



9-1997

Fundamentalisms Comprehended Across Traditions and Cultures (Book Review)

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Recommended Citation

Manning, Christel, "Fundamentalisms Comprehended Across Traditions and Cultures (Book Review)" (1997). *Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies Faculty Publications*. Paper 49.

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BOOK REVIEW SYMPOSIUM

Martin Marty and R. Scott Appleby (eds.). *Fundamentalisms Comprehended*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Pres. 1995. 522 pp.

This symposium consists of four reviews of the final volume of *The Fundamentalism Project*. The final of five review symposia on the volumes of this series has come full circle, and ends where the first symposium began: Each of the reviewers here questions the extent to which the concept "fundamentalism" has genuine cross-cultural and cross-national applicability. The collections generated by Marty and Appleby have generated a great deal of controversy, and seem certain to affect the intellectual agenda of the sociology of religion for some time to come.

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Review of Religious Research, Vol. 39, No. 1 (September, 1997)

Fundamentalisms Comprehended Across Traditions and Cultures

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"A true believer is someone who will kill you for your own good." According to Gideon Aran, this characterization of fundamentalism was given not by a secular academic, but by Jewish and Arab fundamentalists themselves. Aran's essay on fundamentalist humor is my favorite of the nineteen contributions to *Fundamentalisms Comprehended*, the final volume in Marty & Appleby's fundamentalism project. By debunking the image of fundamentalists as humorless zealots and showing that they joke not just about their opponents but about themselves, Aran demonstrates that they possess a level of self-reflectiveness and self-criticism that outsiders usually deny them. He thus adds empathy and subtlety to our understanding of these movements. Fortunately, Aran is not alone. The stated goal of this book is to comprehend fundamentalism. To the authors, this means to come up with an "inclusive analytical statement" about fundamentalism based on the "data base" created by the previous four volumes (3). More generally, comprehension means adding to our understanding of fundamentalism and/or encouraging us to look at fundamentalism in new ways. I think this book does both of those things.

The problem with most interpretations of fundamentalism is that they only work for one particular fundamentalist movement. By contrast, Marty & Appleby's interpretive framework (henceforth referred to as "Master Model") makes sense of many different fundamentalisms. Chapter 1 defines fundamentalism as an enclave-culture whose greatest problems are maintaining boundaries and dealing with success in achieving their goals. Chapter 16 identifies nine characteristics of fundamentalism, of which the most important is reactivity against secularization. A distinction is made between "fundamentalist" movements, whose focus is mainly religious and who get involved in politics to protect religion, and "fundamentalist-like" movements, whose concerns are mainly ethno-political and for whom religion becomes a medium expressing that concern. The authors then

set up a grid to measure how various movements labeled as fundamentalist fit this model. They find that the "Abrahamic religions" (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) and Sikhism best fit the definition of "fundamentalist" while Hindu and Buddhist movements tend to be "fundamentalist-like." Chapter 17 is a model of how such movements develop. It identifies three causal factors: structural, chance, and human, of which the first two are necessary but only the last is sufficient. These factors determine not only whether or not a fundamentalist movement will develop, but also how this fundamentalist enclave will relate to the wider culture: as world conqueror, transformer, creator, or renouncer. Chapter 18 applies this model to various cases of fundamentalism in the past, and Chapter 19 tries to use the model to predict future development of fundamentalist movements.

The Master Model is useful because it is comprehensive. The distinction between fundamentalist and fundamentalist-like resolves a difficulty scholars have had in categorizing Hindu and Buddhist fundamentalisms, but it also reflects a bias that is common to all such categorizations: a term such as fundamentalism which was originally derived from monotheistic, scripture-based traditions will obviously work better to describe such traditions. The identification of four different ways of relating to the world makes the model more inclusive, but it does not fully resolve the problem of distinguishing between fundamentalists and other religious conservatives. If transformation of the world is defined as gradual conquest, then where does one draw the line between world conqueror and transformer? And if the distinguishing characteristic of fundamentalism is "dynamic engagement with the outside world," (478) then how can world renouncers be called fundamentalist? The remaining essays in the book suggest different ways of looking at fundamentalism, some of which support the Master Model, while others do not. Lacking the space to comment on all of these essays, I will instead raise questions commonly asked by people trying to comprehend fundamentalism and analyze the answers provided by the Master Model and various other contributors.

First, is fundamentalism peculiar to a particular type of religion? The Master Model's nine characteristics and its distinction between fundamentalist and fundamentalist-like suggest that the answer is yes. By contrast, Sahliyeh's essay implies that fundamentalism is not bound to a particular type of religion (one characterized by millennialism, scriptural inerrancy, etc.), but rather that people will use any kind of religion for political ends. Obeyesekere's piece on Buddhism reaches a similar conclusion. He answers the question of how Buddhist fundamentalism is possible, given that Buddhist doctrine clearly rejects violence and intolerance, by distinguishing between doctrine and history: because so many Buddhist kings violated doctrine yet clearly benefited Buddhism, monks writing the history of Buddhism had to rationalize such actions. I think this distinction would apply to Christian fundamentalism as well. The moral of the story seems to be that when people want to use religion to justify violence, they will — no matter what the nature of that religion.

Can we apply the term "fundamentalism" to a group that rejects it? The Master Model does not directly address this question, but other contributors do. While some have argued that generalizing the term "fundamentalist" beyond its Christian origins is "Eurocentric," Oberoi sees the refusal to apply that term to Eastern religions like Hinduism as "Semitic-centric." He believes that we can label Hindus and Sikhs as fundamentalist even if they reject that label in favor of "nationalist" because theirs is a nationalism based on religious affiliation, as opposed to pure (secular) nationalism. Though I find this distinction somewhat arbitrary (nationalism is always based on some affiliation and thus is never really pure) I think Oberoi's argument points to the reality that our scholarly categories will not always be accepted by the subjects of our analysis. As Heilman's essay suggests, this may or may not be a problem. For example, it has been argued that the difference between fundamentalism and traditionalism is militancy (willingness to be political) towards the world, but what we define as militant may to many practitioners seem nothing more than fidelity to tradition. Is fundamentalism a uniquely

modern phenomenon? The Master Model suggests that it is, and various contributors try to explain why that might be so. Arjomand's comparison of various Muslim movements argues that the difference between modern fundamentalisms and historical ones is the contemporary emphasis on politics: the enemy today is not so much religious impurity but Western culture. Madan's essay, which focuses on Islam in South Asia, draws a similar conclusion: the chief aim of past movements was defense of orthodoxy, while for today's fundamentalists gaining political power is equally if not more important (that's why some Muslim fundamentalists today are willing to translate the Quran into other languages, which in the past was considered totally unorthodox). This explanation is persuasive — if we agree on what orthodoxy is. As Eisenstadt's essay points out, orthodoxy is itself continually changing.

Most interpretations of fundamentalism, including the Master Model, are based on doctrines and observed practices of fundamentalist groups — can this limited focus really lead to an understanding of fundamentalism? Two essays in this book suggest otherwise. Booth argues convincingly that we must also look at narratives because, unlike doctrines, stories are transformative, i.e., they take the reader or listener into the world that fundamentalists share. Peacock & Pettyjohn make a similar point. Though they fail to demonstrate that all of the stories they cite actually *are* fundamentalist, their analysis of these narratives shows that scripture plays a different role for different kinds of fundamentalists — a conclusion which should give pause to the many scholars who see emphasis on scriptural inerrance as a key characteristic of fundamentalists.

Finally, what causes fundamentalism? The implication of the Master Model and most interpretive schemes I've encountered, no matter how neutral they claim to be, is that fundamentalism is a deviant kind of religion that only arises under certain conditions. One of the most interesting essays challenges this assumption. Levine's piece on Protestants and Catholics in Latin America points out that by some definitions, the Liberation Theology movement is more fundamentalist than Pentecostals who are usually labeled as such. He challenges conventional views of Pentecostalism as a response to social deprivation or a result of outside influence (US funded missionaries). Instead he argues that both movements are creative answers to social, political, and economic changes that called for development of new religious responses. Though he sounds a bit like a Pentecostal apologist, he rightly points to a bias in many analyses of fundamentalism. After reading this book, I wonder whether secular academics can ever really comprehend fundamentalism. By the very fact that we think that fundamentalists have to be explained and understood, we imply that they are wrong, or deviant at best. Aran's observation that Arabs, Jews, and secularists use the same caricatures to demonize each other is worth pondering. Though this book avoids such demonizing, it is, as the authors acknowledge, only a beginning in comprehending fundamentalism.

Review of Religious Research, Vol. 39, No. 1 (September, 1997)

Fundamentalisms Compared within Traditions

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Reviewing a collection of essays is always more difficult than reviewing a book, and reviewing part of a collection is more difficult still. I am aware that my comments about the chapters I am charged with reviewing might be challenged by reference to other parts

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