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Religion, Fundamentalism, and Conflict

R. SCOTT APPLEBY

Since the event known as “9/11,” when Islamic extremists piloted hijacked planes into the twin towers of the World Trade Center, New York, and the Pentagon, Washington DC (while a fourth hijacked airliner crashed in a Pennsylvania field), the fervent international debate about the roles of religion in deadly conflict has seen analysts gravitating toward one of two extremes. One camp follows in the tradition of religion’s cultured despisers, pointing to the bogeyman of “fundamentalism” as evidence that religion is inherently opposed to every (liberal) expression of human freedom and committed to intolerant theocracy. To proponents of this approach to religious violence, “fundamentalism” is a catch-all term for a range of disparate phenomena, from any activity of religiously conservative or orthodox believers on the one hand, to religion-inflected wars and atrocities in conflict settings like the Balkans, Afghanistan, or Sri Lanka, on the other. To this camp—which equates religion, fundamentalism, and terrorism—absolutism, intolerance, and deadly violence is the true face of religion.

The other camp, which includes secular humanists who are friendly to organized religion, as well as many religious believers themselves, expects religion to uphold the humanist credo, including the proposition that human life is the highest good, the one inviolable reality. These proponents of enlightened religion tend to explain away acts of terrorism, murder, and sabotage committed in the name of religion: This is not Islam, this is not Christianity, this is not Sikhism, they contend, precisely

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because the act and agents in question violate the sanctity of human life and dignity.¹

The either/or method of analyzing religion—predicated on the assumption that one must decide whether religion is essentially a creative and “civilizing” force, on the one hand, or a destructive and inhumane specter from a benighted past, on the other—is no less prevalent for being patently absurd. Both positions on religion smack of reductionism. The cynics fail to appreciate the profoundly humane and humanizing attributes of religion and the moral constraints it imposes upon intolerant and violent behavior. The advocates of “liberalized” religion fail to consider that an authentic religious precept—a sincere response to the sacred—may end in subordinating human life to a higher good (e.g., unconditional obedience to God’s law).²

Both of these camps hold a distorted view of religion, of fundamentalism, and of the relationship of each to armed conflict. Deconstructing the stereotypes they reinforce is the burden of this essay.

RELIGION: FLUID, ADAPTIVE, INTERNALLY PLURAL

People have believed in and practiced “religion” from the beginning of recorded history. Each community of belief and practice undertaken in response to the experience of the sacred has produced its own virtuosi and officials—priests, rabbis, ulema, gurus, and the like—who preside over sacred rituals and lead communal worship, proclaim doctrines, enforce ethical teachings, and organize the community.³

1. Appleby, *Ambivalence of the Sacred*, 10.

2. *Ibid.*

3. The “objective” and comparative study of religion as a phenomenon found in every society is less than two hundred years old, however. The Western Enlightenment, the sweeping cultural and intellectual movement that elevated reason over revelation in the eighteenth century, led to the separation of scientific inquiry from religious belief. An important legacy of the Enlightenment is the idea that religion is a human enterprise or product, much like politics or culture, with its own inner dynamics and rules that can be examined rather than experienced as a gift from God. By the dawn of the twentieth century religion itself had become an object of scholarly or “scientific” study. Since then, the study of religion in the West has been conducted mostly by scholars who do not share the perspectives and beliefs of the people they study. Journalists as well as scholars have adopted an increasingly detached and analytical view of religion. Their approach has tended to minimize the unique nature of religious experience and behaviors. It views religion not as an independent reality, but as a colorful, dramatic, and often violent expression of “something else”—of political, social, economic, or psychological needs or desires, for example. See Capps, *Religious Studies*.

To various degrees the great religious traditions, in their teachings and commentaries on the sacred scriptures and doctrines, evolved hermeneutics, or interpretive strategies, designed to identify the sacred more and more completely with its benevolent, life-giving aspect. In the Traditions of the Book—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—God is the ultimate source of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful; Satan, the destructive aspect of the numinous, is banished from the godhead. These traditions vary significantly, of course, both in comparison to one another and within themselves, as to the credence they continue to give to the primordial notion of divine wrath and retribution. In Eastern traditions such as Buddhism and Hinduism, ambivalence reigns colorfully in the mundane religious imagination, where avatars of fertility commingle with warrior gods. Enlightenment, however, is a state of transcendence beyond a world imprisoned in these illusionary dualisms.

Within each of these great traditions, notwithstanding their profound substantive differences, one can trace a moral trajectory challenging adherents to greater acts of compassion, forgiveness and reconciliation, and delegitimizing as “demonic” the competing voices of revenge and retaliation that continue to claim the status of authentic religious expression. It is this internal evolution of the great religious traditions that commands our attention, for these traditions spawn the most significant religio-political movements of our time, from the violent extremist cadres to the organizations of faith-based peacemakers. Thus it behooves us to understand how change occurs within these religions, how spin-off movements form to advocate and embody different elements within these internally plural and ambiguous traditions, and how external actors and circumstances influence both processes.

In striving to adhere to traditional beliefs and moral codes, religious actors recognize that tradition is pluriform and cumulative, developed in and for concrete and changing situations. Decisions based on religious principles reflect the ways religious authorities interpret and apply the received tradition in specific circumstances. In this process the *internal pluralism* of any religious tradition—the multiplicity of its teachings, images of the divine, moral injunctions, and so on—bestows upon the religious leader the power of choice. It falls inevitably to the evangelist, prophet, rabbi, priest, sage, religious scholar or guru to select the appropriate doctrine or norm in a given situation and thus to define

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what is orthodox or heretical, moral or immoral, permitted or forbidden, at a particular moment.⁴

Gaps between dogma and ideology—or, to put it differently, between professed belief and operative belief—are found in every religion and historical period. This alone does not constitute a betrayal of religious ideals. Religious traditions are inherently dynamic, composed of what Cardinal Newman called “leading ideas,” which interact with “a multitude of opinions” and introduce themselves into “the framework and details of social life.”⁵

Religious traditions can adapt to their environments without eroding continuity with the sacred past because the past is capacious. The notion of “internal pluralism” suggests an array of laws, doctrines, moral norms, and “practices” (socially imbedded beliefs) sacralized and sanctioned at various times by the community and its religious authorities. This storehouse of religiously approved options is available to religious leaders whenever new circumstances call for change in religious practice. Scientific developments, for example, may transform the believer’s understanding of the world and shift the context for moral decision-making, thereby providing justification for ransacking the religious past.

The philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre defines a “living tradition” as “an historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition.”⁶ MacIntyre’s formulation, coupled with Newman’s notion of religious “ideas” awaiting development in each historical period, suggest a working definition of a “religious tradition” as a sustained argument, conducted anew by each generation, about the contemporary significance and meaning of the sources of sacred wisdom and revealed truth (i.e., sacred scriptures, oral and written commentaries, authoritative teachings, etc.). The argument alternately recapitulates, ignores, and moves beyond old debates, but draws on the same sacred sources as did previous generations of believers. It follows its own inner logic and rules, and generates distinctive patterns of thought and action. According to MacIntyre, the argument is “precisely in part about the goods which

4. Appleby, *Ambivalence of the Sacred*, 31–32.

5. Newman, *An Essay on the Development*, 35, 37–38.

6. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 204–5; see also Appleby, *Ambivalence of the Sacred*, 33.

constitute that tradition”—and in part about the practices which sustain and extend those goods to the individual and the community.⁷

What is striking about the recent past is that the religious “argument” has unfolded in Christianity and Judaism, in Islam and Hinduism and Sikhism, around the notion that these historic traditions are under siege, threatened to their very core, by irreligious or corrupt religious forces and trends linked to the rise of secular modernity. Strikingly, there has emerged within each of these religious traditions a comparable “logic”—a modern mode of political religiosity that justifies, embraces and elaborates a militant reaction to the religious and secular “other.” This religious logic has come to be known as “fundamentalism.”

FUNDAMENTALISM: SELECTIVE, REACTIVE, ABSOLUTIST, DUALIST, APOCALYPTIC

The Western media began to take special notice of the violent, “uncivilized” dimensions of religion in the 1970s. Observers pointed to the rise of the politically influential New Christian Right in the United States, the messianic ideas of Jews who settled the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza in hopes of extending Israel’s boundaries to “Biblical proportions,” and the violent activism of certain Sunni Muslim groups. The most powerful cause of the media’s fascination with religion’s “dark side,” however, was the Islamic Revolution in Iran (1978–1979), which shocked U.S. and European policy makers and intellectuals who had presumed that religion was a spent force in the modern world. How, astonished reporters and politicians wondered, could a “medieval” ayatollah transform a supposedly secularizing nation like Iran into a semi-theocracy (a nation ruled by religious law and clergy)? After all, Iran under the Shah had been moving away from religious identity and religious justifications for its public policies, foreign alignments, and economic practices.

By the mid-1980s the world seemed to be on fire with “radical religion.” The government of India, supported by militant Hindu nationalists who promoted India as a “Hindu nation,” were fighting Sikh separatists of the Punjab, who employed their own brand of deadly violence in an ultimately futile effort to secede from India. “Buddhist nationalism” colored the civil war between Sinhalese and Tamils in Sri Lanka. In the

7. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 222.

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Holy Land of the Middle East Jewish messianists of the religious settler movement Gush Emunim clashed lethally with Sunni Muslim extremists of the Palestinian Muslim resistance movement Hamas. In failed states such as Lebanon and Afghanistan, Muslim “freedom fighters” (such as Lebanon’s Shi’ite movement, Hezbollah—“the Party of God”) attempted to establish Muslim sovereignty over the state.

Although these groups had little in common and were not cooperating with one another, American journalists and some scholars lumped them together. They reached back for a familiar word—“fundamentalism”—to describe the phenomenon. “Fundamentalism” was first used by evangelical Christians of the 1910s and 1920s who proclaimed themselves willing to wage “battle royal” for “the fundamentals of the faith.”⁸ In the 1980s, journalists began to extend the term “fundamentalism” well beyond its original North American context, to militant Sikh, Muslim, Jewish, and Buddhist groups. The term is in many ways an unfortunate one, however, because its frequent misuse and promiscuous application lead some people to conclude that all seriously committed religious people are fundamentalists, and that all fundamentalists are a public menace. Nonetheless, numerous scholarly and popular studies of “global fundamentalism” and religious violence were published in the 1980s and 1990s.⁹

8. Appleby and Marty, *Fundamentalisms Observed*, 2.

9. From 1988 to 1993 the American Academy of Arts and Sciences devoted the funding from a major public policy grant to “The Fundamentalism Project,” a comparative study of worldwide religious resurgence, political religion and religiously motivated violence. Seventy-five scholars from twenty nations contributed to the project, which produced five encyclopedic scholarly volumes published by the University of Chicago Press and edited by Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby. Several spin-off books and essays also appeared, including *Islamic Fundamentalisms and the Gulf Crisis*, translated into several languages worldwide, and *Spokesmen for the Despised*, a collection of biographical profiles of “fundamentalist” leaders of the Middle East. The literature on religious conflict and religious violence has grown significantly over the past twenty years, with innumerable titles published after 9/11. Among the most influential authors are Mark Juergensmeyer (*Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, 2000), Gilles Kepel (*Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*, 2002) and Philip Jenkins (*The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, 2002). In 1994, the sociologist of religion José Casanova wrote an influential book, *Public Religion in the Modern World* (University of Chicago Press), that scolded Western scholars and academics for underestimating the resilience of religion in national and international affairs. Casanova noted that most Western observers of the worldwide “resurgence of religion” had assumed that the world was becoming completely secularized or devoid of religion. Thus they were taken completely by surprise by the “news” that religions remain quite

The themes and findings of these studies are too numerous to be summarized fully, but a few should be mentioned here. First, members of these religious movements fear or hate the modern nation-state. The modern state, they argue, is godless and therefore morally and spiritually bankrupt. It regulates many aspects of social existence and establishes the basic political and cultural conditions within which social life occurs. Thus, “fundamentalist” religious actors often feel compelled to provide a strong religious alternative or challenge to the state. Even when fundamentalists attempt to preserve their separateness from secular society, however, they find themselves participating in a common discourse about modernization, development, political structures, and economic planning.

Second, most of these movements are composed of religious believers who chose to separate from their orthodox or traditionalist communities. People of religious consciousness and conscience are being pushed to the margins of society, they believe. Accordingly, “true believers” must “fight back” against nonbelievers and “lukewarm” believers. In this context, male charismatic or authoritarian leaders emerged from each religious tradition, often in defiance of the conventional religious leadership. These new leaders ransacked the tradition’s past, retrieving and restoring politically useful doctrines and practices, and creating others. They were successful in creating an ideology that mobilized disgruntled youth into militant cadres or into grassroots political organizations. The religious militants established new boundaries between “insiders” and “outsiders” and imposed a strict discipline on their followers. In many cases, they were able to elevate their mission to a spiritual plane in which apocalyptic, or “end-times” urgency informed even the most mundane tasks of the group.

Third, all of this unfolded in the name of defending and preserving a cherished collective identity rooted in religious tradition. Strikingly, most of these movements did not look backward but forward. They look to the past for inspiration rather than for a blueprint. Direction and models for reform of society came not only from a selective interpretation of the sacred past, but also from imitation of what works in

capable of causing or extending deadly conflicts. No one doubts that truth now. But most scholars of politics and culture, as well as practitioners of conflict resolution, are still learning that religion can also be a powerful source of conflict prevention, management, and resolution.

the present—including what works for the modern state! Thus militant religious actors became important players in local, regional and even national politics, not as a result of their nostalgia or “backwardness,” but as a result of their ability to adapt to modern organizational imperatives, political strategies, communications advances, and economic theories.

When fundamentalists react to the marginalization of religion, that is, they do so as modern people formed in a pluralist, secular milieu. They might invoke the pristine moment of origin of the Davidic kingdom or Christendom or Islamic civilization, but the fundamentalists are looking ahead, not backward. Educated and formed epistemologically under the banner of techno-scientific modernity, most “middle-managers” of fundamentalist movements are trained as engineers, software experts, medical technicians, soldiers, politicians, teachers, and bureaucrats. They are pragmatists of the soul. Few are astrophysicists or speculative philosophers. Stinger missiles, modern media, airliners, and cyberspace are their milieu. They have little patience and no time for the ambiguities of the vast, multivalent religious tradition.

Given their emergence from the heart of secular modernity, these would-be defenders of traditional religion approach the scriptures and traditions as an architect reads a blueprint, or an engineer scans his toolbox: they plumb the sacred sources for the instruments appropriate to the task. By this habit they reveal themselves to be modern, not traditional. In competition with the “Westoxicated” moderns, the fundamentalists select, mix and match, recombine, innovate, create, build. They grow impatient and angry with mere traditionalists, who insist on disciplining themselves to the tradition as an organic, mysterious, non-linear, irreducible, life-giving whole. There is no time for such luxuries, such refinements, as the fundamentalists implore: we are *at war*, our souls as well as lives depend on swift and powerful retaliation: this is *urgent!*

And so the mode of reaction to the marginalization of religion is, ironically, fundamentally modern, instrumental, rational—and manipulative of the religious tradition.

Thus fundamentalists, whether vaguely or explicitly aware of the compromises they are compelled to make, practice *selective retrieval* not only of aspects of secular modernity, but also of the host religion. From the religious sensibility they choose the elements most resistant to relativism, pluralism, and other concomitants of secular modernity that conspire to reduce the autonomy and hegemony of the religious. Hence

fundamentalists embrace *absolutism* and *dualism* as tactics of resistance, and as justification for extremism in the service of a sacred cause.

In an attempt to protect the holy book or hallowed tradition from the depredations of historical, literary, and scientific criticism—that is, from criteria of validity and ways of knowing that deny the transcendence of the sacred—fundamentalist leaders claim *inerrancy* and *infallibility* for their religious knowledge. The truth revealed in scriptures and hallowed traditions is neither contingent nor variable, but absolute. To underscore the trans-rational (and thus counter-modern) nature of absolute truth, each movement selects from its host religion certain scandalous doctrines (i.e., beliefs not easily reconcilable to scientific rationality, such as the imminent return of the Hidden Imam, the literal virgin birth of Christ, the divinity of the Lord Ram, the coming of the Messiah to restore and rule “the Whole Land of Israel”). These “supernatural dicta” they embellish, reify, and politicize.

The confession of literal belief in these hard-to-swallow “fundamentals” sets the self-described true believers apart from the Westoxicated masses. Moreover, it marks them as members of a sacred remnant, an elect tribe commissioned to defend the sacred against an array of “reprobate,” “fallen” and “polluted” co-religionists—and against the forces of evil that have corrupted the religious community. This *dualist* or Manichean worldview valorizes the children of light, in stark contrast to the children of darkness, and reinforces the fundamentalists’ conviction that they are specially chosen by God to withstand the forces of irreligion.

Yet a reliance on absolutism and dualism as a mode of selective reaction to the marginalization of religion is not enough. The leaders and organizers of these reactive and selective religious movements typically are drawn toward extremism, that is, toward extralegal, often violent measures to realize a meaningful victory over their enemies. But they have a recruiting problem, for their pool of potential disciples is drawn not only from the religiously illiterate and untutored or drifting youth, but more centrally from conservative and orthodox believers—people who are familiar with their scriptures, embrace the tradition in its complexity and recognize that it enjoins compassion and mercy toward others, not intolerance, hatred, and violence. Theoretically at least, violence and retaliation are not the only strategies for resisting evil. Separatism or passive resistance might suffice to withstand the encroachments of

the world. Guerrilla war, terrorism, and the killing of innocents seem a breathtakingly severe and indeed unorthodox reaction.

This is why *millennialism* is the ideological characteristic that stands at the heart of the religious logic of fundamentalism. It is also the trait that sets contemporary religious violence in the fundamentalist mode apart from other types of revolutionary or terrorist violence by resistance or oppositional movements. Indeed, the specific contours, timing, and purposes of fundamentalist violence are dictated by this aspect of the religious imagination, which fundamentalists amplify and turn to their particular political ends.

“Millennialism,” as it is used here, is an umbrella term encompassing the full array of “apocalyptic,” “eschatological,” or “end-times” doctrines, myths and precepts embedded in the history and religious imagination of the major religious traditions of the world. Islam, Christianity and Judaism, for example, all anticipate a dramatic moment in time, or beyond time, in which God will bring history to a just (and often bloody) culmination. In certain religious communities, such as Shi’ite Islam or evangelical Protestant Christianity, this expectation is highly pronounced and developed. (Indeed, the term “millennialism,” when used precisely, refers to the prophesied 1,000-year reign of the Christ, following his return in glory to defeat the Anti-Christ.) What is striking, however, is the recent retrieval of “millennial” (or messianic or apocalyptic or eschatological) themes, images, and myths by fundamentalists from religious communities with a muted or underdeveloped strain of “end times” thought.¹⁰

How does this retrieval and embellishment of apocalyptic or millennial themes function within fundamentalist movements that seek recruits from among their orthodox co-religionists? Leaders seeking to form cadres for jihad or crusade or anti-Muslim (or anti-Jewish, etc.) riots must convince the religiously literate fellow believer that violence is justified in religious terms. Luckily for them, most scriptures and traditions contain ambiguities and exceptions—including what might be called “emergency clauses.” Thus the Granth Sahib, the holy book and living guru of the Sikhs, repeatedly enjoins forgiveness, compassion and love toward enemies. It does, however, also contain an injunction calling believers to arms, if necessary, if the Sikh religion itself is threatened with extinction—a passage put to use by Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale,

10. Freyer Stowasser, *A Time to Reap*.

the Sikh militant who cut a swath of terror through the Punjab in the early 1980s. Such “emergency clauses” can be found in the Qur’an, the Hebrew Bible, and the New Testament as well. And what better “emergency” than the advent of the predicted “dark age” or reign of evil that precedes the coming of the Messiah, the return of the Mahdi, the vindication of the righteous at God’s hands?

The fundamentalist invocation of “millennialism,” in short, strives to convince believers that they are engaged not merely in a mundane struggle for territory or political power or financial gain, but in a “cosmic war,” a battle for the soul and for the future of humanity.¹¹ In such a context, violence is not only permissible; it is obligatory.

FUNDAMENTALISM AND ARMED CONFLICT

Not all fundamentalist movements endorse or employ violence: some are morally opposed to killing, while others are constrained by a powerful state and law enforcement agencies. Yet numerous such movements and individuals who feel threatened by the seemingly all-powerful secular nation-state, or by fellow believers who have compromised with it, see conflict as inevitable and violence as a religious duty. Nothing is more important than fulfilling the will of God, as proclaimed in sacred texts and religious laws, and as interpreted (by charismatic religious leaders) through the lens of contemporary events.

Fulfilling God’s will may require sacrificing lives in the struggle to regain or possess land considered sacred. Thus, Jewish as well as Muslim radicals risk or offer their lives for control of sacred sites in Jerusalem; and Hindus and Muslims fight to the death for contested land in Ayodhya, India, where in 1993 a major mosque was destroyed by Hindu nationalists seeking to avenge what they saw as the desecration of the birthplace of the Lord Ram. Serving a divine cause may entail driving the U.S. army from Iraq or expelling Russian forces from Chechnya, just as Muslim mujahideen drove the Soviets from Afghanistan. Or, it may mean that Iranian mothers must send their children across minefields, in the effort to unseat Saddam Hussein, the great persecutor of Shi’ite Muslims of southern Iraq—as they did during the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s. For some Christians, obeying God means ending abortion by any means necessary, including the killing of doctors.

11. On “cosmic war,” see Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, 145–63.

Within the logic of fundamentalism, that is, one discovers a trajectory toward violence and war. The bracing complexity of religious reactions and the diversity of options even with the fundamentalist mode of religiosity means, however, that not all fundamentalists will follow this trajectory to its culmination and actually engage in terrorist violence or armed conflict. Accordingly, the central theoretical questions include the following: *What imposes constraints on fundamentalist violence—that is, what factors or conditions inhibit fundamentalists from expressing their resistance and reaction through armed aggression? Conversely, under what conditions is fundamentalist violence and armed aggression likely to occur?*

Theorizing in response to these questions is now possible, in light of the body of research, including independent case studies, that has accumulated over several decades. Systematic analysis of these cases indicates that the nature of the state—its level of militarization, on the one hand, and the space and autonomy it allows to civil society, on the other, is the decisive structural condition that creates the conditions of possibility for the growth and development of fundamentalist movements—and also for their resort to violence or armed conflict, in the settings where this occurs. Similarly, “the nature of the state” is the most important factor in predicting the suppression or moderation of fundamentalist extremism.¹²

12. A quarter-century of reports on suicide bombers, the Religious Right, Al-Qaeda, the Taliban and “militant” Burmese monks (all of whom have been described as “fundamentalists”) bear out the need to differentiate between logics. In an indirect acknowledgment of the fundamentalists’ technological and political savvy, the post-9/11 flood of polemics against Islamists (sometimes equated with all Muslims) takes a tone of awed alarm, not condescension. For example, an “exposé” of Tariq Ramadan by the French feminist editor of *ProChoix*, “an anti-racist and anti-fundamentalist journal and website,” finds the Swiss Muslim intellectual a daunting adversary precisely because he is “urbane,” “articulate,” and “ingenious,” a thoroughly sophisticated modern philosopher “who claims to be attached to secularism, even if he wants to see it evolve.”

Even more destabilizing to the received wisdom regarding fundamentalists—the “here be monsters” attitude toward them—is the lack of any sound study or other evidence that persuasively links fundamentalists, or the so-called “fundamentalist mindset,” to a type of mental illness or emotional pathology such as “the authoritarian personality”—and this absence of hard evidence is certainly not for lack of trying. Nor do fundamentalists, despite still being repeatedly depicted as brutally violent, enjoy a monopoly on extralegal political violence, torture, or systematic violation of human rights, as polemics against the second Bush administration, the Musharraf regime, or other state-centered violators of international law and human rights norms make clear.

Two relational patterns tend to affect the fundamentalists' resort to armed conflict, and their success in waging it when they attempt to do so. One pattern is a military regime or police state where all dissent is ruthlessly crushed by direct application of force, and/or where voluntary organizations, oppositional political parties, labor syndicates, religious groups and other expressions of civil society are tightly controlled and manipulated by the regime. Syria is an example of the former, while Egypt combines elements of both approaches.

The other form of governance that impedes fundamentalist resort to armed conflict is a vibrant democracy with a robust civil society, where pluralism flourishes, individual rights are protected, and the rule of law is enforced by a competent state. In such settings fundamentalist movements tend not to fight to the death, but rather seek to increase their portion of the political and resource pie, to expand their recruiting reach and, ultimately, to “transform the world” through political and cultural agency rather than armed conflict.¹³ This pattern is illustrated by the history of the New Christian Right in the United States, the Jammati-Islami in Pakistan, and the various political incarnations of the Islamist movement in Turkey, including The Justice and Development Party, or AKP, the political party in power at this writing.¹⁴

Examination of the development of such movements over time indicates that fundamentalism is not a static condition or a consistently violent expression of the “essence” of the host religion in question. To the contrary, fundamentalism—best understood as a mode of politicized religion and religiosity—is subject to the same dynamics that condition both religion and politics. As we have seen, religion is a fluid, internally plural, shifting and adapting reality that exists in continual interaction with its specific social, political, and cultural environment. Politics, especially as practiced in a globalized, pluralist milieu, is the art of compromise and continual negotiation, punctuated by the rhythms of resistance and accommodation. The religio-political movements known as “fundamentalisms” are hardly immune from these dynamics. Indeed,

13. Almond, Appleby, and Sivan, *Strong Religion*, 168–79.

14. The Justice and Development Party or White Party (Turkish: Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi or AK Parti, or AKP), is the incumbent Turkish political party. The AKP portrays itself as a moderate, conservative, pro-Western party that advocates a liberal market economy and Turkish membership in the European Union. Abdullah Gül, a prominent AKP leader and former Foreign Minister, is currently the President of Turkey, while Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is the head of the party and the Prime Minister.

the evidence indicates that fundamentalism in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century is a mode of religious politics (and politicized religion) that is available to social protest movements across the globe.¹⁵ The movements that inhabit this mode follow a certain logic, outlined above, characterized by reaction, selective retrieval of tradition and appropriation of techno-scientific instrumentalism, uncompromising absolutism, demonizing dualism, and violence-justifying “millennialism.”

Because fundamentalism is an available logic, a mode of social protest, rather than a static condition, movements can and often do move in and out of this mode. “Pure fundamentalism,” so to speak, is a temporary and indeed increasingly rare mode of operation, given the enormous pressures upon social protest movements to leave their constructed enclaves, engage outsiders, temper demonizing rhetoric, and adopt a position of moderation and political compromise. When religious actors choose, instead, to engage in armed conflict, whether by waging war or conducting terrorist operations, the fundamentalist mode is readily available. Indeed, the most striking expressions of fundamentalism are those multi-generational movements—Gush Emunim in Israel, U.S. Christian fundamentalism, the Muslim Brotherhood, etc.—which have maintained an oppositional, defiant, and absolutist stance across several decades. But even these “fundamentalisms” have engaged in armed conflict only intermittently, and then to various degrees of intensity and coordination.

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15. Almond, Appleby, and Sivan, *Strong Religion*, 168–79.

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