

# 1 Introduction

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### POPULAR CONCEPTIONS OF FUNDAMENTALISM

There can be few terms which have, of late, obtruded on popular consciousness in the West as persistently as 'fundamentalism'. During the past several years the label has been employed prodigiously by the mass media to describe and explain a host of apparently disparate religious and political developments in various parts of the world.

In Western Christianity, where the expression was first mooted, fundamentalism has come to identify conservative evangelicals inside the mainline Protestant denominations, as well as the charismatic sects which comprise what is now the fastest-moving current within the Christian world. In the American setting, it no longer exemplifies the hill-billy element in rural or small-town Protestantism, as it did half a century ago. Today, it denotes an aggressive and confident religious movement which, in coalition with conservative political forces, seeks to combat what is regarded as the liberal takeover of the state, family and church since the days of Roosevelt's New Deal (Whitfield, 1982).

The term 'fundamentalist', however, is not applied only to groups and activities within the Christian fold. Nowadays, it may refer equally to militantly orthodox sections within the Jewish population in Israel, separatist and nationalist elements in the Sikh community, Tamil 'liberation' movements in Sri Lanka, or Hindu groups opposed to foreign missionary influences in India. The most prolific rhetoric of fundamentalism, however, is reserved for Islam, and especially for the depiction of contemporary events in the Middle East. Said (1981) has documented how, for the West especially, the Islamic world has become an obsession. The reasons for this preoccupation seem obvious enough: the dependence of the industrialised nations on Middle Eastern energy resources, and the threat Islamic revival is thought to pose to the stability of this strategically vital area.

More to the point, fundamentalism has become a prominent focus of the imagery through which Islam is presented to the Western public. Thus, the overthrow of the Shah and the emergence of Khomeini's Iran, Sadat's assassination in Egypt, the assertiveness of Lebanon's Shi'ite community, even various forms of 'terrorism' have alike been reported as manifestations of the fundamentalist resurgence within Islam.

To the extent that Islamic fundamentalism is portrayed as radical and extremist, and so as menacing Western interests, it is, as the Tappers suggest in Chapter 3, a 'problem' for the West. But while the media have obviously helped to constitute it, the notion of fundamentalism is by no means entirely of their making. This interest reflects a widespread popular view that such tendencies are on the increase if not in the ascendant, and parallels a growing scholarly curiosity in the phenomenon. An issue which not only enters the arena of public discourse in this way, but affects the very regions and disciplines in which many of us live and work, and touches directly on themes which have traditionally engaged academic interest is, to say the least, worthy of serious attention.

Fundamentalism is unquestionably an evocative image *in* our time, but it is important to counter what seems to be a popular assumption that it is uniquely *of* our time. Recent historians of Protestantism in the USA, anxious to dispel an earlier idea that American fundamentalism was entirely a product of the 1920s (which witnessed the controversy over evolution, leading to the infamous Scopes 'monkey' trial) have shown how it existed as a religious movement before, during and after the events of that decade (see Sandeen, 1970). Marsden has traced its roots back to the Holiness and Pre-Millennial movements of the nineteenth century, and argued that fundamentalism in this century has 'emphasized doctrinal tendencies already strong in American culture and religious traditions' (1980, p. 224).

In south Asia, there are also strong links between revivalism and fundamentalism (Frykenberg, forthcoming). In this volume Dietrich (Chapter 6) stresses that present-day Sikh fundamentalism has direct antecedents in religious renewals at the turn of the century, the most significant of which sought to resurrect the sacred *khalsa*, or traditional religio-military brotherhood. This was established at the end of the seventeenth century by Guru Gobind Singh to abolish the authority of intermediary spiritual representatives and invest the community itself with ultimate power and responsibility (Shackle, forthcoming). Writers on Islamic communities similarly draw attention to the recurrent pattern of religious revivals. Zubaida and Amselle (Chapters 2 and 4) link contemporary fundamentalism in Egypt and Mali to earlier movements, both reformist and fundamentalist. Baharuddin, referring to Malaysian Islam, suggests that Islamic revivalism is a 'misnomer', since it 'occurs at such regular intervals', and adds that the only revival is in 'foreign scholars' interest in studying Islam' (1983, p. 400).

I leave the particular issue of how much contemporary Islamic resurgence is a creation of Western scholarship to the consideration of those better qualified than I am. However, in this connection it is worth reminding ourselves that the very people whom outside observers – whether media or academic – designate as fundamentalists (often with pejorative intent) may appropriate these same idioms to describe their own religious beliefs and behaviours or those of others within the same social and cultural contexts. Fundamentalism is no less an emic (insiders') category than an etic (observers') one.

Indeed, the changing significance of its deployment in Protestant circles provides a piquant illustration of the 'tyranny' of language. Walker (Chapter 10) recalls that fundamentalism was initially a self-advertising label, a proud epithet used by and of those who saw themselves as defending the fundamentals of their faith. Because of the unsavoury connotations it has acquired of late, however, it is increasingly being abandoned by those to whom it was once a 'badge of pride'. Leaders of the new Restoration movement in Britain refuse the label because they see it as imposed upon them by disapproving outsiders and opponents.

We have also to note the importance of what Zubaida in Chapter 2 calls the 'demonstration effect' of fundamentalist effervescence today. Nagata observes that the 'upsurge of Middle Eastern prosperity and power and the increasing Islamic fervour in that region have had profound effects elsewhere', and she reports how Muslim fundamentalists in Malaysia 'see themselves as part of an international fundamentalist resurgence' (1979, pp. 412–13; 1980, p. 129). The rapid spread of Wahabi fundamentalism in West Africa from its source in Saudi Arabia involves a similar dynamic, while within Christianity we witness the spread of such forms of religiosity throughout Europe and especially the USA, and from there to the Third World. The close ties between fundamentalist groups in such indigenous settings as the Punjab, Israel, and Sri Lanka and their diasporas in the West provide further evidence for a global diffusion of this tendency. This should not surprise us, given technologies which allow near instantaneous communication of ideologies around the planet, and where vast sums are deployed for the very purpose.

The contributors to this volume, therefore, profess two complementary aims. On the one hand, they are concerned to investigate the historical and cultural specificity of fundamentalist manifestations in diverse ethnographic settings, each author seeking to understand what constitutes fundamentalism in the particular context examined. On the

other hand, while insisting on the integrity of a plurality of ethnographic depictions and analytical approaches, the collective intent is to interrogate the possibilities for comparative insights into the notion of fundamentalism.

We approach a cross-cultural examination of fundamentalism with an equal measure of curiosity and wariness. The latter is called for on two main counts, both of them already familiar to anthropologists concerned with comparative studies. The first touches on the sometimes glib employment of concepts whose roots lie in the Western tradition to make sense of data lying outside that tradition. Crick has criticised anthropologists for applying the seventeenth-century English notion of witchcraft to certain beliefs and behaviours in twentieth-century African societies which are superficially similar but semantically distinct. He suggests that 'great violence must be done to the conceptual structures of another culture in speaking of witchcraft if it lacks the environing categories which defined it in our own' (1976, p. 112). A similar note is sounded by Dumont when he questions the usefulness of studies which fail to consider the wider configuration of societal values in which are situated the religious ideologies and institutions being compared (1971, p. 32). These are salutary reminders of the difficulties attending the cross-cultural employment of a term like fundamentalism, with its particular Protestant origins and history.

A second, related issue concerns the diverse phenomena which, as already pointed out, are conflated in the notion of fundamentalism even within the English-speaking West. As Needham has remarked about kinship, 'it has an immense variety of uses, in that all sorts of institutions, practices and ideas can be referred to by it' (1971, p. 5). As a general term, therefore, it can at best identify 'family resemblances' among the disparate phenomena it is intended to describe. The recognition of such polythetic categories, moreover, can have serious implications for comparative studies, rendering them 'more daunting and perhaps even unfeasible' (1975, p. 358). However, the designation and subsequent deconstruction of a host of similar 'odd-job' words (as Wittgenstein called them) should not be an end in itself, nor indeed lead to the abandonment of comparative exercises. Rather, we are encouraged to pursue more appropriate abstractions or frames of reference, as Lévi-Strauss (1962) did for totemism, Crick (1976) for witchcraft, Rivière (1971) for marriage, and Needham himself for kinship (1971). Parkin has recently noted, in respect of another polysemic term – 'evil' – how, in seeking to identify

equivalent concepts in diverse cultural circumstances, we may be led to re-cast them in new terms (1985, p. 23). The challenge of fundamentalism as our object of investigation, therefore, lies precisely in its ambiguity and equivocality, in the realisation that it is not a self-evident category, as Webber (Chapter 5) observes, nor a unifying paradigm that can encapsulate the diverse phenomena under consideration (Walker, Chapter 10). To what modes of religious discourse and behaviour in the modern world, then, does 'fundamentalism' refer?

## FUNDAMENTALISM AND THE MODERN WORLD

The fundamentalist engagement with the modern world is complex. Those labelled fundamentalists are sometimes portrayed as fossilised relics, insulated from and oblivious to their surroundings, living perpetually in a bygone age. As Marsden puts it, their detractors see them as clinging to the past in 'stubborn and irrational resistance to changing culture...' (1980, p. 185). The ethnographic accounts in this volume belie such a portrayal. They demonstrate, rather, that fundamentalism must be seen as quintessentially *modern* in the sense that it constitutes a response to events and conditions in the *present*. It is not an inexplicable resurgence or revival, but a symptom of perceived threat or crisis. As such, it is frequently deeply involved in contemporary political processes, and so cannot be divorced from the operation and implications of power. The incidence and character of fundamentalist ideologies, moreover, as the Tappers stress in Chapter 3, depend on the nature of the politics in which and in relation to which they emerge.

The fundamentalism sweeping much of the Muslim world today is frequently interpreted as a reaction to Western imperialism and its predatory economies and ideologies (see Firth, 1981, p. 581; Vatikiotis, 1982, p. 69). Zubaida (Chapter 2), while lending support to this general view, also demonstrates how important it is to examine institutional settings and historical conjunctures for an understanding of the disparate relations obtaining between Islamic fundamentalist movements and the modern states in which they are located. He records how the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt was antagonistic not only to the European colonialists and their cultural influence, but to Nasser's nationalist regime, which the Brotherhood pilloried as a secularist, ungodly tyranny (and for which hostility it paid dearly). He also shows how Khomeini's opposition to the Shah in Iran arose not

only from the latter's association with American power in the region, and the oppressive nature of the Western-backed monarchy, but Khomeini's own novel convictions about the need for an Islamic republic led by benign jurists to replace the rule of princes. Though presented in the terms of Shi'ite discourses, the idea assumes the existence of the modern state and nation.

Considering a different Islamic context, the Tappers (Chapter 3) suggest that the character of the fundamentalism associated with the dominant ideology of republicanism in Turkey relates directly to the degree of perceived threat to the stability and prosperity of the state. In the circumstances, those who are thought to pose such a threat are members of clandestine Islamic sects ('fanatics'), and political dissidents of both left and right, as well as members of minority communities, seen as agents of outside powers. The reaction to this threat is the adoption of a hard line nationalist stance, paralleling the move to an exclusivist and oppositional fundamentalism, which the Tappers regard as akin to the ideological structure of evangelical Protestantism as described by Barr (1977).<sup>1</sup>

Non-Islamic fundamentalisms are no less implicated in contemporary social and political currents. In the Protestant milieu of the USA, fundamentalism crystallised in response to the liberals' eagerness to bring Christianity into the post-Darwinian world by questioning the scientific and historical accuracy of scripture. Subsequently, the scourge of evolution was linked with socialism, and during the Cold War period, with communism. This unholy trinity came to be regarded as a sinister, atheistic threat to Christian America (Marsden, 1980, pp. 209–10). Bruce (Chapter 9) suggests that to understand the recent success of the Moral Majority, an alliance between the conservative forces of the New Right and the fundamentalist wings of the mainly Southern Baptist churches, we have to appreciate these fears, as well as the impact of a host of unwelcome changes – in attitudes to 'morality', family, civil and women's rights, and so on – which have, in the wake of economic transformations since the Second World War, penetrated especially the previously insular social and cultural world of the American South.

Of late, with the support of the New Right, fundamentalist organisations have moved outside America's borders, not merely to join in spreading the Christian gospel, but to challenge the traditional hegemony of the orthodox churches already established abroad. The growing popularity of such sects in Latin America, for example, where they are encouraged by a number of regimes favoured by the present

American administration, may be interpreted, on one level, as an attempt to undermine the Catholic Church, many of whose priests now openly call for political and social reform. In south India, fundamentalist groups overtly challenge the liberal and ecumenical 'social gospel' favoured by the dominant sectors within the orthodox Protestant church and community. In the context of local power structures they provide an alternative to the latter's authoritative theology, and thus a means whereby 'ordinary' Christians can resist their social and cultural subordination (Caplan, Chapter 8).

Considering recent developments in a different part of the Indian sub-continent, Dietrich (Chapter 6) traces the rapid rise to prominence of a Sikh fundamentalist movement, led by the charismatic Sant Bhindranwale, and its sudden demise in the tragic events of June 1984. She situates these developments against the backdrop of (among other things) inadequate access by Sikh peasants to the Punjab's ample water resources (partly because these are treated as a national resource), unequal distribution of the benefits of the region's 'green revolution', and declining employment opportunities for Sikh youth. These conditions are attributed by the fundamentalists to what they see as an oppressive, alien (that is, non-Sikh) power in Delhi, and its secularist and Westernised allies within the Sikh community itself, who support the 'moderate' Akali Dal party which has singularly failed to alter these conditions, or to persuade the central government to do so.

Similarly, the emergence in Britain of a fundamentalist strain among Tamil Hindu migrants from Sri Lanka only becomes comprehensible in the context of that country's recent troubled history. Taylor (Chapter 7) relates the background to Tamil demands for a separate state to the complex struggles for power in the post-independence period. In the course of these events there arose (and was encouraged) an increased self-awareness among Buddhists, and a sense of being a threatened minority in south Asia, despite their numerical predominance in Sri Lanka itself. The ensuing ethnic conflict gave rise to divergent views within the Tamil population concerning the appropriate response, and these differences are represented within the migrant community in Britain.

What emerges clearly from the narratives in this volume is that fundamentalists interact dynamically with their contemporary social and cultural surroundings. The nature and extent of this engagement is of course variable, but nowhere do they seem to remain unaffected by or immune to local, national or global tides. What is also clear is that



fundamentalists do not assume, nor can they be allocated in any a priori way, a consistent stance in political affairs. In some contexts they seek to subvert the existing regime, in others they are its most fervent supporters, in still others they are compelled to adopt a neutral position. A fundamentalist ideology may contain within itself elements which lend themselves to interpretations in diametrically opposed ways. Zubaida (Chapter 2) notes how the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt contained some elements claiming to be 'Islamic socialists', although their 'socialist' opponents branded them as 'fascists'. Furthermore, even within the same setting the political posture of fundamentalism may alter over time. Barr, referring to Protestant fundamentalism in the USA, remarks that the 'claim of the evangelical gospel to be a radical questioning of the inner bases of human self-certainty is suddenly reversed, when the religion becomes the ideological guarantor of the rightness of the existing social order' (1977, p. 110). According to Carter (1968) prior to the First World War American fundamentalists were as apt to be political liberals as conservatives. Of late, however, fundamentalists have seldom failed to take a strong right-wing position on most issues (Barr, 1977, p. 110; Bruce, Chapter 9).

Nor is it possible to identify a universal constituency of support for fundamentalism. In the USA, Ruth suggests, fundamentalism was once the 'social and spiritual preoccupation of a minor segment of the ignorant and poor', but it has of late become associated with a much larger 'economically pinched and hostile middle class' (1983, p. 345). In Britain, too, according to Walker (Chapter 10), while fundamentalism was, at one time, identified with 'working-class enthusiasms', nowadays a number of movements, like Restorationism, attract primarily the middle class.

Although there seems to be a widespread consensus that Islamic fundamentalism appeals primarily to the educated classes (Dessouki, 1981, p. 108), this provides only a crude indication of the population from which an active following is actually drawn in diverse ethnographic situations. In Bamako, although Wahabism now draws recruits increasingly from the urban youth, Amselle (Chapter 4) reports that its mainstay has for some time been the commercial bourgeoisie, who find it a conducive and supportive ideology. The main activists in the Egyptian and Iranian fundamentalist movements discussed by Zubaida in Chapter 2, however, are drawn from a much wider social base. They include not only what he calls 'the intellectual proletariat' (students, teachers, minor functionaries), but elements of the urban



working class, petty shopkeepers and artisans who, he notes, tend invariably to become involved in oppositional politics, of whatever hue. But the peasantry and uneducated urban poor seem to be excluded from participation in these movements, although they may, of course, be mobilised sporadically to support their activities.

This contrasts with the Sikh fundamentalist movement considered in Chapter 6. According to Dietrich, it suggests a form of populism which not only seeks to re-establish the rights of ordinary people against those of the dominant economic and political interests in the society, but also involves the peasantry in a direct way.

If a comparison of disparate fundamentalisms does not offer the possibility of generalisation in terms of the substantive social locations or political tendencies of those to whom such religiosity appeals, it does expose clearly its oppositional character. Fundamentalism requires to be defined 'idiomatically', as Webber phrases it (Chapter 5), in terms of a significant 'other', to which it is antithetical and with which it constantly engages. In attempting to identify the cultural space within which to situate the phenomenon, therefore, we are impelled to seek its conceptual adversary.

## FUNDAMENTALISM AND MODERNISM

Several contributors address the question of the relation between fundamentalism and modernism. Although, as Ardener reflects, there are as many versions of modernism as persons attempting to define it (1985, p. 46), in the religious field, it has come to imply, among other things, innovation in scriptural interpretation, a less stringent application of religious codes, secularism, liberalism and rationality: in short, the adaptation of religious ideas and practices to modern culture. In the Protestant West, as already noted, fundamentalism arose as a self-conscious movement to proclaim and defend the 'essentials' of the faith in reaction to what were regarded as the compromising tendencies of modernist theologies. Indeed, without modernism, Carter remarks, 'there could have been no fundamentalism' (1968, p. 188). Walker (Chapter 10) suggests that modernism, and the strategies developed to guard against its effects and implications, is the focal problem to be addressed in any consideration of fundamentalism. In this connection, he comprehends the emergence of the Restoration movement in Britain as a strategic resistance to the social and moral climate of 'permissiveness' pervading the 1960s, and as a

particular response to the extreme liberal position represented by Robinson's *Honest to God* (1963), as well as to the recent debates within certain Protestant circles regarding the interpretation of Christ's incarnation and resurrection.

Both Dietrich and Taylor (Chapters 6 and 7) employ Eric Sharpe's formal model which identifies fundamentalism as the last in a three-phase dialectical process. This features *rejection* (of existing ultimate authority), *adaptation* (of the old to the new, hence the emergence of the liberal position), and *reaction* (on the part of those – fundamentalists – who reject the modernist position and seek to re-establish traditional 'ultimacies'). Thus, Taylor attributes the emergence of 'incipient fundamentalism' among Sri Lankan Tamil migrants in Britain to the influences of liberalism and permissiveness in the host society, and to the plural beliefs of other Hindu settlers. This has led some members of the community to perceive a challenge to the traditional authority of Saiva Siddhanta precepts, but their attempts to reassert the fundamentals threatens to lead to isolation from other Hindus as well as from more 'moderate' Saivites.

Sharpe's model underlines clearly the oppositional nature of the fundamentalist-modernist link, but the suggestion that it provides a universal paradigm for religious processes must be met with some reserve. Taylor, for one, suggests a need to separate the notion of secularism from that of modernity, though the two tend to be conflated willy-nilly in much Western sociological thinking. (Walker in Chapter 10 suggests that the secularisation thesis has generally been somewhat overplayed). Another caveat must be entered in respect of the sequencing of Sharpe's three phases. Webber's explication of the Jewish experience of modernity (Chapter 5) indicates the possibility for alternative histories of fundamentalism. In this situation, modernity has meant, on the one hand, an increasing assimilation into the cultural mainstream of those predominantly Western nations in which Jews have settled during the past century and, on the other, the emergence of a range of social and cultural associations which preserve group solidarity and define Jewish identity ethnically rather than in terms of traditional religious beliefs and institutions. The modern synagogue has become more a community centre than a place of worship. Those who appear to resist assimilation, and remain committed to non-modernist formulations of Judaism, attract the label 'fundamentalist'. Here, then, fundamentalism has not arisen in response to the challenge of modernity, but remains, for the modernists, a crucial residual

category. The tension between the two lies at the very root of contemporary Jewish society.

The fundamentalists' engagement with modernity is often alleged to involve a Luddite-like rejection of new technologies, consonant with their assumed disavowal of modern science. This view is refuted by the evidence from contributors which indicates that fundamentalists have not been slow to appreciate the advantages of these technologies and to adopt or adapt them to advantage. This may simply mean devising a special refrigerator motor to circumvent ritual prohibitions on the use of electricity during the Jewish sabbath (Chapter 5), or, more seriously, where fundamentalist groups are engaged in armed conflict, using up-to-date weaponry (Chapter 6). The acceptance of modern technologies and economic changes required by growing industrialisation is encouraged, according to the Tappers (Chapter 3), by the fundamentalist ideology of Turkish nationalism/republicanism, with its 'Protestant ethic'. This seems to accord with Humphreys's refusal to see any inherent contradiction between a commitment to fundamentalist ideals and a modernising, technocratic regime – such as that in Saudi Arabia (1979, p. 4). Amselle (Chapter 4) makes a similar observation in respect to the Wahabi community in Bamako.

Fundamentalists have also been quick to enter the field of modern mass communications in propagating their views. In the USA there are scores of television channels and hundreds of radio stations devoted exclusively to religious programmes, and dozens of gospel shows utilising secular commercial networks and stations. They are, for the most part, funded by and serve the interests of fundamentalist organisations, and Crawford (1980, p. 161) estimates that they reach close to 100 million Americans each week (see also Bruce, Chapter 9). In south India, several of the most popular local fundamentalist personalities also utilise the latest sound recording and broadcasting techniques (based on Western counterparts) to attract and retain their followings (Caplan, Chapter 8).

A refusal or inability to accommodate science in their world-view is often singled out by observers as evidence of fundamentalists' retreat from the modern world, yet such an assertion is also challenged by ethnography. The post-First World War controversy over the teaching of evolution in American state schools is increasingly regarded by historians of the period as a 'typical expression of the America of the 1920s', which actually discouraged various forms of dissent, rather than as the peculiar concern of Protestant fundamentalists (Sandein, 1970, p. 267). Moreover, hostility to the spread of Darwinian ideas

does not in itself constitute antipathy to science. The recent emergence of 'scientific creationism' within Protestant fundamentalism in the USA suggests precisely the opposite. What is posited is that 'science is knowledge, and the Bible is a book of true and factual knowledge throughout'. The Bible is said to 'contain all the basic principles upon which true science is built' and 'those who say the Bible is not a book of science have not read it very attentively' (H. M. Morris, quoted in Williams (1983, p. 98)). While it is possible to challenge creationist theory in a number of ways (as Williams does), what is relevant to note for our present purposes is that this knowledge is intended to be validated not on religious but on scientific grounds; on the grounds, that is, of the dominant explanatory paradigm in the most 'modernised' Western society. The fact that Morris, the major exponent of this theory, and many of his colleagues at the Institute for Creation Research are professional scientists (who 'know the difference between religion and science') adds to the authority of their claims: it is an 'argument by credentials', as Williams observes (1983, p. 101).

A tendency to read sacred texts in the light of contemporary scientific knowledge is also found among fundamentalists outside the Christian fold. Jewish and Muslim fundamentalists see no inherent difficulty in asserting that scripture can be made to fit within the framework of our scientific knowledge of the world today. In Mali, part of the appeal of Wahabism to young Bamakois is its favourable attitude towards science (Amselle, Chapter 4). Followers speak of the 'complementarity' of Islam and science, of how the former provides the latter with a 'soul', and of how Islam has in so many ways anticipated modern science, a recurrent theme among Muslims in Turkey as well. The Tappers (Chapter 3) report how fasting during Ramazan is said to be healthy and in accord with up-to-date ideas about what is good for the body. Hence the legitimacy of modern science is acknowledged within what is purported (by opponents) to be an anti-modern world-view.

Fundamentalists, by refusing to accept many of the cultural assertions and social implications of their contemporary world, are assumed by modernist protagonists – as by many academic and literary observers – to have excluded themselves from the mainstream of intelligent, rational discourse. In its mild form, this assessment may simply note an absence of theological sophistication (see Hollenweger, 1972, p. 186) or, as V. S. Naipaul has written of Islamic fundamentalism, the lack of any 'intellectual substance' (see Said, 1981, p. 7). In its more severe form, fundamentalism is represented as

the very antithesis of science and reason: 'rationalism and fundamentalism are two different ways of thought' (Amin, 1983, p. 24).

Any discussion of fundamentalism is bound, at some point, to confront the difficulties inherent in the notion of rationality. Both fundamentalists and modernists would claim rationality for their own beliefs and practices, though modernists – many of whom, as we have seen, tend to nominate others as fundamentalists in the first place – are also inclined to regard the beliefs and practices of the latter as less than rational. While this may tell us something about the construction of hierarchies of knowledge, it reveals little about the observances themselves. Perhaps Webber (Chapter 5) is right to complain that there is altogether too much stress on rationalism in current notions of modernism. But then Barr (and the Tappers in Chapter 3) regards rationalism as a crucial characteristic of fundamentalism. Walker (Chapter 10), for his part, criticises Barr for his refusal to see 'reason and rationality' in those modern forms of Protestant fundamentalism (such as Restorationism) which emphasise emotion, the supernatural and the miraculous. Caplan's discussion of a charismatic form of fundamentalism in south India (Chapter 8) certainly does not suggest that it implies an absence of reason or rationality. If anything, this particular brand of fundamentalism offers what most Protestants believe to be both a more satisfactory (reasonable? rational?) explanation for, and a more adequate (reasonable? rational?) means of coping with evil and misfortune in their everyday world. Further, given the threat of cultural and social absorption or annihilation, whether real or imagined, which confronts minorities like the Jews, Sikhs or Sri Lankan Tamils (Chapters 5, 6 and 7), a desire to defend the irreducible principles of their faith is in no sense an unreasonable or irrational project.

Instead of incorporating the notion of rationality as a defining ingredient of either modernism or fundamentalism, we might more usefully acknowledge its discursive potential, its capacity for proposing or constituting others as inferior, superstitious, or otherwise deviant, because they are seen to operate with a different 'mode of thought'. The notion of rationality, after all, assumes meaning only in the context of the kinds of knowledge or truth it seeks to reveal (Overing, 1985, p. 5).

We are therefore led away from seeking to understand either fundamentalism or modernism in terms of peremptory, essential qualities, or as categories which can be known by their objective characteristics. Each varies ethnographically, and so requires to be

approached in the context of interaction with its conceptual 'other'. This relationship, moreover, is too subtle and complex to be denoted by a crude and emphatic binary distinction which, as Webber suggests (Chapter 5), fails to convey adequately the manner in which fundamentalists and modernists contend, oppose, qualify and affect one another.

The abandonment of a rigid dualism also compels us to recognise that boundaries are permeable, so that particular religious ideologies can and do in fact incorporate elements of both fundamentalism and modernism. This is most evident in the Turkish and Malian studies by the Tappers and Amselle (Chapters 3 and 4). In both cases the predominant opposition is not between fundamentalism and modernism, but between a puritanical and conservative ('Barr type') fundamentalism – which includes many modernist elements – and those kinds of Islam organised around Sufi brotherhoods which feature mystical beliefs and practices. In Bamako, the Wahabis consider these activities as semi-pagan, and their leaders (the marabouts) as charlatans and 'mixers', who contaminate the purity of (Sunni) Islam. Here, those who would regard themselves as fundamentalists appoint others as deviant, and the latter's religious behaviours are rendered heterodox, superstitious, fanatic and the like. In different circumstances, they might be labelled 'fundamentalist'.

## FUNDAMENTALISM, TEXT AND TRUTH

The tendency to seek authority in scriptures on the basis of their infallibility touches on what is widely held to constitute one of the most significant features of the fundamentalist stance, though most contributors to this volume, as we shall see presently, suggest a more complex relation between fundamentalism and text. In the most general sense, however, any particular fundamentalism legitimates its existence and world-view by reference, among other things, to a corpus of sacred writings, the belief in whose veracity constitutes a prime test of faith. Protestant fundamentalism places a 'very strong emphasis' on Biblical literalism (Barr, 1977, p 1; see also Sandeen, 1970, p. 103). For Jewish fundamentalists, it is the rabbinic law (*halacha*) which is regarded as the authentic and inerrant amplification of the Torah; for Sikhs the Guru Granth Sahib is the Holy Book which symbolises and carries the authority of the 'living Guru'; for Sri Lankan Tamil worshippers of Siva, the Agamic canons are as sacred as

the Vedas; while for Muslims, it is the Quran and the Sunna (the traditions and example of the Prophet and his companions) which provide the irreducible written sources, and upon which the *shari'a* (the body of Quranic laws established over time by eminent theologians and jurists) is theoretically based. In Turkey, the Tappers (Chapter 3) note the emergence of parallels between Muhammad and Ataturk, whose texts are considered equally inerrant. The sayings and biographical highlights of both are beyond critical comment, and presented without wider social context.

The sacred texts are not simply the expression of timeless verities, but may constitute prime symbols of religious identity. A shared commitment to particular canons encourages a sense of exclusivity among believers. The more distinctive the beliefs, moreover, the clearer the dividing line between the faithful and those excluded. The growing 'fundamentalisation' of Islam in urban Malaysia and south India, for example, serves as an important means of distinguishing Muslims from the rest of the population (Nagata, 1980, p. 129; Mines, 1981, pp. 65–6). Walker (Chapter 10) stresses the point that doctrinal exclusivity need not be absolute to be effective. Restorationists in Britain subscribe to a range of beliefs and practices in common with a variety of other fundamentalist groups, as well as with some Protestants who might not normally attract such a label. They are distinguished and distinguish themselves primarily in respect of their observances relating to 'shepherding'. Based on a reading of several verses from St Paul's epistle to the Ephesians, this entails a hierarchy of ritual offices, whereby each member submits to a spiritual overseer.

Likewise, fundamentalist Sikhs are not alone in observing the tenets of their faith, and Dietrich (Chapter 6) suggests that they become differentiated from the generality of co-religionists by assuming a total commitment to a particular charismatic leader who is pledged to uphold the honour, integrity and equality of the community of believers. His followers demonstrate loyalty by a readiness to sacrifice their very beings to re-create the spiritually sanctified order of the *khalsa*.

The distinction may be expressed spatially as well as doctrinally. Zubaida (Chapter 2) reports on how one recently formed fundamentalist group which regards Egypt (indeed, most contemporary Middle Eastern societies) as not truly Islamic, encourages its members to live and pray apart from the mass of unbelievers, likening their separation to the *hijra*, the Prophet's flight from the corrupt society of Mecca. The 'Kingdom people', as Restorationists in Britain are sometimes called,



also foster a sense of exclusiveness by living close together – even taking over whole city streets – and providing various practical and professional services for one another (Walker, Chapter 10). A similar tendency is evident among certain Jewish groups who erect spatial and cultural boundaries which mark them off from the wider society, as indeed from the rest of the Jewish community (Webber, Chapter 5).

Such attempts at removal from constant exposure to the influences of the outside world underline the tendency for fundamentalist ideologies to address and appropriate the faithful as whole persons. The modernist dichotomy between the secular and religious realms is refused: the domain of the true believer is indivisible. In a paper at the original seminar series, to be published elsewhere as part of a larger work, Epstein (1986) considered the case of the Watchtower movement on the Copperbelt during the late 1950s (in what is now Zambia), and especially its implications for individual members. What he found striking was the ‘new sense of self’ it engendered, encouraged and moulded in the context of regular assemblies where the individual was made the focus of attention, given scope for personal expression, and offered suitable support in every endeavour by the entire congregation. The resulting commitment of such appeals to the self is often total. In the West, especially, this kind of attachment often leads to accusations of ‘brain-washing’ by the popular press (see Walker, Chapter 10), or is regarded as a form of addictive illness. There is now a Fundamentalists Anonymous in the USA to deal with the ‘problem’ (*Guardian*, 1 March 1986). One common Western diagnosis for similar ‘afflictions’ in Muslim societies is the ‘martyrdom complex’, or simply a primordial inclination for such religious activities, a view which Zubaida (Chapter 2) is anxious to dispel.

The advocacy of an exclusive doctrine unites its proponents against the mass of non-believers, but is also self-limiting. This becomes especially evident where a fundamentalist group, seeking to acquire wider political influence in a pluralist setting, is compelled to compromise with some of the very elements in society against which it has defined itself. Nagata reports how one particular Islamic fundamentalist leader in Malaysia speaks with conviction on a host of universal social issues when appearing before secular audiences in national and international contexts, but adjusts his oratory when among fellow believers. Here, she notes, the focus is on Islam and its identification with Malay interests, and ‘the idea of *jihad* [holy war] is heard’ (1980, p. 137).

Such compartmentalisation, as Bruce (Chapter 9) calls this kind of discursive alternation, is also practised by Jerry Falwell, leader of the Moral Majority. Falwell must constantly negotiate the thin line between an accommodative, inclusive rhetoric required of a national political figure, and the more exclusive rhetoric demanded by his fundamentalist constituents. The latter, Bruce notes, increasingly resent the invitation to join forces with Jews, Catholics and other Protestants who may share certain of their political views, but few, if any, of their religious beliefs. This fuels their growing suspicion of having been used as 'vote fodder' by the politicians.

Most of the texts which are held to be infallible can be located in history, and tend to be situated in this way by modernist theologians and believers. Scriptures are viewed principally in the context of conditions obtaining during the periods in which they were produced or to which they refer, and new exegeses are constantly offered to reinterpret doctrines and reflect their moral relevance in a changing milieu. Islamic modernists, for example, argue that the *shari'a* was 'shaped by scholars who were concerned to deduce an Islamic way of life which would fit the conditions of their time... [it] thus cannot be understood as a fixed repository of commands and prohibitions but... the end result of a long process of jurisprudence' (Humphreys, 1979, p. 5). A reformist like Mohammad Abdu in Egypt, therefore, would not insist on the strict application of Islamic law, particularly elements of the penal code and restrictions on women (Zubaida, Chapter 2). Similarly, Jewish modernists suggest that the *halacha* only codified (and should continue to codify) Jewish social and cultural realities existing at a particular moment in historical time (Webber, Chapter 5).

Fundamentalism, however, tends to represent these texts as timeless, out-of-time, and so valid for all time (Tappers, Chapter 3). By asserting the eternal verities of scripture, fundamentalism implies an ahistorical world-view (as Barr indicates), or perhaps we should say an altogether different conception of history, arising from a view of knowledge at variance with that of modernism. Rather than a discovery of the unknown, or an expansion of frontiers, the acquisition of knowledge is seen, in effect, as an archaeological process, an uncovering of truths already revealed in the texts, and only hidden from us by our own refusal or inability to apprehend them. This is 'an old Islamic view of knowledge', according to Cudsi and Dessouki (1981, p. 10), while such a notion is also 'central to Indian thinking through the ages' (Van Buitenen, 1968, p. 35; see also Parry, 1985, p.

205). It is the fundamentalists who nowadays defend this view of knowledge against the modernist conception.

In as much as fundamentalists desire a return to the pristine moral condition elucidated in the *vade mecum*, history itself comes to be perceived as a process of decline from an original ideal state, hardly more than a catalogue of the betrayal of fundamental principles. Thus, fundamentalist ideologues like Qutb in Egypt assert that the holy realm inaugurated by the Prophet and his followers in Medina – which exemplified all the principles of Islamic perfection – lasted for only a brief period, and degenerated after their death into *jahiliyya*, the chaos and corruption which attends the 'rule of man' and not the 'rule of God'. The perceived inferiority of Middle Eastern nations *vis-à-vis* European powers is thus attributed not to Islam as such, but to its defilement and decline (Zubaida, Chapter 2; see also Amin, 1983, p. 17). This view has echoes in the portrayal by the fundamentalist New Christian Right in the United States of a formerly 'great' America which obeyed God's commands but which has gradually been undermined by the secular humanists who control its government and institutions (Bruce, Chapter 9). Here too, the original state of perfection is recoverable only by a return to the essential principles contained in the holy scriptures.

In this connection, one of the most obvious concerns of the fundamentalists is to reverse the trend of contemporary gender relations which are seen as symptomatic of a declining moral order. In America today, one of the Moral Majority's principal anxieties is what it perceives as the undermining of the father's authority, which it attributes to women's growing role in the economy. This fading authority can only be re-established, it is argued, by the removal of wage-earning women from the labour market and their return to the home, and Falwell calls for the provision of an adequate and inflation-proof income for the sole (male) breadwinner. This wish to revive what it sees as the traditionally sanctioned sexual division of labour in the home leads, among other things, to the Moral Majority's vigorous opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment. In its view, women should be reinstated in their rightful domestic place, under the benign control of men (Eisenstein, 1982, pp. 576–7; see also Walker in Chapter 10 on the patriarchal character of Restorationism in Britain).

In the Islamic *shari'a*, as in the Jewish *halacha*, women are allocated a restricted and inferior ritual position. While modernists seek to ameliorate the effects of these codes, fundamentalists are more likely

to insist on their strict application. Women thus appear to assume a symbolic poignancy in fundamentalism – their dress, demeanour and socio-ritual containment providing eloquent testimony to what is regarded as the correct order of things.

Within both Christian and Islamic fundamentalisms this vision of a return to perfection is sometimes conveyed in starkly dyadic terms, so that history is seen to involve a cosmic struggle between good and evil, the former deriving from adherence to the essential principles propounded in scripture, the latter attributable to countless human digressions from them (Amin, 1983, p. 14; also Marsden, 1980, p. 211). Wahabis in Bamako are convinced that those who do not travel the Sunni path are followers of Satan (Amselle, Chapter 4), and similar sentiments characterise Protestant fundamentalist discourse (Bruce, Chapter 9). For this reason, Hofstadter describes the ‘fundamentalist mentality’ in America as essentially ‘Manichean’ (1964, p. 135).

Whether such texts are regarded as revelational or authoritative in some other ultimate sense, they are clearly the provenance in which fundamentalists seek a definitive blueprint for their contemporary beliefs and lifeways. But the proposition that a religious tradition is an integrated unity whose essentials are readily apparent and discernible is challenged from a number of sides. In the early part of this century there was, in fact, a collective effort within the Protestant fold to agree the basic principles of the faith. But the ‘essentials’ which emerged with each successive attempt expanded or contracted in number, or were differently stressed (Sandeep, 1970, p. xiv). Within Islam, even this degree of consensus is absent. Ahmad tells us that while Muslims in India subscribe to the fundamental Islamic precepts, there is ‘no unified definition of what is truly orthodox or truly “Islamic”’ (1981, p. 18).

Thus a return to the text, though presented as a rediscovery or reiteration of the fundamentals, involves of necessity a process of reformulation. Dessouki observes that innumerable groups each present their teachings as the real Islam (1981, p. 107). Fundamentalist movements in both Egypt and Iran, which equally regard the Quran as their ‘constitution’ and insist on the strict application of the *shari’a* none the less offer distinctive versions of the ‘sacred history’ of Islam (Zubaida, Chapter 2).

The degree of ‘creativity’ tolerated will depend on a number of factors, not least of which resides in the authority of the ideologues themselves, and so their capacity to win acceptance for their particular

constructions. Taylor (Chapter 7) records a somewhat audacious (and not entirely successful) attempt by the leader of a fundamentalist circle within the Sri Lankan Tamil community in Britain to insist on a public declaration of devotion to Siva as a sign of faith and loyalty, a practice which has no sanction in either scripture or custom.

The possibility of multiple constructions of the sacred history reminds us again that fundamentalist ideologies may be related oppositionally not only to modernist but to alternative fundamentalist discourses as well. Thus, the three pillars of Religious Zionism – the People of Israel, the Land of Israel and the Torah of Israel – were given a new priority of emphasis by the fundamentalist and politically expansionist Gush Emunim movement, with its stress on the Land of Israel. Aronoff reports that its political activities, which at times embarrassed even the sympathetic Likud Government, led at least one prominent minister and member of one of the strongly orthodox (fundamentalist) religious parties to regret the Gush's 'nationalist emphasis on the Land of Israel' at the expense of the 'religious emphasis on the Torah' (1983, pp. 74–8).

Similarly, writing about the Protestant community in Madras, Caplan (Chapter 8) describes how a stress on different aspects of the Bible produces two quite distinctive forms of fundamentalism. One is the legacy of the 'Evangelical Awakening' which concentrates on the salvation of the individual through a personal relationship with Christ, enjoins prayer and stipulated exercises of piety, and in general displays the attributes of conservative evangelicalism which Barr identifies as fundamentalism. It differs starkly from another variety of fundamentalism which has become popular during the past two decades. This stresses the confrontation between the forces of evil (as an array of external maleficent beings under the control of Satan) and good (symbolised in the person of Jesus in the role of miracle worker). The latter conceptions – which accord largely with popular south Indian theodicies – are authenticated by reference to those sections of the New Testament which present the cosmic struggle as the central theme of the text and speak of the charismata conferred by the Holy Spirit. Fundamentalists see such powers working nowadays through divinely chosen and charismatically gifted individuals.

Such differing constructions of sacred history suggest that the exegetical propensities of fundamentalists are no less developed than those of modernists, although the former would insist on the integrity and inviolability of the text. This 'fiction' is often preserved by means of structures which invest religious leaders with the right to pronounce what is and what is not authoritative knowledge.