

Book Review

Herriot, Peter, *RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM: GLOBAL, LOCAL, AND PERSONAL*

Routledge, New York, 2009, 332 p.

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This book provides an extensive social research into the issue of religious fundamentalism, and explores comprehensively some fundamentalist values and attitudes shared by larger and smaller groups and organizations. The social phenomenon of fundamentalism is seen in its antagonist relationship with modernity, though, at the same time, is perceived by the author as somehow embedded in the cultural fabric of modern, pluralistic societies.

The author argues that although fundamentalists share with the dominant culture some key elements (for example, the Protestant fundamentalists from United States share with the American culture the basic belief in God), they do, however, sustain other cultural beliefs, such as the view that secular modernism would lead to the disappearance of religion.

In the sociological study of religion, the thesis that modernization would increasingly lead to secularism is, as Herriot points out, only one way of answering the question as to how is fundamentalism related to modernity. An alternative answer is that the need for religion remains constant, though what varies is the effectiveness of its provision. Since fundamentalisms happen to be effective providers of religion in the contemporary world, the growth of fundamentalist movements is nowadays larger than before. But, as the author convincingly argues, explaining the relative growth of fundamentalism only in

terms of demand or supply is incorrect, since it overshadows the *reactionary and oppositional nature* of fundamentalism. The existence of something to react against provides both the opportunity and the object of fundamentalist opposition.

Fundamentalism is also seen as a global phenomenon, which subversively uses for its own purposes the technological and organizational opportunities created by the modernity, and the role played by new social identities shaped in resistance to the perceived injustice created by the globalization. At the same time, fundamentalism is described as having a dualistic character, which helps fundamentalist leaders to construct an agenda in opposition to a certain dominant modern culture. This culture is seen by fundamentalists as a threat to their own traditional belief-systems, and is consequently opposed by symbolic action.

The study of fundamentalist organizations includes various movements, such as the American Protestant fundamentalists, the Islamic terrorist cells, the reconstructionist movement, the ultra-orthodox anti-Zionist Jewish group Neturei Karta, and others. All of these are explored through case-studies that use the explanatory concepts of culture, identity, belief, value, or attitude. The strongest point of this research seems to be the dynamic and multifaceted approach of fundamentalisms, in their relationship to different cultures. It thus avoids simplificatory conclusions that would lead, for example, to the erroneous idea that fundamentalism arises only in relationship to a certain kind of modern culture.

Of course, every fundamentalist movement is reactionary and hostile to an Other, but it is important to notice that that Other is variable, and should, therefore, be understood in relation to a certain context. Hence, fundamentalisms could not be grasped simply by listening to the account by which the members of a certain reactionary group describe their hostility to an

Other, but by searching for the social and psychological origins of the fundamentalist fervor.

Even if the main context is widely speaking offered by the modern world, modernization itself has many levels and meanings. And if we should understand the phenomenon of modernization on many levels of analysis, such as the institutional and technical level, the cultural level, and the level of the self, we should also be able to understand the fundamentalist reaction to modernity on many levels of analysis. Fundamentalism is thus not only a "global" response to the globalist modernity. It also has local and individual embodiments. At the same time, individuals who share fundamentalist views have some personal motivations, although many of them have also strong social prejudices (for example, against homosexuals) and core beliefs influenced by a group of fellow-believers, which may be found at the social rather than the individual level of analysis.

As Herriot points out, there are also paradoxical fundamentalisms, such as the Jewish anti-Zionist group Neturei Karta, initially derived from many fundamentalist groups that reacted against the secular state of Israel. By cultivating a strong hostility to Zionism, this group has developed instead cordial relations with Muslim radical opponents of Israel, such as Abu Hamza and the President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran. They even agreed to sustain the revisionist vision about Holocaust, adopting the conspirational thesis that Holocaust was the product of Zionist political manipulation, and was intended to justify the post-war creation of the secular state of Israel. The anti-Semitic orientation of this movement could find its explanation only if we understood the complex structure of Judaism, which allows for the development of a variety of "orthodox" attitudes, according to the diversity of experience in the Jewish Diaspora. Herriot proposes also a logical explanation of the favorable attitude of Neturei Karta to Muslim and Arabs by reconstructing and briefly examining their core beliefs, which invariably lead to hostility to Zionism.

Since the "internal" enemy, i.e. Zionism, is perceived as absolutely negative, the out-groups became by comparison lesser enemies, and can even become friends, as "enemies of their enemies".

In short, this is a very complex analysis of contemporary fundamentalisms, which could be illuminating for all those who study the relationship between politics and ultra-orthodox religious movements from the perspective of social and political science. At the same time, it offers a valuable insight into the historical relation between post-Enlightenment secular modernity and religion, and may fuel reflection on the counter-secularization that came of some processes of secularization during the period of late modernity.