

Malise Ruthven

FUNDAMENTALISM

A Very Short Introduction

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Chapter 1

Family resemblances

‘Heave an egg out of a Pullman window’, wrote H. L. Mencken, the famous American journalist, in the 1920s, ‘and you will hit a Fundamentalist almost anywhere in the United States today’. ‘Fundamentalism’ is a word with which everyone is familiar now. Hardly a day passes without news of some terrorist atrocity committed by religious militants or fundamentalists in some part of the world. On 7 July 2005 an acquaintance was actually reading this book on the London Underground, when a nearby carriage exploded, killing dozens of commuters in the worst-ever terrorist atrocity committed on British soil. Altogether, the suicide bombers – three young British Muslim men from Leeds – succeeded in killing 53 people in addition to themselves, while wounding hundreds more, many of whom will be maimed for life.

‘The fact that I was reading your book when the bomb went off on the train profoundly conditioned my thoughts in retrospect about that experience, and much else besides’, Jonathan Williams, a curator at the British Museum, would later write in an e-mail.

Crucially, it allowed me to realize that whatever the motive cause was that drove these young men to kill themselves and take too many others with them, the key context where we need to look for understanding is not ‘Islam’, but the failure of traditional religion to encompass modernity.

My views on lots of things have changed in consequence – the exclusive truth claims of my own Christian religion for instance, which I am still struggling with, and more parochial matters like the Anglican Communion’s utterly distasteful obsession with issues of sexual orientation.

The most spectacular fundamentalist atrocity of all was the suicide hijacking on 11 September 2001 of three airliners by Islamist militants belonging to the al-Qaeda network, whose titular head is the Saudi dissident Osama bin Laden. Nearly 3,000 people were killed when the planes crashed into the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon near Washington. The atrocity was a classic example of the ‘propaganda of the deed’: the image of imploding towers, symbols of Western capitalism, has been etched into public consciousness as an icon of Islamist terror or resistance to American hegemony, according to one’s point of view. But there have been dozens of other atrocities blamed on fundamentalists which have caught the headlines.

Fundamentalism



1. The World Trade Center, 9/11

Most of them have been attributed to Muslim terrorists whose hostility to the West, and to the United States in particular, is widely presumed to be the outcome of their fundamentalist views. Though far from being exclusive to Islam – Jewish, Sikh, and Hindu extremists have been responsible for assassinating three prime ministers – the world of Islam seems particularly prone to religiously inspired violence at this time.

Foremost among the conflicts attributable to fundamentalist intransigence is the Arab-Israel dispute, still the world's most dangerous flashpoint. For the rationally minded person, whatever their religious background, the Middle East impasse illustrates the pitfalls into which fundamentalist politics is driving the world. Monotheists (who include most Jews, Christians, and Muslims) may worship the same single transcendental deity, whether known by the name of Jehova, the Trinity, or Allah ('The God' as Muslims know Him). But when it comes to understanding His will, or intentions, His self-proclaimed followers invariably adopt opposing standpoints. For the secular non-believer, or for the liberal believer who takes a sophisticated view of religious discourse, the god of fundamentalism must be mischievous, if not downright evil, a demonic power who delights in setting humans at each other's throats.

Religious fundamentalism, as it is broadly understood, has been a major source of conflict since the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the Berlin Wall came down and the Soviet Union collapsed, bringing the Cold War to an end with its attendant spin-offs in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The death-toll from modern religious conflicts, or conflicts involving religion, is formidable. Not all these conflicts, perhaps, can be laid at the door of religious fundamentalism. Local factors, including ethnicity and nationalism, come into the picture. But religion, as a source of motivation and identity, seems to have replaced the old ideologies of Marxist-Leninism, national socialism, and anti-colonialism as the principal challenge to a world order based on the hegemonic power

of the liberal capitalist West. Just as the contradictions within liberalism (for example, between the universal rights of man and the pursuit of imperial trade) gave rise to the anti-colonial movements of the post-Second World War era, so the earliest shoots of fundamentalism (semantically, if not as an age-old phenomenon) came to fruition in the United States in the very heart of the capitalist West.

Academics are still debating the appropriateness of using the F-word in contexts outside its original Protestant setting. Islamic scholars argue that since all observant Muslims believe the Koran, the divine text of Islam, to be the unmediated Word of God, all are committed to a doctrine of scriptural inerrancy, whereas for Protestants biblical inerrancy is one of the hallmarks that distinguishes fundamentalists from liberals. If all believing Muslims are fundamentalists in this sense of the word, then the term is meaningless, because it fails to distinguish between the hard-edged militant who seeks to Islamize his society and the quietist who avoids politics completely. Higher criticism of the Bible, based on close textual study – the original cause of the Protestant fundamentalist revolt against liberalism and modernism – challenged traditional teachings by claiming, for example, that the Book of Isaiah has more than one author and that the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament, was not authored by Moses himself. Higher criticism of the Koran, by contrast, which would challenge the belief that every word contained in the text was dictated to Muhammad by God through the agency of the Angel Gabriel, has not been a major issue in the Muslim world to date, though it may become so in due course, as literary-critical theories gain ground in academic circles. The present concerns of most Muslim fundamentalists are largely of a different order: the removal of governments deemed corrupt or too pro-Western and the replacement of laws imported from the West by the indigenous Sharia code derived from the Koran and the *sunna* (custom) of the Prophet Muhammad. On slightly different grounds, scholars of Judaism point out that ‘fundamentalist’ is

much too broad a term when applied both to ultra-orthodox groups known as Haredim (some of whom refuse to recognize the legitimacy of the State of Israel) and the religious settlers of Gush Emunim (the Bloc of the Faithful) who place more emphasis on holding on to the Land of Israel than on observing the Halakha (Jewish law).

Fundamentalism, according to its critics, is just a dirty 14-letter word. It is a term of abuse levelled by liberals and Enlightenment rationalists against any group, religious or otherwise, that dares to challenge the absolutism of the post-Enlightenment outlook. Other scholars argue that fundamentalism is a caricature or mirror-image of the same post-Enlightenment outlook it professes to oppose: by adopting the same rational style of argument used by the secular enemy, fundamentalists repress or bleach out the multifaceted, polysemic ways in which myth and religions appeal to all aspects of the human psyche, not just to the rational mind, with fundamentalists exposing what one anthropologist calls ‘the hubris of reason’s pretence in trying to take over religion’s role’.

Words have a life and energy of their own that will usually defy the exacting demands of scholars. The F-word has long since escaped from the Protestant closet in which it began its semantic career around the turn of the 20th century. The applications or meanings attached to words cannot be confined to the context in which they originate: if one limits fundamentalism to its original meaning one might as well do the same for words like ‘nationalism’ and ‘secularization’ which also appeared in the post-Enlightenment West before being attached to movements or processes in non-Western societies. Whatever technical objections there may be to using the F-word outside its original sphere, the phenomenon (or rather, the phenomena) it describes exists, although no single definition will ever be uncontested. Put at its broadest, it may be described as a religious way of being that manifests itself in a strategy by which beleaguered believers attempt to preserve their

distinctive identities as individuals or groups in the face of modernity and secularization.

Bruce Lawrence, a scholar who believes that the F-word *can* be extended beyond its original Protestant matrix, sees the connection with modernity as crucial: fundamentalism is a multifocal phenomenon precisely *because* the modernist hegemony, though originating in some parts of the West, was not limited to Protestant Christianity. The Enlightenment influenced significant numbers of Jews, and because of the colonization of much of Africa and Asia in the 19th and early 20th centuries, it touched the lives and destinies of many Muslims. In his view, the modernist hegemony did not end with the attainment of political independence by so-called Third World countries. Indeed, given the far-reaching consequences of the scientific revolution that flowed from the Enlightenment, the modern predicament against which fundamentalists everywhere are reacting has been extended to every corner of the planet.

Fundamentalism

Rather than quibbling about the usefulness of fundamentalism as an analytic term, I propose in this book to explore its ambiguities, to unpack some of its meanings. The word may be less than satisfactory, but the phenomena it encompasses deserve to be analysed. Whether or not we like the term, fundamentalist or fundamentalist-like movements appear to be erupting in many parts of the world, from the Americas to South-East Asia. No one would claim that these movements, which occur in most of the world's great religious traditions, are identical. But all of them exhibit what the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein called 'family resemblances'. In explaining his analogy, Wittgenstein took the example of games: board games, card games, ball games, Olympic Games, and so forth. Instead of assuming that all must have a single, defining feature because of the common name applied to them, games should be examined for similarities and relationships. Such an examination would reveal a complicated network of features that criss-cross and overlap: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail such as one finds in different

members of the same family, in which build, features, colour of eyes, gait, and temperament criss-cross and overlap in the same way.

Before proceeding to explore these resemblances, it would be useful to recapitulate the history of the F-word and its burgeoning semantic career. Its origins are quite revealing. Although the word has acquired negative connotations in much of the world, it did not begin as a term of abuse or even criticism. It appeared early in the 20th century not, as might have been expected, in the Bible Belt of the Old South, but in southern California, one of America's most rapidly developing regions (in the same area and at about the same time that one of fundamentalism's principal bug-bears, the Hollywood film industry, made its appearance). In 1910 Milton and Lyman Stewart, two devout Christian brothers who had made their fortune in the California oil business, embarked on a five-year programme of sponsorship for a series of pamphlets which were distributed free of charge to English-speaking Protestant pastors, evangelists, missionaries, theological professors, theological students, YMCA secretaries, Sunday School superintendents, religious lay workers, and editors of religious publications throughout the world. Entitled *The Fundamentals: A Testimony of Truth*, the tracts, written by a number of leading conservative American and British theologians, were aimed at stopping the erosion of what the brothers and their editors considered to be the fundamental beliefs of Protestant Christianity: the inerrancy of the Bible; the direct creation of the world, and humanity, *ex nihilo* by God (in contrast to Darwinian evolution); the authenticity of miracles; the virgin birth of Jesus, his Crucifixion and bodily resurrection; the substitutionary atonement (the doctrine that Christ died to redeem the sins of humanity); and his imminent return to judge and rule over the world.

Like many conservative American Protestants, technically known as premillennial dispensationalists, the Stewart brothers believed that the End Times prophecies contained in the Old Testament books of Ezekiel and Daniel, and the Revelation of St John, the last book of

the New Testament, refer to real (not symbolic) events that will soon take place on the plane of human history. Drawing on a tradition of prophecy interpretation developed by an Anglo-Irish clergyman, John Nelson Darby (1800–82), they argued that since many Old Testament prophecies about the coming Messiah were fulfilled with the coming of Christ as documented in the New Testament, other predictions, concerning the End Times, will soon come to pass. Expecting the world to end at any moment, they saw it as their duty to save as many people as possible before the coming catastrophe, when sinners would perish horribly and the saved would be raptured into the presence of Christ.

Being successful businessmen, the Stewarts wanted, and expected, results. As Lyman wrote to Milton after learning that the American Tobacco Company was spending millions of dollars distributing free cigarettes in order to give people a taste for them: Christians should 'learn from the wisdom of the world'. Theological motives were complemented by business competition. Lyman's principal agenda in the oil business was fighting his rival John D. Rockefeller's attempts to monopolize the industry. It may or may not be coincidental that one of the first preachers he hired came to his attention after preaching against 'something that one of those infidel professors in Chicago University had published'. Chicago Divinity School, a hotbed of liberalism, had been founded and endowed by John D. Rockefeller.

Some three million copies of *The Fundamentals* were circulated, on both sides of the Atlantic. The *-ist* was added in 1920 by Curtis Lee Laws, a conservative Baptist editor: Fundamentalists, he declared, were those who are ready to do battle royal for The Fundamentals. About half the American contributors to *The Fundamentals*, including such leading lights as Reuben Torrey and Cyrus Ignatius Scofield, were premillennialists. Before endowing *The Fundamentals*, Lyman Stewart had been a major sponsor of Scofield's Reference Bible, first published in 1909, and still the preferred commentary of American premillennialists.

The belief that Jesus would return to rule over an earthly kingdom of the righteous after defeating the Antichrist dates back to the earliest phase of Christianity, when the apostles lived in the daily expectation of his return. Dismayed by its revolutionary potential, which challenged the renovated imperial cults, common to both Eastern Orthodoxy and Western Catholicism, that conferred divine legitimacy on the Holy Roman and Byzantine emperors, the early church fathers, notably St Augustine (354–430) allegorized and spiritualized the coming Kingdom of God. Christian apocalyptic became part of the everyday fabric of Christian life and belief, and to that extent reinforced eschatological awareness by embedding it in liturgy and preaching while distancing Catholic thought from literalistic readings of prophecy, and especially notions of an earthly millennium. The seal on Augustine's teaching was set by the Council of Ephesus in 431 which condemned millennialism and expurgated works of earlier church fathers thought to be tainted with the doctrine. After the Reformation loosened the Church's grip on Christian teaching, millennialist ideas resurfaced in such apocalyptic movements as the Anabaptists of Münster in Germany and Fifth Monarchy Men who took part in the English Revolution. Transplanted to America, where constitutional separation of church and state encourages religious innovation, millennialist ideas took root in fertile soil.

The number of premillennialist Protestants (who believe that the Second Coming will be followed by the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth) has been estimated conservatively at eight million. Most American fundamentalists are premillennialists, although there are many variations in their approaches to the Second Coming: many of them, in the course of time, have actually become postmillennialists, who argue that the world must be put to rights by people *before* Jesus's return. In no tradition does one find a complete consensus about what the fundamentals of the faith really are. Fundamentalists are nothing if not selective about the texts they use and their mode of interpretation. They are also much more innovative in the way they interpret the texts they select than is

often supposed. In this respect they may be contrasted with traditionalists.

'Tradition', like 'fundamental', can be understood in more than one way. Among Roman Catholics, Anglicans, and other religious communities, the word conveys the sense of a cumulative body of ritual, behaviour, and thought that reaches back to the time of origins. In Catholicism especially, tradition embodying the accumulated experience and knowledge of the Church is seen as a source of authority equal to scripture. Tied to the exclusive authority of the Church, tradition was affirmed at the Council of Trent (1545–63), the Church's official response to the challenge posed by the *sola scriptura* doctrine of the Protestant reformers.

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In the Islamic tradition similar considerations apply: tradition here means the accumulated body of interpretation, law, and practice as developed over the centuries by the *ulama*, the class of learned men who constitute Islam's professional class of religionists or clerics. Throughout Islamic history there have been renovators or reformers who, like Luther, challenged the authority of the *ulama* on the basis of their readings of the Sources of Islam, namely the Koran and the Hadiths – the latter, sometimes confusingly translated as 'Traditions', are canonized reports about Muhammad's deeds and teachings, based, it is supposed, on the oral testimony of his contemporaries and passed down by word of mouth before being collated into written collections. In this sense, the medieval scholar Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1326), who ended his life in prison for challenging the authority of the *ulama* and rulers of his day, was a fundamentalist. Significantly, his writings are extremely popular among today's Islamist militants.

A less specialized meaning of tradition, however, is also relevant here. In a broader context, tradition is simply what occurs unselfconsciously as part of the natural order of things, an unreflective or unconsidered *Weltanschauung* (world view). In the words of Martin Marty, most people who live in a traditional culture

do not know they are traditionalists. Tradition, in this sense, consists in not being aware that how one believes or behaves is traditional, because alternative ways of thinking or living are simply not taken into consideration. In traditional societies, including the mainly rural communities that formerly constituted the American Bible Belt, the Bible was seen as comprehensively true, a source of universal wisdom, knowledge, and authority deemed to have been transmitted to humanity by God through the prophets, patriarchs, and apostles who wrote the Bible. The latter was not thought of as a scientific textbook; but nor did the ordinary pastor or worshipper consider it unscientific. For most of the 18th and 19th centuries, the Bible was considered compatible with reason, or at least with that version of reason conveyed by the common-sense philosophy which spread to North America from Scotland, along with Calvinist theology and more or less democratic forms of church governance.

When Higher Criticism, originating in Germany, began to challenge the received understandings of the Bible, for example by using sophisticated methods of textual analysis to argue that books attributed to Moses or Isaiah show evidence of editorial changes, textual accumulations, and multiple authorship, or that the doctrine of the virgin birth of Christ depended on a mistranslation of the original Greek text, unreflective tradition (the received knowledge of generations) was converted into reactive defensiveness. From this perspective, fundamentalism may be defined as tradition made self-aware and consequently defensive. In Samuel Heilman's words, traditionalism is not fundamentalism, but a necessary correlate to it:

In all religions, but especially in Protestantism, the active defence of tradition demands selectivity, since the text of the Bible is too vast and complex to be defended in all its details.

Like any military commander, the fundamentalist had to choose the ground on which to do battle royal with the forces of liberalism and Higher Criticism. *The Fundamentals* was part of the process that

galvanized this reaction. In America it split the more democratically organized denominations, including Presbyterians, Baptists, Lutherans, and Methodists, generating bitter culture-wars inside their churches. In most of the American denominations it represented the grass-roots reaction to the elitism of the seminaries, perceived as being out of touch with the culture and beliefs of ordinary believers. Yet, as Marty and Appleby point out, the very idea behind the project revealed the distance that had already been travelled along the path of secularity: designating ‘fundamentalisms’ automatically places the designator at a considerable remove from the time when religion thrived as a total way of life. To identify any one thing or set of beliefs or practices as essential is to diminish other elements of what was once an organic whole.

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The most famous of the battles royal which tore many American churches apart in the first half of the 20th century was the Monkey Trial in Dayton, Tennessee in 1925. As Garry Wills, one of America’s best-known commentators, has explained, the trial was something of a put-up job, engineered, in effect, by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) to challenge an obscure and little-used Tennessee state law banning the teaching of evolution in schools.

Many Southern states had such laws early in the 20th century. A biology teacher, John Scopes (who subsequently admitted that he had missed teaching the classes dealing with evolution), claimed (rather shakily) to have broken the law. It was an early example of what would later be known as a media event, in which the coverage itself was more important than what actually occurred in court. Hundreds of journalists attended, including the most famous reporter of the day, H. L. Mencken of the *Baltimore Sun*. Radio lines were brought into the courtroom, and the judge held up proceedings to allow photographers to get their shots. The fundamentalist defenders of the state law won the trial on points. With a fundamentalist jury, three members of which testified that

Opposing Christian views of evolution

1. ANTI

All the ills from which America suffers can be traced back to the teaching of evolution. It would be better to destroy every other book ever written and save just the first three verses of Genesis.

(William Jennings Bryan, in Vincent Crapanzano, *Serving the Word: Literalism in America from the Pulpit to the Bench*)

Evolution is the root of atheism, of communism, nazism, anarchism, behaviorism, racism, economic imperialism, militarism, libertinism, anarchism, and all manner of anti-Christian systems of belief and practice.

(Henry Morris, *The Remarkable Birth of Planet Earth*)

2. PRO

Evolutionary theory emphasizes our kinship with nonhuman animals and denies that we were created separately. But it does not interfere with the central Judaeo-Christian message that we are objects of special concern to the Creator. It simply denies us an exclusive right to that title.

(Philip Kitcher, *Abusing Science: The Case against Creationism*)

they read nothing but the Bible, the verdict was a foregone conclusion. The state law was upheld, but Scopes had his conviction quashed on appeal, which prevented the ACLU from pursuing its original aim of bringing the case to a higher federal court. He went on to become a geologist after winning a scholarship to the University of Chicago.



2. The Scopes trial, Dayton, Tennessee, 1925

Culturally, the media battle was a devastating defeat for fundamentalism. In a famous cross-examination before the trial judge, William Jennings Bryan, former secretary of state and three times Democratic candidate for the presidency, suffered public humiliation at the hands of Clarence Darrow, the ACLU lawyer. Cleverly drawing on literalistic interpretations of the Bible approved of by conservatives, Darrow showed that Bryan's knowledge of scripture and fundamentalist principles of interpretation was fatally flawed. Afflicted with diabetes, Bryan died shortly after the trial, a broken man. In the media treatment sight was lost of the moral issues that had been his primary concern. As a Democrat and populist, Bryan believed that German militarism, the ultimate cause of the First World War, had been a

by-product of Darwin's theory of natural selection combined with Friedrich Nietzsche's ideas about the human Will to Power. Given the way in which ideas of Social Darwinism were subsequently put to use by the Nazis, he deserves more credit than he has been given. Shortly before the Second World War, Adolf Hitler would state in one of his speeches: '[Anyone] who has pondered on the order of this world realizes that its meaning lies in the warlike survival of the fittest.'

Anti-evolution laws remained on the statute books of several American states, and indeed were extended in some cases. But for the American public at large, fundamentalists were exposed as rural ignoramuses, rural hillbillies out of touch with modern thought. One of the major cultural events of 20th-century America, the Monkey Trial precipitated what might be called the 'withdrawal phase' of American fundamentalism – a retreat into the enclaves of churches and private educational institutions, such as Bob Jones University in South Carolina. In the mainstream academies, seminaries, and denominations, liberal theology, which accepted evolution as God's way of doing things, swept the board.

As Susan Harding explains, the regime of public religiosity that prevailed in America during the mid-20th century was secular in the limited sense, at least, that at the national-level signs of religious partisanship were voluntarily suppressed – though it remained for the most part incomplete, fragile, and, at times and places, seriously contested. The triumph of liberalism in the mainstream churches was at first tacitly endorsed by the fundamentalists who, for the most part, opted for the strategy of separation from the world. Logically, premillennialists should not care if the world goes from bad to worse, though they are charitably enjoined to rescue as many souls as they can. According to the Book of Revelation, the reign of the Antichrist preceding the Second Coming will be accompanied by all sorts of portents and signs of evil. As the saved remnant of humanity, true Christians (that is, fundamentalists) should even welcome these signs as proof that

salvation is imminent. 'The darker the night gets, the lighter my heart gets', wrote Reuben Torrey, one of the editors of *The Fundamentals*.

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Fundamentalists therefore saw the contempt to which they were exposed in the popular media after the Scopes trial as confirmation of their beliefs. The trend towards withdrawal did not mean, however, that American fundamentalism remained static. Despite its exclusion from the mainstream, the half-century from 1930 to 1980 saw a steady institutional growth, with numerous (mainly Baptist) churches seceding from national denominations in order to create an impressive national infrastructure of pastoral networks, parachurch organizations and superchurches, schools and colleges, book and magazine publishing industries, radio, television and direct-mail operations that built on older institutions created during the 19th-century revivals, such as the famous Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. Whilst mainstream America, abetted by an increasingly centralized media, remained unaware of what Jerry Falwell would call the 'sleeping giant' in its midst, the giant itself became progressively alarmed and annoyed at the encroachments of permissiveness and the growing assertiveness of mainstream secular culture.

The United States Constitution in its First Amendment disestablishes religion and creates what would become known, in Thomas Jefferson's famous phrase, as 'a wall of separation' between church and state. Whatever their political ambitions, American fundamentalists are constrained by this wall, which, for historical reasons, they are more likely than not to accept. As refugees from what they conceived to be the religious tyrannies of the Old World, the Protestant colonists who founded the United States in 1776 and won its independence from Britain were opposed to any alliance between state power and religious authority. Churches should be self-governing, autonomous institutions free from taxation and government interference. Nevertheless, since all of the Founding Fathers were Protestants, modern fundamentalists can plausibly

argue that the United States was founded as a Christian – specifically, Protestant – nation. For them, the wall of separation does not mean that the state is atheist or even secular in the fullest sense of the word: merely that it maintains a posture of neutrality towards the different churches or denominations. However, with waves of Catholic migrants from Ireland arriving from the 1830s and Jewish immigration from Eastern and Central Europe from the latter part of the 19th century, denominational pluralism was extended far beyond what many people would have imagined during the 1780s (though not Thomas Jefferson, who believed in religious freedom for ‘the infidel of every denomination’).

A landmark Supreme Court decision in 1961 extended to secular humanists (non-believers) the legal protection accorded to followers of religious faiths. Ironically, this is the decision which fundamentalists now use in order to argue that secular humanism qualifies as a religion, for example when values associated with it appear in school curricula. They argue mischievously that it should be curbed by the state in order to maintain the ‘wall of separation’. American fundamentalists are therefore constrained by the pluralistic religious culture in which they must operate. Rather than forming a religious party aimed at taking over the government, they lobby for power and influence within the Republican Party. Legislative successes at state level have included the reinstatement of daily prayers in some public schools, equal time rules for the teaching of evolution and creationism, or ‘intelligent design’ (a thinly disguised version of creationism that appears to be more scientific), and the overturning by a dozen or more states of the 1973 Supreme Court *Roe v. Wade* judgment repealing state bans on abortion. At the local level, fundamentalists have lobbied for the banning of books deemed irreligious from public school libraries or curricula. The banned titles have included such classics as Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*, and books by Mark Twain, Joseph Conrad, and John Steinbeck, all of which have been seen as promoting the ‘religion’ of secular humanism by questioning faith in God or portraying

religion negatively. These successes, however, have often been reversed by the courts after actions by organizations such as the ACLU and PAW (People for the American Way), a liberal lobby group. At the national level, fundamentalism is further constrained by the need to find conservative partners from beyond the ranks of Protestants.

On single issues such as abortion or the proposed amendment to the US Constitution granting Equal Rights for women (ERA), and the teaching of creationism or 'intelligent design' in schools, fundamentalist lobbying can be efficacious. (ERA failed after 'Christian' women were bused in their thousands to Washington.) In the wider political domain, however, American fundamentalists are faced with a dilemma. To collaborate with other conservative groups they must suppress or even abandon some of their theological objections to those – such as Mormons, Jews, or Catholics – whose religions they regard as being false.

The world of Islam presents a somewhat different perspective. The earliest reference to 'fundamentalism' in English I have found in relation to Islam is in a letter written in May 1937 by Sir Reader Bullard, British Minister in Jeddah, who stated that King Abd al-Aziz Ibn Saud has been 'coming out strong as a fundamentalist' by condemning women who mix with men under the cloak of progress. Bruce Lawrence suggests that the term 'Islamic fundamentalism' was coined by H. A. R. Gibb, the well known orientalist, in his book *Mohammedanism* (later retitled *Islam*), with reference to Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, the pan-Islamic reformer and political activist. Both the movements headed by Ibn Saud and Afghani could be said to have exhibited some of Wittgenstein's family resemblances: both involved a radical, in some cases an armed, defence of a religious tradition that felt itself to be challenged or threatened by modernity. But in both cases, the modernity in question was complicated by international politics. Ibn Saud's warriors, following in the tradition of Ibn Hanbal, Ibn Taymiyya, and Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, the 18th-century

Arabian reformer, were certainly fundamentalists in the way they sought to return to the 7th-century scriptural roots of Islam, unsupplemented by the accumulated customs, doctrines, and traditions of subsequent centuries. Afghani, a masterful conspirator, polemicist, and political activist, can similarly be seen as fundamentalist in his desire to return to Islam's pristine roots, and in the efforts he made throughout his life to galvanize the Muslim rulers of his day into combating British imperialism. But far from unequivocally opposing the Enlightenment (one of the family traits ascribed to most fundamentalist movements), Afghani's attitude to modernity was thoroughly ambiguous. Hating imperialism, he nevertheless acknowledged the need for wholesale reforms of the Muslim religion, which he saw as decadent, decayed, and corrupt. His spirit is much closer to that of Martin Luther than to, say, a contemporary scriptural literalist such as Jerry Falwell.

Fundamentalism The problems of definition are compounded when so-called Jewish fundamentalism is taken into account. As with Arabic, there is no indigenous Hebrew word that corresponds to 'fundamentalism'. The term usually employed for Jewish extremists by the Israeli media is *yamina dati*, the 'religious right'. Far from rejecting modernity, fundamentalists of the religious right such as Gush Emunim (the Bloc of the Faithful), are religious innovators. Whereas some traditionalist or orthodox groups known as the Haredim regarded the establishment of Israel as an impious pre-empting of the Messiah's role, Gush Emunim and other right-wing religious Zionists see the secular state as a stage towards Redemption. If Jewish fundamentalism can embrace such divergent alternatives, can the term be meaningful or useful?

The question, of course, is theoretical. By now it should be clear that the meanings, or possible applications, of the F-word have strayed far beyond the umbrella of the Abrahamic monotheisms (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). For example, Sikh 'fundamentalists' took control of the Golden Temple of Amritsar in the Punjab, and when Indira Gandhi sent the troops in, they murdered her in revenge.

Hindu ‘fundamentalists’ demolished the Babri Masjid Mosque at Ayodhya, south-east of Delhi, in 1992, believing it to be the birthplace of the deity Rama (Lord Ram), setting off communal rioting that cost many thousands of lives (see Chapter 6). Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka have taken up arms against Tamil separatists, breaking with centuries of pacifism. For their part, the mostly secular Tamils, who developed the tactic of suicide bombing a decade before the Palestinians, sometimes require their vanguard squads to take an oath to the Hindu god Shiva.

‘Fundamentalism’ now encompasses many types of activity, not all of them religious. Critics of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) such as George Soros, the financier, and Joseph Stiglitz, the Nobel Laureate, have accused the doctrinaire policies of ‘market fundamentalism’ dominant in Washington, for making global capitalism ‘unsound and unsustainable’ by forcing deregulation and tight fiscal restraints on the economies of developing nations, with dire consequences for the poorest sections of society. The wing of the Scottish National Party least disposed to cooperate with other parties in the Scottish Parliament has been described as fundamentalist by its opponents. In Germany, members of the Green Party who supported Joschka Fischer in joining former Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder’s Red-Green coalition were described as *realos* (realists), in contrast to the *fundis* (fundamentalists) who held true to the Party’s ideology of pacifism, opposition to nuclear power, and radical environmentalism. The tension between the two wings was brought to breaking point when Fischer, as Germany’s foreign minister, supported the NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999 while his Green Party colleague, environment minister Jürgen Trittin, was pressured into abandoning a scheme to make car manufacturers pay for the cost of recycling old vehicles and forced to make painful compromises in his plans for phasing out nuclear power.

Similar tensions between ideological purists who stick to the fundamentals of their cause without compromising their principles,

and the realists who argue that real gains can be achieved through bargaining and compromise, exist in all political and cultural movements; indeed, they are the very stuff of democratic politics – the energy of political life is most often released when the ideals of party activists are pitted against the realities of power. Virtually every movement, from animal rights to feminism, will embrace a spectrum ranging from uncompromising radicalism or extremism to pragmatic accommodationism. For feminist ultras such as Andrea Dworkin, virtually all penetrative sex is deemed to be rape. For some animal liberationists, every abattoir, however humane its procedures, is an extermination camp, while in the rhetoric of radical pro-lifers such as Pat Robertson, the 43 million fetuses ‘murdered’ since *Roe v. Wade* are an abomination comparable to the Nazi Holocaust.

Fundamentalism

At the borders of the semantic field it now occupies, the word ‘fundamentalism’ strays into extremism, sectarianism, doctrinaireism, ideological purism. It seems doubtful, however, if these non-religious uses of the word are analytically useful. There may be some similarities in political and social psychology between, say, anti-abortionists, animal rightists, Green Party activists, Islamist agitators, and the Six Day Creationists (now modulated into ‘intelligent designers’) who sit on school boards in Kansas or southern California. A reluctance to compromise with one’s deeply held principles is an obvious common trait. Such usages, however, seem to me to stray beyond Wittgenstein’s family resemblances into something closer to mere analogy. Similarity does not necessarily imply kinship. The genetic bond that defines fundamentalism in its more central, and useful, meaning – the fundamentalist DNA, as it were – is sharper and more distinctive than extremism. The original Protestant use of the word anchors it in the responses of individual or collective selfhoods, of personal and group identities, to the scandal or shock of the Other.

Although many religious activists (especially the evangelical movements within Christianity and Islam) believe they have a

universal mission to transform or convert the world, all religious traditions must face the *problématique* of their parochial origins, the embarrassing fact that saviours and prophets uttered divine words in specific languages to relatively small groups of people in certain localities at particular moments in time. The late John Lennon was correct in stating that the Beatles were more famous in their time than Jesus was in his. The original social context of the Bible, or the Koran, can never be recovered: modern Christians will never be Galilean peasants; Muhammad's Arab Bedouin have all but disappeared. Religious pluralism is an inescapable feature of modernity. It implies choice, inviting the suspicion that there may be more than one path to salvation (perhaps even a non-religious path). The surge of fundamentalist movements, or movements of religious revitalization, we are witnessing in many parts of the world is a response to globalization and, more specifically, to the crises for believers that inevitably follows the recognition that there are ways of living and believing other than those deemed to have been decreed by one's own tradition's version of the deity.