentalism depends on the specific degree of tension, the access to power of oppositional actors, circumstantial opportunities and the disposition within religious tradition to generate universalistic power strategies.

### **Democracy and power-broking: two different forms of reason**

Fundamentalism turns out to be a partial answer to modernity. It generally affirms instrumental and technological modernity while it opposes reflexive modernity – both for the sake of its own power. It is *modern* in so far as it uses religious tradition as an ideology and modern technology in order to foster its practices, can get along with modern social institutions and traces universalistic perspectives. It is *anti-modern* in so far as it rejects the understanding of principles of social organization as historical and therefore relative to other times and cultures, refuses self-critical observation with checks and balances, counteracts pluralism, and refuses social differentiation and the distinction between religion and politics and promotes the integration of state and society under religious rule.

Reflexive reason is a core characteristic of modern democracy. This does not mean that it is a reality in the West; instead, it represents a challenge to Western culture, politics and economics. Nor should we claim that other cultures do not have similar systems of self-reflexive checks and balances to which Western reflexive reason may be able to link very well. But it is first and foremost to Western modernity that fundamentalism reacts, so we must focus on the Western brand of modern reflexivity. In the democratic tradition of the West, reflexive reason is based on the recognition that all human beings are relative to each other, and that no social actor possesses an absolute position and clear knowledge of the truth. Reflexive reason operates by the *processes* of regulating

this relativity and not with substantial (religious or cultural) traditions. Thus, modern reflexive rationality derives legitimacy from its ability to mediate the conflicting interests of different societal actors, acknowledging the basic individual and social rights of any and every human being. This means it is social, plural and democratic, or it does not exist at all. In this sense, it represents a constant challenge to any society and policy, foremost in the West.

Fundamentalisms develop within the framework of globalization as an answer to Western modernity. On the one hand, the programme of globalism<sup>17</sup> means the concentration and extension of financial and other economic capital and brings about the extension of technocratic and instrumental rationality. On the other hand, cultural and political inter-relatedness brings a certain amount of reflexive reason (e.g. in democratic international institutions and processes). Economic globalism acts as the background against which reflexive traits of globalization are perceived by many non-Westerners. And Western governments and economic actors are not reflexively democratic in many of their policies.

This situation produces a downwards spiral and makes fundamentalist counter-strategies seem plausible. Many people perceive globalism as a threat to their very existence and their customary ways of life. Under this pressure, they are also likely to perceive changes in customary methods of legitimation as a threat. So even if rational legitimation with a democratic form of government might be the best way to face the threats of economic exclusion and loss of cultural self-esteem, people might prefer habitual traditional legitimation. As an addition to the problems of Western globalism, reflexive democratic modernity might appear only to deepen the problems. The actors concerned cannot conceive of procedural legitimation (by democratic processes) as an opportunity for the management of diversity and conflicting interests. This tendency is reinforced by the undemocratic and hegemonic strategies of Western countries. The consequent revival of traditional cultural values gains plausibility and at the same time offers a linkage for the logic of fundamentalisms. The more that non-Western actors perceive global players as constituting nothing but sheer domination by force instead of reflexive democracy, the more the plausibility of fundamentalist and violent counter-strategies increases.

As noted above, fundamentalism builds upon an ideological exaggeration of its own cultural traditions over against a perceived threat from outside. Fundamentalism stresses very much the importance of traditional values. But true tradition only means some accentuated elements of its own world-view. Tradition turns into ideology. So, even in

modern and plural societies such as Brazil, fundamentalists can try to codify patriarchal family relationships in law, while the patriarchal orientation of Islamic fundamentalism boils down to the male rule of women's bodies. Tradition is not so much an orientation for critical self-examination as it is a rationale to legitimize the group's interests. Thus, the fact that Christian (upper-middle-class) fundamentalism sees the liberal economy as part of the divine order is no more astonishing than the fact that globally marginalized Hindus depict the divine order in conflict with the free market economy. Instead of complex processes designed to discover feasible policies, traditional texts serve to provide simplistic models that legitimize the group (class) interests of fundamentalist believers. This simply means that tradition serves as a disguise for instrumental teleology: everything serves that fosters our interest. Nothing is more harmful to such a position as reflexive reason.

Nevertheless, the revival of traditional culture is not by itself fundamentalism. It might work as the defence of a given population against overwhelming social change and the threat of extinction. The affirmation of cultural identity might make a certain culture absolute for its members, but this does not imply its belligerent imposition on outsiders. On the contrary, traditionalists like the Amish, for example, look inside to the details of their culture in order to preserve it against any modernity, be it reflexive or instrumental.

Fundamentalism, on the other hand, moulds tradition and important traits of instrumental modernity into one – with a preference for the latter. In Iran under Khomeini, for example, no one seemed to have a problem with the hybrid construction of an Islamic republic. It worked well for the double strategy of overthrowing the non-republican government of the Shah and installing Shari'a under the rule of the specially created office of the *faqih*. Fundamentalism, generally, does not reject the use of modern organization or technology if this promotes its goals. Neo-Pentecostal fundamentalists in Guatemala, for example, were the first in the religions there to use computers (in order to coordinate with the military a missionary campaign in a guerrilla stronghold). Anything goes if it serves "our" interests. It seems that today's fundamentalists endeavour within their limits to locate themselves at the spearhead of instrumental reason. They do so without the hindrance of reflexive self-criticism and recognition of the rights of others. In this sense, today's Western fundamentalism is a late affirmation of Marcuse's unidimensional man. It reacts to the challenges of Beck's Second Modernity (globally inter-related, reflexive and pluralist) with the means of the First (instrumental, unilinear and orthodox).

The social perception of time plays an even more important role in fundamentalist success than in the 19th century, when historical thinking was only in its beginnings. In today's social and technological conditions it has been transformed into an almost total awareness of risk. Living in the modern risk society means living with a clear idea of the fact that the future depends upon human agency, with all its flaws and shortcomings. Ontological trust is a scarce good under these circumstances and has to be created by favourable living conditions. But what if those conditions do not exist? Where ontological trust is fragile, fundamentalism installs metaphysical trust with its teleological concept of a history that points towards the final victory of God's people. Fundamentalist time management, once again, turns into risk management.

This is especially applicable to the crisis of (the first) modernity and the appearance of post-modern talk since the early 1970s. Up to the late 1960s, Western modernity had its "grand narratives": utopias of eternal fulfilment in the garments of revolution, technical evolution, a Third Reich of a thousand years, and so forth. These utopias directed collective orientation to ends that helped withstand the inner contradictions of modern life. But when the limits of growth became visible, these utopias gave way to apocalyptic fears. The future was no longer the utopia of a teleological historic reason; instead, it became a source of fear. In such a context fundamentalism gets straight to the point, for it does not deny the possibility or even necessity of the apocalypse. It binds its followers into a group of winners and restores an old-new story of fear and security that spans history. At the moment when the secular myths of modernity crumble, fundamentalism proposes instrumental modernity combined with a religious myth. The teleology of means and ends in instrumental rationality finds a counterpart of historic dimensions.

The price that fundamentalism imposes for this consolation is the reintegration of religion and politics. One of the most important features of Western modernity is the separation of politics and religion. Secularization means not so much the disappearance of religion as the privatization and individualization of religious belief. Especially in the French version of European modernity, this separation is strong. This might be one reason why French observers perceive fundamentalism as integrism. In this sense, religious fundamentalism always has a strong political dimension. Integration of religion and politics at a first glance seems to have very much in common with traditional cultures and religious systems. However, the fundamentalist programme overstates again a trait of traditional belief and turns it into an ideology. Religion in many cultures pervades the daily life of the people, is quite strongly



identified with ethnic identity and plays a role in political decision-making. But it normally does not dictate political decisions. Religion usually plays a consultative role, with no last and definitive word in politics. In this sense, it is more than doubtful that fundamentalism guarantees something like public faith. Instead, it subdues religion to political calculus.

Those religions with the most strongly developed fundamentalist movements – Christianity, Islam and Judaism – are prophetic and messianic religions. Why should they react to reflexive modernity and democratic plurality with a proposal for religious jurisdiction over politics and society? All three of them are intimately involved in the development of Western modernity itself. And it seems to be precisely the utopian trait of modern grand narratives and their universalism which goes back to a messianic and prophetic origin. All three religions go back to one basic story: the overcoming of slavery in Egypt and scarcity in the desert with the promise of a sacred land. Overcoming the afflictions of the present with fulfilment in the future has since become common. This fulfilment has to be universal, valid for all, and it has to have the shape that religious believers have in mind – if it were not like this, what promise would it be? Such a promise cannot be relative to other promises given to other people, and it cannot be relative to the course of time, so that it might be fulfilled or not. Thus, the messianic tradition gave rise to strong expansionist activities in Christianity and in classical Islam (today, in a defensive position). And they gave rise to the great promise of instrumental, technological modernity: the overcoming of scarcity in the future. The messianic current in the three religions tends to share the consequences: universalist exclusivism and belligerent propagation of the promise. Thus, these religions share the contradictions of modernity as well. Western Christianity struggles against post-modern decomposition of the great modern stories and with them the perspective of a future fulfilment of hopes. Islam struggles against the overwhelming power of Western technology, politics and a military presence that constantly challenges the doctrine of the universal superiority of Islam. And Jewish fundamentalists struggle against an Islamic presence that obstructs the reconstruction of Zion, and against post-modern secular decay in Israeli society. All three fundamentalisms are fighting for their messianic identity. However, these religions have also developed other choices during their history.

The messianic trait of Christianity has its counterparts in the grand narratives of evolution, revolution and Western superiority. These narratives are told in the language of instrumental modernity. They are far

from self-critical reflexivity and pretend to universal validity. The logic of globalism is unidimensional and oriented in unilateral domination. Yet these are characteristics that are countered, within the West itself, by reflexive, democratic rationality. Under the conditions of developed globality and multiple modernities, however, the grand narratives of the West also face a crisis. The plurality of cultures that give their own interpretation to modernity and their increasingly strong presence on the global scene relativizes the West. Believers in the secular religion of Western superiority now tend to give secular fundamentalist responses. The thesis of the “end of history” with modern capitalist society is basically fundamentalist. It reacts to the crisis of the grand narrative in almost the same way as dispensationalism. Proclaiming the end of history means to deny historical relativity and thus the necessity of reflexive self-examination and rendering account to others as a constant condition for legitimizing social and political systems. A second reaction is to set the underlying rationality of Western globalism as an absolute value over against human life and dignity and to promote it by any and every means, including violence and violation of international law. Thus, the myth of Western superiority can create a secular political fundamentalism in the core of Western modernity itself – again, by strengthening instrumental and weakening reflexive reason. In the worst case, global politics would have to count on confrontation with two fundamentalisms: a globally religious Islamic fundamentalism and a religiously global Western fundamentalism.

### **Religion and reflexive reason**

To answer one fundamentalism with another fuels fundamentalist resentment and confirms its logic, as the situation in Palestine shows quite clearly. Democratic organization of society and possibilities for everybody to participate in the benefits of social welfare and peaceful change diminish the plausibility of fundamentalist radicalism. Islamist movements, for example, are likely to be absorbed by democratic structures that provide opportunities to participate in the shaping of social structures and which are strongly against armed militancy. This does not mean that core activists stop being fundamentalists, but it does mean the enclave culture loses its plausibility, rank and file members diminish, the strong borderline with the devil or the “system” blurs, and armed militancy loses its appeal. If perceived opportunities for action generate mobilization, political actors have to create specific opportunities that respond to the demands at the social basis of fundamentalism. If democratic participation in local and global processes brings a

real chance to achieve one's goal, then fundamentalist strategies of domination and violence do not make much sense.

Any answer to religious fundamentalism that only names secular democracy and social participation is too brief, however. Religion itself should be an important component of any answer. The contrast of modernity and traditional societies shows that the secular trend to privatize religion tends to exclude religion from political and social ethics. Religion turns into a private means to satisfy personal needs. In traditional societies, religion generally is primarily a general code of understanding basic matters in the daily life of the community. It is part of the common habitus and can be made explicit by religious specialists in cases of conflicting interpretations. In modernity this basic function is lost. But the arguments of religious ethics, nevertheless, can have weight. They have weight if they target precisely the point at stake and offer from their special perspective relevant answers to relevant problems. What counts is competence.

Modern secularism produces a loss of belonging. The same is the case for any other culture affected by the rapid social change of globalization. Contradictions that arise as multiple modernities develop – uprooting by migration, social marginalization, destruction of dignity – call for new sources of identity, a new belonging. This is where religion enters in. It is far from fundamentalism.

In this context, the plurality of religious and cultural options even in very small local spaces presents a special problem. Religion could play a special role here. In its fundamentalist use, religion has the capability to produce a sense of absoluteness and to foster aggressive exclusion of the other. But religion has the opposite ability as well: to show that over against the ultimate, every human being is relative, yet still has a firm ground for hope and existence. The essential characteristic of a faith state is not the cognitive knowledge of “truths”, but the emotional (and ontological) sense of security and stability. This makes it possible to perceive oneself as relative over against others in a plural world without despair or losing responsible ties to other human beings.

Fundamentalism as a modern phenomenon turns out to be a challenge to religion in that it forces religious people to become more reflexive about themselves.

## **Recommendations**

Fundamentalism, according to the above analysis, mirrors instrumental modernity. To those who favour the concept of the rational individual and its exclusive interest in maximizing benefits, fundamen-

talism reveals the same instrumental logic at work, only for the benefit of others with different goals. In this sense, fundamentalism first calls for a self-critical assessment of Western modernity in order to nourish its reflexive traits.

A closer examination shows a continuum between defensive traditionalist identities and outright fundamentalism. Not every traditionalist is fundamentalist, but there can be circumstances that can forge fundamentalism out of a defensive identity affirmation. Thus, it is important to examine carefully any religious actor the ecumenical movement has to deal with, in order not to discriminate and to detect concerns with which the ecumenical movement might identify.

A careful assessment might also discover elements in an actor's praxis of which the ecumenical movement might not approve. In case of strong doubts about certain fundamentalist practices, a clear ecumenical position should be established.

Fundamentalists mobilize people who suffer assaults to their human dignity, their ability to act on their own behalf and to live in an acceptable way. Democratic participation in politics and economic life, as well as recognition of plural cultural traditions, are means of restoring dignity. Fundamentalist activists are neither democratic nor plural, so direct dialogue with them does not seem to be of much use. But members of movements might be interested in social participation. So it makes sense to foster democratic and participative opportunities and structures, addressing and including members of fundamentalist groups. More democracy and participation in society at large counteracts fundamentalism.

For inter-religious dialogue, this means that discussions about religious dogmatics and codified truths do not lead to anything in relation to fundamentalism. An alternative strategy might be to contact the religious organizations of other cultures and religions in order to address together the social, political and cultural demands at the basis of fundamentalist mobilization.

As ecumenical Christianity partly is identified with the West, Western tendencies towards an excess of instrumental reason and thus technological, political or even military fundamentalism are an important challenge to the ecumenical movement. The ecumenical movement should detect fundamentalist trends in Western culture and foster reflexive reason in general.

A theological orientation that focuses on confessionalist interests and reaffirmation of confessional positions does not seem to be a creative reaction to fundamentalism. To simply state one's own opinion against that of others does not lead us very far. Instead, while one's own

position should be clear, ecumenical theology should cultivate liberal approaches to inter-religious relations that permit the joint development of inter-religious policies over against fundamentalist movements in the different religions.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> For many of our observations we rely on the findings of the "fundamentalism project" by Marty and Appleby (1991, 1993, 1993, 1994, 1995). Shmuel Eisenstadt, "Fundamentalism, Phenomenology, and Comparative Dimensions", in Martin Marty and R. Scott Appleby eds, *Fundamentalisms Comprehended*, Chicago, Univ. of Chicago Press, 1995, p. 259.
- <sup>2</sup> Shmuel Eisenstadt, "Multiple Modernities", *Daedalus*, vol. 129, 2000, p. 4.
- <sup>3</sup> Wolfgang Geiger, "Das Gespenst des Fundamentalismus", in *Die Neue Gesellschaft. Frankfurter Hefte*, 36. Jg., 1989, no. 3, p. 245.
- <sup>4</sup> Another way to approach fundamentalism systematically within the framework of modernity is that of Julio de Santa Ana. See "Fundamentalisms, Integralisms, Religious Conservatisms", paper presented at Bossey working group, "The present situation of religious life in the world and its challenge to the ecumenical movement", Bossey, 2001. He points out five characteristics of modernity: the autonomy of the individual, instrumental reason, historicity of truth, the "death of God", and religion as a private matter. Using these orientations he discusses fundamentalism with many interesting results.
- <sup>5</sup> Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Stanford CA, Stanford UP, 1991, p. 3.
- <sup>6</sup> Modernity does not erase religious faith as such, but religious institutions and their claim to publicly administer religion and morality (see Ronald Inglehart and Wayne Baker, "Modernization, Cultural Change, and the Persistence of Traditional Values", *American Sociological Review*, vol. 65, Feb. 2000, pp. 19–51). The idea that reason could question religious *faith* is wrong, since reflexive reason may foster relativity but cannot do away with personal attitudes, as hermeneutical religious science states (see Reinhold Bernhardt, *Der Absolutheitsanspruch des Christentums. Von der Aufklärung bis zur Pluralistischen Religionstheologie*, Gütersloh, Mohr, 1990). Religion is a "practical logic" (Heinrich Schäfer, *Theologie und Religion. Praxeologische Untersuchungen zu zwei zentralen Themen ökumenischer Forschung*, Habilitationsschrift, Ev.-Theol. Fakultät, Ruhr-Universität Bochum, 2001, p. 179), based in "faith states". See William James, *Die Vielfalt religiöser Erfahrung*, Frankfurt, Insel, 1997, p. 485.
- <sup>7</sup> Thomas Meyer, *Fundamentalismus. Aufstand gegen die Moderne*, Reinbek, Rowohlt, 1989, pp. 10,62.
- <sup>8</sup> There is discussion about the role of premillennialism in the origins of fundamentalism. Sandeen (Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism. 1800–1930*, Chicago, Univ. of Chicago Press, 1970) derives fundamentalism from millennialism. Marsden (George Marsden, "From Fundamentalism to Evangelicalism: A Historical Analysis", in David F. Wells and John D. Woodbridge eds, *The Evangelicals*, Nashville TN, Abingdon, 1975, p.126) sees important differences. So do I. For more detailed information see Heinrich Schäfer, *Protestantismus in Zentralamerika. Christliches Zeugnis im Spannungsfeld von US-amerikanischem Fundamentalismus, Unterdrückung und Wiederbelebung "indianischer" Kultur*, Frankfurt, Lang, 1992.

- <sup>9</sup> George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of 20th Century Evangelicalism, 1870–1925*, New York, Oxford UP, 1980, p. 214.
- <sup>10</sup> A.A. Hodge and B.B. Warfield, “Inspiration”, *Presbyterian Review*, 2, 1881, p. 238, quoted in Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism*, p. 126.
- <sup>11</sup> For fundamentalism as an enclave culture see Emmanuel Sivan, “The Enclave Culture”, in Martin Marty and Scott Appleby eds, *Fundamentalism*, Chicago, Univ. of Chicago Press, 1995, pp.11–68; and “Kultur und Identität im Vergleich unterschiedlicher Ausprägungen des Fundamentalismus”, in Aleida Assmann and Heidrun Freise eds, *Identitäten*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1999, pp. 427–55.
- <sup>12</sup> See Schafer, *Protestantismus in Zentralamerika*, pp. 67ff.
- <sup>13</sup> Nor do Muslim fundamentalists, according to Bassam Tibi (*Die Krise des modernen Islam*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1991).
- <sup>14</sup> S. Wesley Ariarajah, “Religion and Politics”, paper presented at Bossey working group, “The present situation of religious life in the world and its challenge to the ecumenical movement”, Bossey, 2001, p. 11.
- <sup>15</sup> Jerry Falwell, *Listen America!*, New York, Doubleday, 1980, p. 13.
- <sup>16</sup> Eisenstadt, “Fundamentalism”, p. 264.
- <sup>17</sup> See Beck (*Was ist Globalisierung?*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1997, pp. 26ff.), who makes the following distinction: *globalism* is the deliberate spreading of neo-liberal practices; *globality* is the fact of non-revisable global inter-relatedness; *globalization* is the complex process of spreading different forms of inter-relations.

Edited by

*Julio de Santa Ana*

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