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# THE RISE OF RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM

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■ **Abstract** Religious fundamentalism has risen to worldwide prominence since the 1970s. We review research on fundamentalist movements to learn what religious fundamentalisms are, if and why they appear to be resurging, their characteristics, their possible links to violence, and their relation to modernity. Surveying work over the past two decades, we find both substantial progress in sociological research on such movements and major holes in conceptualizing and understanding religious fundamentalism. We consider these weaknesses and suggest where research might next be directed.

## INTRODUCTION

The November 27, 2005, edition of the *Dallas Morning News* featured a section in which the headline read, “10 ideas on the way out. . . . [T]he world’s leading thinkers identify ideas and institutions they believe are not likely to survive the next 35 years.” What were two of the first three ideas not likely to survive? The sanctity of life and monogamy (religious hierarchy was fourth). Although secularized people might celebrate these changes, such proclamations are fundamentalist fuel. Perceived as direct attacks on their way of life and all they hold dear, such predicted and actual changes serve as rallying points for millions of people around the world to organize and resist.<sup>1</sup> And so they do.

Without modernization and secularization there would be no fundamentalism, many scholars now write. For centuries, it has been understood that the processes of modernization—such as urbanization and cultural and structural pluralism—lead to secularization. As Max Weber and others suggest, secularization is the demystifying of the world, where religion is relegated to a smaller and smaller role among a decreasing number of people and organizations. Secularization proceeds

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<sup>1</sup>This information comes from Section P: Points, pp. 1P, 5P, of the November 27, 2005, edition of the *Dallas Morning News*. Peter Singer wrote on the sanctity of life, Jacques Attali wrote on monogamy, and Harvey Cox wrote on religious hierarchy. This newspaper article was adapted from *Foreign Policy* magazine, available at <http://www.foreignpolicy.com>.

until whole strata of people (say, the Western intelligentsia) and entire societies (say, those of Northern and Western Europe) operate without any apparent reference to or reliance upon religion. Religious faith becomes individualized and, for many, outdated, something like a historical artifact, part of cultures of long-gone, superstitious peoples.

At least this is what has been written and experienced by those who developed the secularization thesis, namely Western academics. But as secularization theory proponent Peter Berger (1992) writes, secularization theory failed to anticipate something: that the demystification of the world provided within it the seeds both for the remystification of the world and resistance to the demystification. These movements, organizations, and people who remystify, and who resist demystification, have come to be called fundamentalist.

Far from disappearing, religion and religious movements appear to be resurging around the globe. According to research, fundamentalist movements can be found in Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, North America, and Asia, including India. Such movements can be found in multiple religions, including Judaism, Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism, neo-Confucianism, Christianity, and Buddhism. These movements have political influence. As Almond et al. (2003, p. 1) write:

Since the Iranian Revolution, purported fundamentalist movements have risen to the highest levels of power in five countries—in Iran in 1979, in the Sudan in 1993, in Turkey, Afghanistan, and India in 1996, and in India again in 1998 and 1999. There have been even more frequent penetrations by fundamentalist movements into the parliaments, assemblies, and political parties of such countries as Jordan, Israel, Egypt, Morocco, Pakistan, and the United States.

What is more, as we can see, hear, and read, fundamentalism is at times associated with violence. From suicide bombers to other forms of religiously inspired violence, fundamentalism is in the news and is having global impact.

In this review, we seek to outline the contours of research by sociologists and others on the resurgence of conservative religion around the globe, the meaning of religious fundamentalism, its characteristics, and the implications of such movements for modern life. We review history, identify perspectives, provide a critical overview of existing research, and discuss the areas where sociologists must go if we are to move forward in understanding these world-shaping phenomena.

## WHAT IS RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM?

A basic task of any paper focused on a conceptual term is to define that term. This is not an easy task in our case because fundamentalism is such a commonly and loosely used term, thrown around like a baseball in the media, backyard arguments, and political arenas. Sometimes the term fundamentalist is used to describe any group that takes religion seriously or that views religion's role in public life to be greater than the labeler would wish it to be. The term also might be used for

those who are too religiously confident or who engage in any sort of action out of religious conviction. Thus, not only are the Christian religious right in the United States and the global al Qaeda Muslims called fundamentalist, but so too are local parent groups who want restrictions placed on Internet access in local schools. Groups that want their religion practiced purely are called fundamentalist, as are groups pushing for an overhaul of the national or global political system who are at best culturally connected to a religion.

So what is fundamentalism? Perhaps more so than many other concepts, fundamentalism is a contextual phenomenon. As noted in the introduction of this review, many scholars think fundamentalism cannot be understood apart from modernity nor exist outside of modernity. Thus, to provide a working definition of fundamentalism, we begin with a brief overview of modernity.

## Modernity

Sociology arose out of the conditions of modernity, or, at the very least, modernity animated the work of its early writers. Marx, Weber, Durkheim, and others were concerned with the social implications of a modernizing world. Increasing modernity meant not only an increasing division of labor, but also a division of life (Bruce 2000, chapter 2). Social life would no longer be a cohesive whole, but divided into distinct spheres. One's coworkers, neighbors, and coreligionists could and likely would be different sets of people. Moreover, social life would come to be divided into public and private realms, and people would be expected, nay required, to act differently in the separate arenas.

As Weber teaches us, another core aspect of modernization is the rationalization of the world. Much of life comes to be regulated using policies and procedures, science, administrative rules, and the like. Deities have no role in such a perspective. The laws of the market are devoid of religious content. The invisible hand is not supernatural.

Along with the division of social life and rationalization came industrialization and urbanization. These processes heighten cultural pluralism. Many peoples with a variety of perspectives were brought together spatially to serve burgeoning economies or because of their displacement through colonization or other factors. Pluralism—both cultural and structural—is often the linchpin concept in secularization theories. Given the variety of religions, coupled with both the division of social life and the primacy given to economic pursuits, religion comes to be relegated to the private sectors of social life, divorced from formal roles in government, economics, and eventually education, medicine, and other areas. What is more, exposing people to a variety of religious and nonreligious ideologies, secularization theorists argue, relativizes religion, a concept foreign to most religions, especially those with a singular god. As Peter Berger (1967) conceived of religion, it is a sacred canopy under which the entirety of life is explained and regulated. Modernization rips the sacred canopy, and, at best, people are left with sacred umbrellas (Smith 1998).

Modernization thus squeezes out religious influences from many of its spheres and greatly reduces religion's role in the others. And modernization, following its own logic, begets more advanced forms. Currently, postmodernization is a popular term used to describe the continued individualizing and relativizing of the world. Even science comes into question in such a world. Truth can only be spelled with a capital T at the beginning of sentences, for truth is individualized and relativized. Given this vast pluralism, societies and their governments are able to claim less and less as common to all. What rise to the top as shared values are tolerance and acceptance. These become the core values of highly modernized societies. Taken-for-granted social arrangements—such as monogamy—all come under question, and the values of tolerance and acceptance make it difficult for societies to reject many behaviors and perspectives. Modernism becomes an ideology that values change over continuity, quantity over quality, and commercial efficiency over traditional values (Lawrence 1989, p. 27). The result of these processes is to threaten religion by reducing it to nothing but individually held beliefs, a clear Durkheimian violation of the meaning and role of religion in society.

## Defining Fundamentalism

So what is fundamentalism? In one of the first and most careful sociologically based theoretical works on fundamentalism, Riesebrodt (1993 [1990], p. 9) defines fundamentalism as “an urban movement directed primarily against dissolution of personalistic, patriarchal notions of order and social relations and their replacement by depersonalized principles.” In the follow-up book to the five-volume *Fundamentalism Project*, Almond et al. (2003, p. 17) define fundamentalism as “a discernible pattern of religious militance by which self-styled ‘true believers’ attempt to arrest the erosion of religious identity, fortify the borders of the religious community, and create viable alternatives to secular institutions and behaviors.” Put most directly in the context of modernity, Antoun (2001, p. 3) defines fundamentalism as a religiously based cognitive and affective orientation to the world characterized by protest against change and the ideological orientation of modernism.

Each of these definitions supposes a transnational, transcultural character to fundamentalism. It can be defined apart from its specifically unique historical circumstances. Some scholars and some practitioners argue that the term only applies to theologically conservative U.S. Protestants. They make this argument because the term was first used to describe this movement (see the next section) and because it is meant to apply only to a subset of people within a religious tradition. Muslims, for example, often argue that they cannot be called fundamentalist simply because they take the teaching of the Qur'an and their faith seriously. For if that were the criteria, then all Muslims are fundamentalist. And if this were true, the term ceases to be of use.

Serious critiques have been leveled at work that examines fundamentalism as a global phenomenon. Critics charge that such work often conflates conservative religious movements with postcolonial national religious movements. Others

criticize what they view as the immensity of differences that have to be brushed aside to view, for example, U.S. Protestant fundamentalists and Hindu national fundamentalists as the same conceptually [e.g., Billings & Scott 1994, Iannaccone 1997, Munson 1995; see also review symposiums in the *Review of Religious Research* (Chalfant et al. 1993, Jelen et al. 1996)]. Some scholars are willing to use the term to apply to conservative movements within the Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, but not other religions (Lawrence 1989). Riesebrodt (2000) has responded that from a sociological perspective, the fact that resurgent conservative religious movements share many features in common is highly relevant, as it suggests that such movements have risen under similar sociological conditions. For this reason, he argues, despite important differences across these movements, knowledge can advance by considering fundamentalism as a sociological category in need of theoretical and empirical development.

How fundamentalism is defined and interpreted depends in good part on one's perspective. From a modern, secular viewpoint, fundamentalists are reactionaries, radicals attempting to grab power and throw societies back into the dark ages of oppression, patriarchy, and intolerance. These fundamentalists are misguided, scary, and even evil. Supporters of modernization do not view themselves as being like these fundamentalists. Rather, modernists are the good, reasoned people, lovers of freedom and human rights. Again, from their own viewpoint, because they think more clearly and value empirical evidence and individual rights, modernists can see that fundamentalists are wrong.

Conversely, for fundamentalists and their sympathizers, Western versions of modernization rush over them in a tidal wave of change, ripping apart communities, values, social ties, and meaning. To these changes, some groups say, "No." When they do so out of their religious conviction, they are called, by modernists, religious fundamentalists. Fundamentalists and their sympathizers see their stand against the tidal wave of change as honorable, right, life preserving, and a life calling. They are people fighting against the heavy hand of secular oppression, emptiness, anomie, and the restriction of freedom. As Bruce (2000, p. 117) states, "Fundamentalism is the rational response of traditionally religious peoples to social, political and economic changes that downgrade and constrain the role of religion in the public world. . . . [F]undamentalists have not exaggerated the extent to which modern cultures threaten what they hold dear."

## THE "FIRST" FUNDAMENTALISM

The term fundamentalism was first used to describe a conservative strain of Protestantism that developed in the United States roughly from 1870 to 1925. During at least a portion of this period, the United States was arguably the world's leader in modernization. As U.S. religious historian George Marsden and others discuss, this original fundamentalist movement was foremost a religious movement (Marsden 1980, Riesebrodt 1993 [1990], Woodbury & Smith 1998) and took its name from

a series of pamphlets, "The Fundamentals: A Testimony of the Truth," published from 1910 to 1915. These pamphlets outlined the fundamental, nonnegotiable aspects of the Christian faith, as agreed upon by conservative religious leaders of the time. Rather unlike many fundamentalist movements today, U.S. Protestant fundamentalism of the early twentieth century was not so much a battle with the secular state as it was an intrareligious fight with other U.S. Protestant people and organizations. These other U.S. Protestant people and organizations were attempting to modernize their religion to be, in the progressive Protestant view, relevant for a new time. Fundamentalists of this era were militantly opposed to modernizing the Christian faith, and militantly opposed to cultural changes endorsed by modernism. As Marsden (1980, p. 4) notes, "fundamentalism was a loose, diverse, and changing federation of cobelligerents united by their fierce opposition to modernist attempts to bring Christianity into line with modern thought."

In the aftermath of the 1925 Scopes Trial in which fundamentalists went from being respected members of society to a ridiculed group, fundamentalists essentially retreated into their own private world, where they stayed for many decades. While there, they quietly developed parallel institutions, strategies for influencing society, and well-trained leaders. Their reemergence in the public eye in the 1970s coincided with the resurgence of conservative religious movements around the globe.

## THE RECENT RISE OF RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM

In the 1970s, fundamentalism appeared to hit the world stage from out of thin air (Ammerman 1987). Although there were earlier movements [such as the Jewish Gush Emunim (the Bloc of the Faithful) in 1974], the Iranian Revolution was the first unmistakable indicator of a growing phenomenon. Fundamentalism also resurged in the United States, this time as a much more politically active strain. Fundamentalist movements emerged in most of the world's religions on most of the earth's continents. Something was happening. In a 1979 article, Ethridge & Feagin noted a lack of "a coherent sociological definition and theoretical context for the term fundamentalism" (p. 37). And no wonder. The accepted wisdom among those who studied religion and society was that societies were secularizing. According to secularization theories, religion was not supposed to resurge and take a center spot on a global stage.

Sociologists fumbled to understand, and it took them nearly a decade to begin making serious progress. Indeed, many of the most notable early works on the relationship between fundamentalism and society were not written by sociologists. Duke religious historian Bruce Lawrence published an important book in 1989 that anticipated a growth in the study of fundamentalism as a sociological category. In *Defenders of God: The Fundamentalist Revolt Against the Modern Age*, Lawrence (1989) argued that fundamentalism is an ideology rather than a theology and is formed in conflict with modernism. His study set the groundwork

for sociology because in his work we see that fundamentalism is viewed as a transcultural phenomenon located in a developmental historical framework. He sought to understand fundamentalism as a socio-cultural category with common roots in its encounter with the modern world. Lawrence's work was preceded by sociologist Nancy Ammerman's (1987) book, *Bible Believers*. Although this work was limited to U.S. fundamentalists, Ammerman was among the first sociologists to conduct an in-depth study into the lives of contemporary fundamentalists and to draw connections between fundamentalism and modernity.

As Riesebrodt (2000) notes, however, in interpreting the resurgence of religion, sociologists have largely gone in two directions different from that of Ammerman. Some have held fast to secularization theory and viewed the wave of fundamentalisms around the globe as a collective last gasp of religion. Modernism has swept the globe, and religions are making one final but ultimately futile attempt to preserve themselves, as Weber reminds us all organizations and institutions are wont to do.

Another school of thought—what Warner (1993) calls the “new paradigm”—argues that modernization and secularization serve as fertile soil for religious resurgence, especially of the more fundamentalist strains. Where the signs of modernization are strongest—measured as religious pluralism and urbanization, for example—so too is religious involvement (e.g., Finke & Stark 2005). Using a narrower definition of religion—individual involvement—than is common in most secularization theories, these studies find support for their claims (although these claims have not been without challenge—e.g., Olson 1999, Voas et al. 2002).

One can find other, smaller voices to the challenge of understanding the global rise of fundamentalism. But as Riesebrodt (2000) outlines, all these explanations, dominant or not, are lacking in that they do not adequately answer three vital questions: (a) why these movements emerged, (b) why they emerged at this point in history (largely since the 1970s), and (c) what their future significance may be. Much work must yet be done to answer these questions.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM

To date, the most comprehensive study of fundamentalisms around the world was sponsored by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and directed by religion historians Martin Marty and Scott Appleby. After a decade of exhaustive case study research with contributions from dozens of scholars (including sociologists) studying fundamentalist groups and movements across five continents and within seven world religious traditions, and after five volumes of reporting and analysis, the chapter “Fundamentalisms: Genus and Species” by Almond et al. (1995) identified nine interrelated characteristics of fundamentalist groups, five ideological and four organizational (see Table 1).

According to Almond and colleagues, the Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, having clearly defined sacred texts, dualistic worldviews,



TABLE 1 Nine characteristics of fundamentalists groups<sup>a</sup>

<b>Ideological</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Reactivity to the marginalization of religion:</b> Fundamentalism is first and foremost a defense of a religious tradition, a tradition perceived to be eroding or under attack by the processes of modernization and secularization. Without this characteristic, a movement is not properly labeled fundamentalist.</li> <li>2. <b>Selectivity:</b> Fundamentalism is selective. Rather than simply defending a religious tradition, it selects and reshapes aspects of the tradition, particularly aspects that clearly distinguish the fundamentalists from the mainstream (see also Antoun 2001). What is more, such movements affirm and use some aspects of modernity, such as much of modern science and modern forms of communication and other technologies. Finally, certain consequences or processes of modernity are singled out for special attention and focused opposition (such as abortion for U.S. Christian fundamentalists).</li> <li>3. <b>Dualistic worldview:</b> Reality is clearly divided into the good and the evil, light and darkness, righteousness and unrighteousness.</li> <li>4. <b>Absolutism and inerrancy:</b> The text of the tradition (the Torah, Qur'an, or Bible, for example) "are of divine (inspired) origin and true and accurate in all particulars" (Almond et al. 2003, p. 96). Fundamentalist movements in religions that do not have a clear sacred text (such as Hinduism) often privilege one text (or set of texts) over others.</li> <li>5. <b>Millennialism and messianism:</b> History has a miraculous and holy end. At the end of time, at the entry or return of the hoped-for one (the messiah, the hidden Imam, etc.), suffering will end, evil will be vanquished, and believers will be victorious. The Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) offer the most certain assurances; non-Abrahamic traditions, although tending to borrow from Abrahamic religion's "end times" certainty, lack such fully elaborated assurances.</li> </ol>
<b>Organizational</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Elect, chosen membership:</b> Those in fundamentalist movements view themselves as called, selected out, set apart for their mission to defend the religious tradition.</li> <li>2. <b>Sharp boundaries:</b> People are either in the fundamentalist group or they are not. The boundaries are clearly set; there is no confusion. One is saved, righteous, a follower of Allah, a defender of the faith, or one is not.</li> <li>3. <b>Authoritarian organization:</b> Fundamentalist movements are typically organized around charismatic leaders, with others the followers. The leader (or leaders) is viewed by the followers as specially chosen by their deity, someone with near supernatural qualities or special access to the deity, virtuous, a model for the followers, and one with special training and insight into the sacred texts.</li> <li>4. <b>Behavioral requirements:</b> As an extension of the dualistic worldview and creating sharp boundaries, behavioral requirements are both elaborate and specific. Rules about appropriate speech, dress, sexuality, drinking, eating, family formation, children, entertainment pursuits, and other behaviors are common.</li> </ol>

<sup>a</sup>Based on the findings of Almond et al. (1995).

and “end times” theologies, have the most fully developed fundamentalisms across the world’s religions.

But there are critiques of these fundamentalist characteristics. For example, Iannaccone (1997) points out that the authors of these character traits say only two of the eighteen religious movements studied score high on all nine traits. In contrast, he states, religious movements not given any consideration by this or most any other research, such as Jehovah’s Witnesses, score high on every trait. That some religious movements are called fundamentalist even if they do not seem to perfectly fit the characteristics, whereas other movements that do fit the characteristics are not called fundamentalist, points to weakness either in clarity or consistency of definition. For example, much of the literature on fundamentalism implicitly assumes fundamentalists can only exist within established world religions. Whether this is a reasonable assumption must be discussed by scholars.

## FUNDAMENTALISM AND OTHER ASPECTS OF SOCIAL LIFE

Beyond studying the rise of fundamentalism, a growing body of literature examines the relationships between fundamentalism and social life. Some studies look at the racial, class, gender, family, educational, and age structures of fundamentalism (Coreno 2002, Doktor 2002, Lehrer 1999, Srinivasan 2004, Toth 2003), whereas others look at the views or effects fundamentalists have on these concepts (Apple 2001, Bendroth 1999, Darnell & Sherkat 1997, Ellison et al. 1996, Emerson & Smith 2000, Freedman 1996, Fulton et al. 1999, Gallagher 2003, Grasmick et al. 1990, Hoodfar 1996, Ingersoll 1995, Kirkpatrick 1993, Laythe et al. 2002, Sherkat & Darnell 1999, Srinivasan 2004). Some studies examine innovative techniques and views of fundamentalists (Pace 1997), moral reasoning development (Pace 1995), and the relationship to science (De Young 1996, Kurtz 1994, Nelkin 1996, Segerstale 1996).

Despite some evidence of accommodation (e.g., see Gallagher 2003), a consistent finding—whether qualitative or quantitative approaches are used—is that fundamentalists are strong traditionalists on matters of family and gender relations. Patriarchal families, with distinct and separate roles for males and females, are core components of fundamentalist beliefs and practices across religions and continents (Antoun 2001; Apple 2001; Bartkowski 2001, 2004; Bendroth 1999; Grasmick et al. 1990; Marty & Appleby 1991; Riesebrodt 1993 [1990]). Certainly this is a major clashing point with modernity and a central social arrangement that fundamentalist groups fight to maintain. Given the core role of traditional families and gender roles, fundamentalists are, not surprisingly, strong opponents of homosexual behavior or any state acknowledgment or sponsorship of alternative family arrangements (Fulton et al. 1999). Such acts and arrangements are viewed as cooperating with sin and simply cannot be accepted. They also are direct challenges to the worldviews of fundamentalists. As much as any other effects of modernity,

the push to change the definition of family, gender, and acceptable sexual activity has raised fundamentalist groups to political involvement. Indeed, as noted earlier, Riesebrodt (1993 [1990]) goes so far as to define the essence of fundamentalism as concerted resistance to the “dissolution of personalistic, patriarchal notions of order” (p. 9).

Surprisingly, although sociological study has focused on movements, groups, and individuals, little work has examined contextual effects (such as neighborhood, community, or region), an approach quite popular during the time that most research on fundamentalism has been undertaken. Two exceptions include the research of Moore & Vanneman (2003) and Lizardo & Bergesen (2003). In the former article, Moore & Vanneman (2003) make a multilevel analysis of the effects on gender attitudes of the proportion of fundamentalists in a U.S. state. They find that greater proportions of fundamentalists in U.S. states are associated with more conservative gender attitudes of white nonfundamentalists in those states, even after controlling for individuals’ own religious affiliation, beliefs, and practices. Lizardo & Bergesen (2003) use an approach with much promise for understanding why some fundamentalist movements are violent and some are not, and so we defer its discussion to the next section.

## ARE FUNDAMENTALIST MOVEMENTS VIOLENT?

On a global scale, religious violence seems to occur nearly every day. On the day that this section was written, 33 women and children receiving holiday toys from soldiers were killed by religiously motivated violence. In the course of writing this chapter, literally hundreds of people lost their lives as a result of religiously motivated violence. Religious groups plot and kill people from other religions, and they kill people in their own religion whom they view as either accepting modern, Western ways or selling out their religion, or even people who are simply in the wrong place at the wrong time.

The groundbreaking work of Mark Juergensmeyer, especially his book *Terror in the Mind of God* (Juergensmeyer 2003), provides a sociologically rich perspective from which to understand terrorism and violence and their connection to fundamentalism. First, not all religiously based violence is done by fundamentalists. Sometimes, in fact, religion is used as a justification for violence by people and groups not specifically religious. Second, not all fundamentalist groups are violent. In fact, most are not. Despite the many fundamentalist people and groups in the United States, for example, there has been less violence than, for example, in many nations of the Middle East. And most often, when violence has occurred in the United States, it was the work of an individual operating alone, without the organized support of a religious group.

Yet much religious violence is committed by extremist fundamentalist groups. And Juergensmeyer (2003) notes that the use of violence and terrorism has increased over the decades. Why? He finds in his extensive research among Sikhs,

Muslims, Jews, Christians, and the Japanese Aum Shinrikyo sect that the confrontation between religion and the secular state is increasingly framed as a cosmic war that one group or the other will win. It is a battle between the good, true, and right versus the bad, false, and wrong. The end goal is to see religion restored to its position at the center of public consciousness. The result is that politics becomes increasingly "religionized" (as opposed to religion becoming increasingly politicized). Religion is making its claim on public life, rejecting relegation to the private sphere. To make this claim, religious groups sometimes (or for some groups, often) use violence to make their position and presence known. Religious violence, Juergensmeyer (2003) argues, is theater, done to dramatize conditions and perspectives. As part of this theater, "images of martyrdom, satanization, and cosmic war have been central to religious ideologies" (p. 219). These images and ideas have empowered people and groups, provided identity, and given political legitimization. Religious truth must and will prevail. "Performance violence" by religious groups, Juergensmeyer argues, is almost exclusively symbolic, performed to dramatize a cause, and it is buttressed by absolutism and moral justification.

What is more, because the war is framed in cosmic terms with a millennial outcome (the good will triumph eventually), no length of time is too long to fight the battle. Some leaders of fundamentalist groups expect battles to continue for hundreds of years, and others do not even expect the war to be completed in human history. Within such views, compromise is not an option. The end result is that religion, in spiritualizing violence, has given terrorism tremendous power. The reverse is true as well. Terrorism has given religion power. Neither can be ignored in our current world (as evidenced in part by the commission of articles like this present one).

But we are left with the question of why fundamentalism leads to or condones violence in some cases but not in others. Iannaccone (1997), among others, argues that violence should be attributed to the religious-political environment rather than to religion itself. Working from a rational choice perspective, he claims that where religion is unregulated by the government—that is, where the state allows religious diversity, does not squelch religion, and does not favor one religion over another—violence is rare and limited to isolated individuals. Violent religious groups arise in countries where the state suppresses religious freedom or favors one religion over others. "Whereas government regulation and state-sponsored religion encourage sects to fight both church and state, a truly competitive religious market encourages religious tolerance and mutual respect if only as a matter of necessity" (Iannaccone 1997, p. 114). Given the apparent increased role religious violence and terrorism play around the globe, sociologists must focus more attention on this vital question, both theoretically and empirically. Comparative and empirical study will involve collecting data with groups and nations as the units of analysis.

Lizardo & Bergesen (2003) provide one promising approach. They look at terrorism—religious and nonreligious—contextually. They consider the important context to be a nation's location in the world system and historical period. They find that during hegemonic supremacy, terrorist activity is concentrated in the periphery.

When terrorism occurs in core nations (in Cold War terms, the United States and its allies), it comes largely from native leftist groups. That is, attacks are concentrated internally, within the group's own nation, and tend not to be religiously motivated. During these periods, the international community considers such violence to be the purview of the specific states. But the systemic anomie resulting from a more competitive configuration of power and from hegemonic decline projects violence transnationally, from attacks in the semiperiphery to attacks on the core, both on targets within core nations and on core outposts. What were before called local problems thus come to be viewed as crimes against humanity and civilization. As Russian and U.S. global power has declined, religiously motivated transnational violence from those in semiperiphery nations has increased.

On the theme of context, scholars of fundamentalist movements have noted that fundamentalist strategies and approaches differ by region, religion, and type of nation-state. For example, although some fundamentalist Muslim groups may use acts of violence or attempted (and at times successful) coups, U.S. Protestant fundamentalists have largely followed the strategy of working within the system by influencing a political party and affecting change via the party platform, selected candidates, and elections. Violent acts perpetuated by U.S. Protestant fundamentalists, such as abortion clinic bombings, underlie political agendas but do not characterize their overall strategy of creating political and social change. This strategic difference may be in part due to their structural location in a core nation of the world system.

## HOLES IN CONCEPTUALIZING AND UNDERSTANDING FUNDAMENTALISM

Undoubtedly, recent years have witnessed a significant sociological advance in the study of religious fundamentalism. But major questions remain, which we explore here.

### Measuring Fundamentalism

Studies of fundamentalism inconsistently and often incompletely operationalize fundamentalism. Findings across studies, then, are difficult to compare. For comparative-historical approaches, fundamentalism is most often measured as organizations and movements identified as such. There is, of course, some tautological reasoning here: First, one selects fundamentalist groups and movements, then studies them to see what they have in common, and the result is what fundamentalism is sociologically.

According to Woodbury & Smith (1998), fundamentalism may be a binary variable, but it cannot be measured simply along the characteristics discussed above. Rather, one must add historical understanding to religious movements to know which are fundamentalist, which are not, and why. They focus on conservative

U.S. Protestant Christianity to argue that there are historical, organizational, and ideological differences between fundamentalists and evangelicals, two groups most often treated both in sociological literature and media reports as the same group.

Quantitative operationalization of fundamentalism lacks richness of measurement, often owing to data limitations. Most often focusing on identifying U.S. Christian individuals (usually Protestant) who are fundamentalist, rather than groups or people in other religions, the concept is operationalized most often as believing the Bible is literally true, word for word. Other common measures are membership in a denomination determined to be fundamentalist, and those who say they are "born-again." Although all these measures may be indicators, they are by themselves weak indicators of fundamentalism. Better multiple measures must be developed and included on surveys, or knowledge of fundamentalism will continue to be incomplete and perhaps even wrong. As always, measures should be devised that operationalize theoretical understanding of what fundamentalism is.

An alternative measurement strategy, sometimes used on its own (Smith 1998) and sometimes in conjunction with other indicators (Emerson & Smith 2000, Emerson et al. 1999, Gallagher 2003), is to use self-identification. People are asked if they consider themselves to be fundamentalist. Certainly there can be problems in this measurement method as well. For example, do all people who are fundamentalist know this is the term they should assent to? And do all people who are not fundamentalist know not to assent to the term?

In summary, fundamentalism can be and has been measured by denominational or group affiliation, beliefs, practices, and self-identification. Given the complexity of the concept, single measures should be avoided. Importantly, if fundamentalism is a generalizable concept, then work should explore measures that can be used across religions and regions.

### Should We Study Fundamentalism or Modern Secularism?

If fundamentalism is rooted in the context of modernity, might modernity and its followers be the topics on which scholars should focus their study? Consider the words of sociologist Steve Bruce (2000, pp. 116–17):

In the broad sweep of history fundamentalists are normal. There is nothing unusual in people taking religion very seriously. What we now regard as religious "extremism" was commonplace 200 years ago in the Western world and is still commonplace in most parts of the globe. It is not the dogmatic believer who insists that the sacred texts are divinely inspired and true, who tries to model his life on the ethical requirements of those texts, and who seeks to impose these requirements on the entire society who is unusual. The liberal who supposes that his sacred texts are actually human constructions of differing moral worth, whose religion makes little difference to his life, and who is quite happy to accept that what his God requires of him is not binding on other members of his society: this is the strange and remarkable creature.

Most Western-trained academicians and journalists are carriers of modernism and secularization (Berger 1992). From this worldview, fundamentalism is odd. But given the broad sweep of history, perhaps knowledge of religion and the state would advance more rapidly by a closer focus on the “strange and remarkable creature” who walks without a god, and the societies that operate on such suppositions. As Christian Smith and his colleagues have argued, secularization is not the inevitable result of some invisible hand of modernity. Rather, it is the result of careful, planned, coordinated events and confrontations over the course of decades within multiple sectors of society (Smith 2003). It may be fruitful to study such processes and the actors involved in them more vigilantly.

### European Exceptionalism

Insofar as modernization, secularization, and religious fundamentalist movements are related, and insofar as the United States was among the most modernized nations at the turn of the twentieth century, it follows that the first fundamentalist movement was found in the United States. Or does it?

Many nations in Europe were as modernized as the United States, and many modernized earlier than the United States. Certainly secularization followed in these European nations. But significant religious fundamentalist movements did not follow. They still have not, at least among native Europeans. Although fundamentalist movements appear to resurge across the globe, much of Europe stands as the clear example of the decline of religion posited by so many social commentators for centuries.

Why did Europe secularize so thoroughly, while other nations and regions have not? Those developing or working within the sociology of religion’s “new paradigm” posit that state-sponsored churches in European nations led to the demise of religion when modernization and secularization set in. Supported by the state, religious professionals were not motivated nor forced to find ways to have religion appeal to the populace. Their churches and their salaries were guaranteed. With its actors lacking an entrepreneurial drive, religion became outdated for the masses.

But this does not seem a wholly adequate answer. Is it true that every state-sponsored religion dies out in the wake of modernization and secularization? Do only nations that have state-sponsored religions secularize? Do all nations that have state-sponsored religion secularize? Do all nations without state-sponsored religion remain highly religious? Or if pluralism leads to secularization, as many have suggested, why does pluralism seem to have, in a cross-national perspective, such wildly varying effects?

Baker (2005) offers an explanation of why levels of modernization do not universally predict the amount of a society’s secularization. Addressing the discrepancy between the recent rise of fundamentalism in the United States and its relative absence in Europe, Baker notes a different type of cultural heritage at work in the United States compared with European countries. The United States’s cultural heritage is not based on common ancestry or language, but on a civil religion. The United States’s cultural core is ideological and traditional and is therefore not as

susceptible to secularization in response to modernization. Traditional values that are considered religious do not depend solely on the prominence of religious institutions. Baker (2005) notes that the United States has maintained its overall level of adherence to traditional values from 1981 to 2001 and remains extremely traditional as a whole compared with its modernized European counterparts. Baker's (2005) insight that traditionalism and secularization are tied to a country's cultural heritage seems an important one in arriving at sociological explanations of the emergence of fundamentalist movements and of European exceptionalism.

### Is There Such a Thing as Fundamentalism?

Some scholars completely reject not only the term fundamentalism, but the entirety of the scholarly enterprise studying fundamentalism. For example, Iannaccone (1997) argues that the reason scholars struggle to find agreement about the content, causes, and consequences of fundamentalism is that the concept, theoretically, leads us down a dead-end path. Instead, he argues that we should study sectarianism. "Sectarian religion is high-powered religion rooted in separation from and tension with the broader society" (Iannaccone 1997, p. 114). The tradition of contrasting and studying strict and lenient forms of religion is old, dating back not only to the beginnings of the sociology of religion, but even to Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (1965, pp. 746–49). Studying sectarianism allows researchers to build on much solid theory and empirical work, such as the social benefits of strict religions, why people join such religions, and why such religion is attractive to people at the margins of society. Moreover, rather than viewing resurgent conservative religion as rooted in conditions of recent modernity, scholars analyzing sectarianism can view such movements as a pervasive tendency, found to a greater or lesser degree throughout history (see also Prandi 2000 for a related view). Studying sectarianism avoids problems of trying to explain why fundamentalism seems only to have appeared on a global scale since the 1970s, long after modernity had appeared on the scene in some places, and only shortly after it had appeared on the scene elsewhere. Even more importantly, working from a classical understanding of positivist science, the sectarian concept allows for clear hypothesis testing, aiding theoretical advancement.

Without having to accept such critiques, scholars of fundamentalism must address such critiques and demonstrate why conceptualizing fundamentalism as something relatively new is advantageous for advancing our knowledge of religion and society.

### WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Volumes of research have been published on fundamentalism in the past 20 years, far more than can be summarized in these few pages. Yet it is clear that substantially more scholarly work must be done. Vital questions do not yet have answers, and some of these questions have been highlighted here. For all the usefulness of the concept, and for all the progress that has been made in studying resurgent



religion that is impacting the globe, essential debates and questions must yet be addressed.

Even as scholars continue to focus on fundamentalism, they must do so in conjunction with understanding modernity, its processes, and its carriers. Understanding both concepts and their interrelations better will push our knowledge forward. Scholars should also take Iannaccone's (1997) challenge—that we study sectarianism rather than fundamentalism—seriously. Perhaps viewing religion as experiencing general decline only to resurge since the 1970s is not the theoretically most advantageous viewpoint. Insofar as there have been more and less sectarian groups for a very long time, perhaps a reconceptualization of fundamentalism and its antecedents is needed. When the field has more conceptual and theoretical coherence, it will need some industry standards for how to measure fundamentalism. Too many different and, in our view, incomplete ways of measuring fundamentalism now pass the eyes of reviewers and end up in journals, leading to confused understandings of the concept.

We think it will prove fruitful to conceptualizing, theorizing, and measuring fundamentalism to undertake more ethnographic work of fundamentalist movements, attempting to understand who joins fundamentalist movements and why, what their goals are, how they view nonfundamentalists, and how they view and interpret life events. At the same time, in keeping with our suggestion of understanding fundamentalism by studying modernism, ethnographic work asking the same questions as above to understand modern, secular movements is essential.

It will also prove fruitful to undertake more comparative studies of fundamentalism that contextualize and historicize the movements. Such work can help us understand how, if at all, fundamentalism is related to changes in globalization (increasing trade flows, greater economic integration, threat of homogenization, loss of communal identity) and nations' locations in the world system. Ultimately, scholars must seek to understand what role resurgent religion will have in the future, including understanding the role of violence. Will secularized nations and peoples be a temporary phenomenon in the long religious history of the world? Will modernity eventually offer all that people seek, and will religions weaken? Will religion and secularism continue battling endlessly? Will religion continue battling religion?

These issues and queries must now be taken up with great care, precise thought, and the best available research tools. As world events suggest, ignoring these issues and questions is a luxury we can no longer afford.

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