



THE JAMES A. BAKER III INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY  
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THREE PATHS TO EDEN:  
CHRISTIAN, ISLAMIC, AND JEWISH  
FUNDAMENTALISMS

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**Three Paths to Eden:  
Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Fundamentalisms**

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## **Three Paths to Eden: Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Fundamentalisms**

### **Introduction**

On September 11, 2001, a small band of zealots, acting at least in part from religious conviction, brought a powerful nation to a horrifying standstill with devastating attacks on its preeminent symbols of wealth and military might. This shattering event underlined once again the power of religious fundamentalism to disrupt and destroy, underscoring the need for deeper understanding of this increasingly widespread social phenomenon.

Any longstanding religion may experience outcroppings of the fundamentalist impulse, the desire to return to some imagined pristine social and cultural state by rigid adherence to a set of beliefs and practices deemed central, or fundamental, to that faith. But this impulse has appeared most often and most clearly in Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, the classic “Religions of the Book,” all of which appeal to authoritative scriptures and traditions to validate them in their struggle with modernity and pluralism.

Because I have had personal acquaintance with fundamentalist religion, I use “fundamentalism” not in a pejorative sense but to refer to movements grounded in the fundamentals of a religious tradition, fundamentals that its proponents seek to reassert—or restore—in the face of perceived threat or loss. “Fundamentalism” is not a perfect term, and many to whom it is applied do not much like it, given the negative response it often generates, but it can be useful and is worth retaining. Typically, fundamentalism has a reactive, oppositional quality that distinguishes it from orthodoxy, which is more concerned with remaining faithful to a tradition than with fending off or conquering an opposing force. Fundamentalists are fighters, facing a serious threat.

Threats to fundamentalism tend to flow from the common and widespread processes of modernization and secularization. These processes are not so inextricably related to one another as many have thought. The United States, for example, is at or near the top on almost any measure of modernization, yet it remains one of the most religiously vital countries in the world. Islamic revival often finds its most fervent advocates not in rural villages but among well-

## **Three Paths to Eden: Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Fundamentalisms**

educated professionals and engineers in major urban centers. Fundamentalists have, moreover, proved quite skilled at using the tools of modernity—radio, television, computers, the Internet—to spread and support their message. Still, modernity or, more specifically, “modern consciousness,” does pose a distinct threat to any traditional order, religion included. As business, medicine, education, politics, law, and the military operate more and more “without benefit of clergy,” without reference to what God wants us to do, religion becomes compartmentalized and loses its power and influence in other institutional spheres. Fundamentalism, then, is a reassertion of religious authority, an attempt to revitalize a sacred tradition and administer it as an antidote to a society that has strayed from its cultural moorings. Fundamentalism rejects the separation between the sacred and the secular that has evolved with modernization; it is an attempt to bring religion back to center stage as an important—indeed, the overriding—factor in public policy decisions.

Fundamentalism can take numerous forms. Within days preceding my writing of this essay, I have read a book about Mormon fundamentalism, discussed a type of Catholic fundamentalism with a relative, and thought actively about a form of Indian nativism referred to as Hindu fundamentalism. As noted, however, I want to concentrate in this essay on three forms of fundamentalism with particular relevance to contemporary world affairs: Protestant Christian, Islamic, and Jewish. These three differ from each other, and fundamentalist factions within each tradition differ among themselves, but they tend to share a number of characteristics.

### **Common Characteristics of Fundamentalisms**

Fundamentalism typically involves an attempt to reclaim the values and practices of a Golden Age, an earlier, allegedly finer and more pristine era with a good and just moral order—for example, the New Testament Church, early America as a Christian Nation, a City Set on a Hill; the era of the Prophet Muhammad and his Rightly Guided Companions; the Lithuanian *Shetl*, where true Judaism was authentically practiced. The description of the pristine time includes an account of how this idealized and romanticized social order went astray. Reminiscent of the story of the Garden of Eden, found in both the Bible (Genesis 2-3) and the Qur’an (Sura ii and vii, v.

## **Three Paths to Eden: Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Fundamentalisms**

19-25), fundamentalism identifies symbols of evil, delineates moral breakdown, and condemns the corruption of values.

A second key characteristic is an authoritarian interpretation of God that allows the fundamentalist easily to sort humanity into two groups: those who believe and those who do not, the saved and the unsaved, the true followers of God and the disciples of the Great Satan. There are no shades of gray between light and dark. Opposing thought is to be condemned and stifled.

Closely related to this authoritarian view of God is an emphasis on the authority of scripture and related sacred traditions with a corresponding rejection of critical history, empirical science, and the claims of human reason. This often manifests itself in a preference for schools that emphasize subjects and approaches supportive of the fundamentalist tradition's worldview.

Fundamentalists often give greater attention to superstructural issues than to foundational matters. For example, they may show more concern about drinking alcohol, sexuality, pornography, profanity, modes of dress, segregation of the sexes, observance of a sacred day (the Muslim Friday, the Jewish Sabbath, or the Christian Sunday), performance of ritual (baptism, prayers, ceremonial reading), keeping fasts, eating or not eating certain foods, resisting innovation (for example, the Southern half of my nineteenth-century fundamentalist background, the Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement, resisted the encroachment of instrumental music in worship, a prohibition that endures to this day in about half of the congregations associated with that movement), and abstaining from dancing "and such like." Fundamentalists tend to "major in minors" such as these rather than focusing on "the weightier matters" such as justice, economic fairness, fair treatment of religious and ethnic minorities, preservation of the environment, or war and peace.

Fundamentalisms are typically patriarchal. Women are consistently regarded as properly subordinate to men.

## **Three Paths to Eden: Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Fundamentalisms**

Fundamentalists usually show a preference for theocracy, or at least greater unity between church and state. This is strongest among Muslims, muted among American Christians by the firmly entrenched tradition of church/state separation but under increased challenge (for example, the growing favor for government support of “faith-based” charities and provision of vouchers for use in private schools), and quite alien to some forms of Jewish orthodoxy, while intrinsic to others.

Fundamentalists make a claim of absolute knowledge. All that is truly necessary is part of the tradition; anything that contradicts the tradition is wrong. They also make a claim of absolute values that contrasts with the cultural and ethical relativism that is part of the definition of modernity.

The major forms of contemporary fundamentalism all claim that human history as we know it will end by supernatural intervention, typically featuring the appearance of a messiah and initiation of a new Golden Age.

### **Protestant Fundamentalism**

Fundamentalism has swept through Christianity in America in two great waves, the first of which was at the midpoint of the 19th century, following on the heels of the Second Great Awakening, which was led by southern camp meetings in the early years of that century and by the revivals of Charles Grandison Finney in its second quarter. Evangelical Christianity was then the dominant form of religion in America, characterized by confidence in the reliability of scripture, an emphasis on personal piety, and heavy involvement in an impressive variety of reformist voluntary associations. Following the Civil War, Protestant orthodoxy was hit with a series of major challenges. Darwin’s theory of evolution challenged the Biblical account of creation; if Darwin was right, then the Bible was in error and God was not needed to explain the origin of species. German Biblical Criticism challenged the inspiration of scripture; if this “higher criticism” was right, then the Bible, like other ancient books, had been assembled from various sources, some with competing agendas, was not of supernatural origin, and its history

### **Three Paths to Eden: Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Fundamentalisms**

and its science were not to be regarded as authoritative. At about the same time that Protestants were becoming cognitively dismayed, immigration by Jews, Catholics, Eastern Europeans, and Mediterranean Europeans challenged and weakened the traditional hegemony in America of Northern-European Protestants. Industrialization and the attendant urbanization brought about an increase in secularization and, with the growth of poverty and associated ills, undermined optimistic views of progress and human nature that had characterized evangelical preaching, particularly before the war. Some churches, especially those whose clergy had been influenced by the new Biblical studies and had lost some confidence in the reality of heaven and hell, began to proclaim a Social Gospel that placed more emphasis on this-worldly outcomes than on questions of eternal life. Ironically, because evangelicals associated the Social Gospel with decline in conservative views of scripture, they largely retreated from their earlier involvement in service-oriented efforts. In response, then, to these late-19th-century and early-20th-century developments, Protestant Christian Fundamentalism arose and took on the characteristics by which we still recognize it.

Before the rise of Biblical Criticism, American Christians had no strong, well-delineated doctrine of Biblical inspiration. As Christians had done for centuries, they simply assumed that the Bible, as the Word of God, was true and reliable. Now, they needed to formulate a defense against the new attacks and articulate a position on inspiration. The crucial work was done at Princeton Theological Seminary. The heart of the “Princeton Theology” is that God could not and would not convey truth through an errant document; therefore, any doubting of scripture is heresy, a sign of un-Christian attitude. This remains the position held by most Protestant fundamentalists today. Those who deviate from this position and suggest that some of the moral and cultural prescriptions found in the Bible need to be revised to reflect a new situation after the passing of two or three millennia, or who give the wrong answer to test questions specifically designed to smoke them out, can be thrown out of a church, fired from a seminary, removed from power in a denomination, taken off a Christian radio or television station, ostracized from circles of friends, and marked as persons whose views should no longer be considered.

### **Three Paths to Eden: Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Fundamentalisms**

Closely related to firm belief in biblical inspiration, and utterly dependent on it, was increased interest in biblical prophecy, and particularly in the doctrine of premillennialism—the notion that Christ would return to reign on earth for a thousand years before the final wrap-up of history. In its current form, this doctrine teaches that ordinary human history will occur in accord with a detailed plan laid out by God in the scriptures, but overlooked by Christian theologians for 1800 years.<sup>1</sup> When Christ comes again, he will “rapture” faithful Christians up into the heavens where they will escape “the tribulation,” seven truly terrible years on earth; he will exercise command over his triumphant forces during the “Battle of Armageddon” and will then set up his millennial kingdom on earth and reign from his capital, Jerusalem. Because this will happen “soon,” human efforts to change social conditions and preserve the environment are pointless. The key task is to bear witness to as many souls as possible before the Lord returns. This doctrine (or some version of it) is widespread within the Christian Right and has enormous consequences for American foreign policy.

Between 1910 and 1915, a widely distributed set of twelve small volumes entitled *The Fundamentals: A Testimony of the Truth*, written by some of the most respected men in the movement, established “fundamentalist” as the common term to identify the conservative wing of American Protestantism. In 1919, the term gained further currency by the founding of the World Christian Fundamentals Association (WCFA) at a Philadelphia meeting attended by 6,500 delegates and led by the luminaries, most of whom lived in major northern cities. Fundamentalists of this period were fond of drawing up lists of “Fundamentals of the Faith,” from which no deviation could be tolerated. They tried to purge their denominations of “Modernists,” whom they considered to be unfaithful. Not surprisingly, this confrontational approach met with considerable resistance. The worst conflicts came among the Presbyterian and Northern Baptist churches, which eventually opted for a more flexible form of Christianity and squeezed the fundamentalists out. Not all the action was in the North. In the South, anti-

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<sup>1</sup>The classic form of this doctrine, known as Dispensationalist Premillennialism, was formulated and popularized most effectively by British evangelist, John Nelson Darby—it is sometimes called Darbyite Dispensationalism—in the middle of the 19th century, then given almost canonical status by its incorporation into the notes of the widely used Scofield Study Bible, first published in 1909 and still in print by Oxford University Press. More recently, this doctrine has been popularized in Hal Lindsey’s *The Late Great Planet Earth* and the phenomenally popular *Left Behind* series of novels by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins.

## **Three Paths to Eden: Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Fundamentalisms**

evolutionists made concerted efforts to prohibit the teaching of evolution in public schools, culminating in the Scopes Trial in 1925. Though Scopes was convicted, fundamentalism was held up to ridicule throughout the world.

In 1920, fundamentalism had seemed to be on a roll. It was energetic and growing. It counted Billy Sunday and William Jennings Bryan, two of the most famous men in America, among its leaders, and it celebrated a great victory with the passage of Prohibition in 1919. By the end of the decade, however, fundamentalists were in retreat, seemingly defeated and perhaps even headed for extinction. Instead, they consolidated, built on their strengths, and transformed themselves in anticipation of new opportunities. They formed numerous fundamentalist alliances, similar to the World Christian Fundamentals Association. They built large independent congregations, the forerunners of today's megachurches. They established Bible Colleges and Institutes to train people for various ministries, without exposing them to the corrupting influences of the liberal arts. They made extensive use of print and electronic media, laying firm foundations for today's religious broadcasting and the enormous popularity of religious publications.

In the early 1940s, an influential group of more moderate leaders decided it was time to come out of the wilderness and reengage the world on less confrontational terms, to emphasize evangelism more than the protection of sound doctrine. That wing eventually became what we now call Evangelicalism, with Billy Graham as the best-known representative and most influential leader. The more conservative segment was led by Carl McIntire, who had broken away from Princeton and who continued to be a fundamentalist firebrand until his death in 2002 at the age of 95.

Fast-forwarding a few decades to the 1960s and after, we encounter a morphed fundamentalism, the Christian Right, also a reactive movement. Most of its founders and members share a background of noninvolvement with the secular world: As a matter of theological conviction, they once believed their primary task was to win souls, not elections. Millions did not even vote. That has changed, they claim with considerable justification, because perceived threats have forced them into the political arena. During the 40 years since the Consciousness Revolution of

### **Three Paths to Eden: Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Fundamentalisms**

the '60s (another sort of Great Awakening in America), a series of catalyzing events and developments—Supreme Court decisions prohibiting school-sponsored prayer and Bible reading, the widespread introduction of sex education into the schools, feminism, abortion, gay rights, AIDS, soaring divorce rates, sex and violence in the media, etc.—either generated direct response or fomented situations that continue to call for Christian moral action.

Beyond these concerns, fundamentalist Christians have also been deliberately, carefully, and aggressively recruited into politics by such conservative operatives of the New Right as Richard Viguerie, Paul Weyrich, and Howard Phillips, associated with such organizations as the Heritage Foundation and the Free Congress Foundation, a process that I describe in detail elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> It is easily possible to under- or over-estimate the real impact of the Christian Right, but certain assertions seem reasonably safe. Thousands of fundamentalist and evangelical pastors and millions of their flocks who were not much involved in politics until about 1980 have become convinced their Christian duty compels them to get involved. They represent millions of rather easily mobilized votes, and they are likely to cast their votes on the same side of a number of identifiable issues. Moreover, many who were recruited into politics by the Christian Right no longer see themselves as needing to wear that theological label. They are simply Republicans, the Party of “traditional values,” now possessing a great deal more sophistication and knowledge of how our political system works.

Christian fundamentalists dominate Republican Party organizations in at least 18 states and they have substantial influence in at least 26 other state Republican organizations, for a total of 44 states—all the states but six in the Northeast and the District of Columbia. In about half of the 26 states, more moderate Republicans are offering strong resistance. In the Republican-majority Congress in place in January 2005, the top echelon of Republican leaders in both the House and the Senate received approval ratings of 87-100 percent on the 2004 Christian Coalition Scorecard, indicating their vote on issues of key interest to Christian conservatives; the highest score received by their Democratic counterparts was 16 percent.

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<sup>2</sup> William Martin, *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 1996; revised edition, 2005), the companion book to the 1996 PBS television series by the same title, produced by Lumiere Productions, New York.

### **Three Paths to Eden: Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Fundamentalisms**

The Christian Right controls the party platform. Though political platforms tend to be more symbolic than substantive, they are an important symbol. Because they are “official,” they have a way of causing people to think they ought to be taken seriously. Christian conservatives have thus been phenomenally successful at getting their agenda on the record, and they are working to get their beliefs incorporated into public policy.

Their agenda is the same list of aversions to modernity and secularity mentioned above—opposition to abortion, gay rights, pornography, violence and sex in the media; secular humanism in the schools, the teaching of evolution, and any form of sex education that is not abstinence-based. They support student vouchers for private religious schools; they favor a greater presence in public venues for religious symbols such as crosses and the Ten Commandments and for rituals such as prayer in the schools and other public settings and including “Under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance. Since many of these issues fall under the jurisdiction of the courts, they press for the nomination and confirmation of conservative judges, from the Supreme Court on down.

On foreign policy issues, they push hard for sanctions against nations that persecute Christians or that restrict evangelistic work among native populations. They oppose giving aid to countries or to organizations such as the United Nations or the World Health Organization if any of the money can be used to pay for abortions. In large measure because of opposition from the Religious Right, the United States has cancelled or severely reduced contributions to the U.N. Population Fund, jeopardizing a program that provides contraceptives to nearly 1.4 million women in 150 countries. Pressure from Christian conservatives has also led to legislation stipulating that all federal monies for sex education in U.S. schools (\$167 million in 2004) go to abstinence-only programs that are forbidden to provide information about contraceptive options. In a similar spirit, Congress currently requires that one-third of all funds allocated to the global HIV/AIDS pandemic (\$2.9 billion in 2004) be spent on abstinence-only programs, rather than for such proven disease-reduction measures as instruction about safe sex and distribution of condoms.

### **Three Paths to Eden: Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Fundamentalisms**

Surprising to some, fundamentalist Christians also tend to be critical of multinational or broad-scope organizations such as the European Union, the Trilateral Commission, the Council on Foreign Relations, the International Court of Justice, and the World Council of Churches. In part, this stems from standard-issue isolationism and a fear of compromising American safety and economic interests and sacrificing national sovereignty to an international, liberal world order. But it also relates to the premillennialist doctrine that before Jesus returns, a great consolidation of power will take place under the headship of The Antichrist in the area that covers the old Roman Empire. Any significant transnational organization—especially the E.U.—is an easy target for suspicion.

This same doctrine of premillennialism is responsible for the Christian Right's unwavering and uncritical support of Israel, making Christian fundamentalists the greatest friends that Israel has in America, apart from Jews. This doctrine also teaches that Jesus will not return until Jews are in possession of the whole Land of Promise, both Judea and Samaria, including those parts now called "the West Bank," and until the Temple has been rebuilt in Jerusalem, on Temple Mount, where the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque now stand, the third holiest site in Islam after Mecca and Medina. By this standard, then, dismantling the settlements in Palestinian areas cannot be condoned, whereas a takeover of all Jerusalem by Israelis is permissible. If the settlements go and the Temple is not rebuilt, Jesus will not come and the millennium will continue to be postponed.

Although the fundamentalist Christian Right is not a juggernaut that can level all opposition, it is clearly a formidable movement with a powerful set of resources. Enmeshed in webs of churches and clergy, reinforced by the intense personal networks common in congregations, and exposed repeatedly to a clear theological and political message in sermons, religious publications, mass mailings, email, television, and talk radio, its members tend to have a missionary zeal seldom matched by those on the left and almost never by the more moderate middle. Even more important, they are determined not to give up the fight, especially since they seem to be winning more and more rounds.

### **Islamic Fundamentalisms**

The worldwide resurgence of Islam, which includes a fundamentalist response but is not limited to it, is also a reaction to crisis. The crisis for Islam has been painfully acute. The rapid expansion of Islam during its formative period, much of it by conquest, seemed to be self-evident confirmation of its truth. Within a hundred years after Muhammad's death in 632 C.E., Islam spread from Arabia westward to Spain and eastward to India, consequently becoming the enlivening spirit of rich and flourishing civilizations that reached into Asia, swallowed up the Christian Byzantine East, and are still effectively working their way southward through Africa. The spread of Islam, a religion that teaches the common brotherhood of all men and simple allegiance to the Almighty, is one of the more remarkable movements in human history. Its success was seen as proof that it was of God.

Beginning in the 17th century and progressing steadily until after World War I, the great Ottoman Empire—that is to say, Islamic civilization centered in Turkey—began to be overrun and dismantled by European forces, primarily the French, the British, and the Russians. These European nations, once scorned by Muslims as backward and inferior—they were right about that at the time—had become the beneficiaries of Modernity, Enlightenment, and the Industrial Revolution, and now possessed superior weaponry, superior strategy, superior science, superior technology, superior organization. If Islam (complete submission to the will of Allah) is invincible, how could such a new thing in history have come about? The collapse of international Islam into squabbling national and ethnic enclaves precipitated further crisis within the religion itself, a challenge to the legitimacy of Islam. If Muslim power had been a sign of divine favor, its decline could only mean that favor had been lost. Divine revelation warned that departure from the straight path of Islam meant the loss of God's guidance and protection, and now it had happened. The decline of Islam demanded a response, and several were forthcoming.

On the left, some leaders met the onslaught of modernity by opting for a secularist approach. They discarded much that stood in the way of accommodating the West and they rejected Shari'a (the legal tradition based on the Qur'an, the holy book; the Sunnah, sayings of the Prophet; and the Hadith [traditions about the Prophet]) as the basis for law and society. The most successful

### **Three Paths to Eden: Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Fundamentalisms**

example of this approach was in Turkey, where Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the Young Turks called for, among other unthinkable changes, the separation of the religious and political realms and the complete emancipation of women.

Others, sometimes called Islamic Modernists or Reformists, tried to bridge the gap between Islamic concepts and modernity, and to adapt the new technologies and political and administrative ideas to the structures of Middle Eastern societies. They stressed the need for independence from foreign control, but they did not repudiate the Western ethos and Western ways. They also urged a revival of *ijtihad*, the use of reason and common sense, rather than upholding a traditional ethos that was no longer working.

A third and increasingly prominent response was, and continues to be, fundamentalist Islam—also known as Islamic Activism, Political Islam, or simply Islamist—an insistence on an overwhelming rejection of non-Muslim, secular society, and on exact fulfillment of the Shari'a, with strong emphasis on the comprehensive and universal nature of the message of God as presented in the Qur'an.

In this view, religious leaders are justified in trying to get, seize, and infiltrate power. The American model of church/state separation is viewed as false and inferior. Some Muslim fundamentalists are willing to use violence, armed *jihad*, in their efforts to make Muslim countries more Muslim and eliminate secularists as well as Christians and Jews, and to strike out at non-Muslim powers in their own lands. If this cannot be managed by force, by the strong form of *jihad*, then *hijrah* (separation) is mandatory.

The fundamentalist response grows most when Muslim societies experience modernization intensely. The first leaders to encounter the West typically experiment with secularism and reform. As the masses begin to get caught up, fundamentalist leaders perceive the threat and attempt to preserve traditional ways. One way to do this is to keep the sacred canopy over culture and society securely in place. This reaffirmation of the past is understandably attractive to sincere Muslims, for it depicts Islam as a divinely inspired, comprehensive, self-sufficient

### **Three Paths to Eden: Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Fundamentalisms**

ideology that offers a way to fend off the secularizing influences and practices that threaten the tradition.

Though Islamic fundamentalism came to full flower in the 20th century, it is important to note that by the 18th century, before the confrontation with the European powers became critical, Muslim societies were showing serious signs of strain, as large empires always do, and some reformers had begun to call for a sociomoral reconstruction of society on the foundations of Islam. The most important early voice of reform was the Wahhabi movement, established on the Arabian Peninsula by Muhammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab in the mid-1700s. Wahhab challenged the compromises and moral laxity he believed the Muslim states had made. He and his followers did not like compromise and sought to purify and perfect the faith of individual believers and to call on rulers to assist them in this effort. They also emphasized the universalistic character of Islam, the global community of the faithful—the *ummah*.

Wahhab was supported by Muhammad al-Sa'ud, a local ruler (r. 1745-65). The Wahhabi state is based on the close cooperation of a learned teacher (*shaykh*) and an able commander (*emir*), a combination of religious and political leadership advantageous to both. The original Wahhabis helped the Saudis gain control of most of the Arabian Peninsula and solidified “Wahhabism” as a major reform movement in modern Muslim history. Osama bin Laden is a current example of Wahhabism. The Saudi monarchy needs cooperation and approval of the *ulama* (the religious authorities) to enhance its legitimacy; the *ulama* need royal support to maintain their privileges and wield some influence over policymaking. Although considerable tension exists, the royal family winks at the excesses of the Wahhabis in return for their support, and the Wahhabis tolerate the royal family's excesses in return for monetary and political support. Wahhabism today continues to call for the Islamization of society and the creation of a political order that gives appropriate recognition to Islam. It continues to operate within the modern world but was not initiated as a result of conflict with the modernized western powers. It is the most enduring experiment within the broader mission of Islam, and it has provided a standard against which other movements and states have been measured. Wahhabism's export has been made possible

### **Three Paths to Eden: Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Fundamentalisms**

by the sale of Saudi petroleum products. Apart from oil, and financed by it, Wahhabism is Saudi Arabia's most notable export.

The first major movement in the 20th century was the Muslim Brotherhood, founded in Egypt in 1928 by Hasan al-Banna, who organized groups dedicated to improving the moral life of students and helping people to live more strictly in accord with Islamic law and to resist what he regarded as a new crusade to destroy Islam by means of social corruption and unbelief. Though the Muslim Brotherhood was not an official political party, it became a significant political force, primarily through organizing or participating in mass demonstrations. After a member of the Brotherhood assassinated the Egyptian prime minister in 1948, al-Banna was murdered and the Brotherhood was officially suppressed, but it did not disappear. When members of the group tried to kill President Nasser, who took control of Egypt in 1952, many of them were executed or put into prison, where a substantial number became even more radicalized. Muslim Brotherhoods developed in Syria and the Sudan, and similar groups arose in other countries. Though without formal ties, they shared many common interests and tactics. The Brotherhood remains active today, but has become somewhat less radical as it has gained ground in professional associations of doctors, lawyers, pharmacists, engineers, and university professors.

A second key figure, with ties to the Muslim Brotherhood, was another Egyptian, Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966). Qutb visited the United States in 1948 and was thoroughly repulsed by what he saw. In his voluminous writings, the most important of which is *Milestones*, he provided an intellectual and theoretical foundation for the rejection by Muslims of both Nasser's attempts to develop a distinctive Arab Socialism and other western-based ideologies. Qutb told Muslims that they must combat—violently if necessary—*jahiliyya* (unbelief; also, the state of society before Islam) wherever they find it, especially in regimes that claim to be Muslim but whose implementation of Islamic precepts are seen as imperfect. Because of his harsh criticism of Nasser's regime, Qutb was arrested in 1954 and spent ten years in prison before being brought to trial and hanged in 1966. He was, however, allowed to write while in prison and he is often regarded as the true father of modern Islamic fundamentalism.

### **Three Paths to Eden: Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Fundamentalisms**

The only person whose thought and writing have rivaled Qutb's in popularity and influence was Maulana Abul Ala Maududi, the founder in 1941 of Jamaat-I-Islami, a militant Pakistani movement that also helped spawn the Taliban. Southeast Asia also gave rise to the Tablighi Jamaat, which is more concerned with personal piety than with political activism, and is extremely conservative on matters such as the role of women, proper dress and appearance, and strict observance of devotional practices, and which spreads its message by means of itinerant evangelists working in teams.

The cultural challenge of the North Atlantic civilization presents Muslim fundamentalism several targets. One is imperialism—the historical fact that the Islamic world began to crumble under the impact of Early Modern European civilization deeply disturbs Muslim fundamentalists. Now in its fourteenth century, Islam in many countries is quite “medieval” (to use a fine word in a pejorative way); many Muslims know this, and resent being looked down on by sophisticated Europeans and Americans. Modern and secular values are also seen as threatening to a godly life. Muslim fundamentalists condemn, for example, western materialism, sexual and other forms of immorality as seen in movies and on television and in the addictive use of alcohol and drugs. Capitalism and communism, both of them North Atlantic models of social and economic organization, are seen as dangers contrary to the revealed truth of God and destructive to Muslim culture. Moderate Muslims have new models of Islamic economics, including Arab Socialism, but these have not been notably successful.

Patriarchal subordination of women is common, reaching extremes in those Islamic societies where women may not appear in public without a male escort, may not drive, may not receive an education beyond learning how to be a wife and mother, may not engage in a range of occupations, and certainly may not vote. This varies from Muslim country to Muslim country; in Egypt, for example, the liberation of women is far more advanced than in most other Muslim countries, but even in Egypt, fundamentalist elements are agitating to return to the purity of patriarchal control. Even where women have been granted certain rights, a fundamentalist takeover can quickly rescind them, as occurred in Afghanistan under the Taliban.

### **Three Paths to Eden: Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Fundamentalisms**

The State of Israel looms large in the consciousness of Muslims. The partitioning of Palestine and the founding of the State of Israel in 1947-48 was a severe blow to Arab pride and Palestinian nationalism when a half-million Jews reentered the Land after a 2,000-year absence, occupied the Holy City (Palestinian Muslims think of Jerusalem as their “Mother”), appropriated their houses and orchards, and forced an entire generation of Palestinians to grow up inside the barbed-wire confines of Arab concentration camps. The combined efforts of five Arab states and indigenous Palestinians were unavailing against this new Conquest of Canaan, a wound that bled for twenty years, only to be deepened in 1967 by the Six-Day War, when the Israelis, in a lightning show of military power and strategy, seized everything west of the Jordan, including Jerusalem, and south to and including the Sinai Peninsula. At this lowest point of decline in Arab fortunes, jokes and cartoons poking fun at Arab impotence were humiliating to Arabs. In this state of war, fundamentalist Jews carried the encroachment farther by settling on Palestinian land, which continued to feed Arab outrage. To the Muslim mind, the suggestion that a tiny nation, officially secular but overwhelmingly Jewish and backed by European and American power, can dominate nations that believe themselves to be entirely submitted to God, is intolerable. Muslims are convinced that were it not for American-made Apache helicopters and F-16 fighter planes and billions of dollars from American Jews and the U.S. government, this history would have been different.

American foreign policy offers other causes for offense: sanctions and then war against Iraq, failure to offer sufficient support to Muslims in Chechnya and Kashmir, support of corrupt regimes in various countries, and the presence of American troops in Saudi Arabia, the home of Mecca and Medina, Islam’s two most hallowed sites.

For those involved—and it is important to insist that they are not the majority of Muslims—this is a true Culture War, whose aim is not only to defeat or drive out the infidel, but also to rediscover or recreate a satisfactory personal and communal identity. It is a search for authority, for roots, for a new birth. This is the perfect soil for fundamentalism.

### **Three Paths to Eden: Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Fundamentalisms**

Islamic fundamentalism differs from region to region and group to group, based mainly on intensity of commitment. Some are so consumed that they cannot tolerate the failings of their own governments, so they declare war on their rulers. The most famous example of this, of course, is the 1979 revolution in Iran, where Shi'a forces inspired by such as Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini ousted the modernist (but dictatorial) regime of the Shah and established the most successful fundamentalist regime to date. In Algeria, a strong showing by the Islamic Salvation Front in 1992 elections led to a crackdown by the military, which led in turn to the rise of the Armed Islamic Group, a powerful organization that launched a brutal guerilla war against government forces, journalists and intellectuals, and, eventually, ordinary Algerians who did not follow the Shari'a. Though they have failed to achieve their goal of reforming their societies, fundamentalists in Egypt engineered the assassinations of Anwar Sadat in 1981 and radical Islamists continue to bedevil the monarchy in Saudi Arabia. Because they enjoy the certainty of knowing God's will, they feel justified in using any means, and they readily adopt violent methods, including terrorism. If they reach power, they attempt to implement a program based on the Shari'a. This inevitably arouses wide resistance and makes it necessary to exercise coercive control.

The fundamentalist response became so widespread during the last quarter of the 20th century, particularly after the success of the Iranian Revolution and again after the *mujahedin* drove the Russians out of Afghanistan, enabling the Taliban to seize power, that an Islamic leader who fails now to appeal to religion to bolster his regime will squander important political capital. Appeal to religion makes strategic sense when one considers the widespread revival of Islamic practice, as reflected in dress, observance of prayers and other obligations, involvement in youth organizations, and energetic missionizing.

Fundamentalism has strong appeal as masses of people try to preserve their traditional way of life, and those whom fundamentalist leaders such as Osama bin Laden recruit are not only the oppressed. They are often people who have a good education, who come from good backgrounds, and who are socially conscious and eventually radicalized by their desire for reformation and restoration of pristine Islam. Islamic governments vary from the arguably

## **Three Paths to Eden: Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Fundamentalisms**

democratic regimes in Turkey and multi-cultural Indonesia to the oppressive, divine-right monarchy of Saudi Arabia, but all of them clearly feel the pressure of the fundamentalist impulse, a threat that those in power correctly perceive as ominous.

### **Jewish Fundamentalisms**

Within Judaism, one finds forms of fundamentalism that are similar in a number of respects to those found in Christianity and Islam, but most quite conservative forms of Judaism do not fit the criteria for fundamentalism that I am using. Just as the Amish, a doctrinally and socially conservative Christian sect whose members are quite resistant to modernization do not fit the criteria, so other acutely conservative groups that feel threatened by secularity and modernity do not necessarily become fundamentalists.

Israel was founded in 1948 as a social-democratic state, but since the Six-Day War of 1967 and the Yom Kippur War of 1973, that liberal ethos has lost much of its central importance. Israeli consciousness, surrounded by the threat of Muslim nations that would gladly see the State of Israel destroyed, has been challenged by an ultra-nationalist, eschatologically based ideology aptly characterized as Jewish fundamentalism. The implications of this shift to the religious right (analogous to a similar shift in American religious life and politics) entails profound implications for Israel itself, the Middle East, American policy, and much of the rest of the world.

Zionist Jews in the late-19th, early-20th century were inspired and led by Theodor Herzl to begin the return to Palestine to establish Jewish nationhood, contending that anti-Semitism resulted from the abnormal condition of Diaspora Jews. If they had their own land, according to the Zionist argument, Jews could be a nation like any other nation, without needing to be religious. When these international immigrants, many of whom were secular, came to Palestine, they overwhelmed the smaller number of Orthodox Jews who had already filtered back to settle there.

Secular Zionists, then and now, are opposed by ultra-orthodox Jews known as *haredi* or *haredim* (those who “tremble” at God’s word). The Haredim are critical of Zionists because the latter believed that they could redeem the nation by their own actions, instead of waiting on God, and

### **Three Paths to Eden: Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Fundamentalisms**

also because they believed one could be a complete Jew while being secular, with no need to keep the Law of Moses scrupulously in its rabbinic interpretations.

The Haredim fall into two major divisions, the Hasidim (Hasidic Jews) and the Misnagdim. They contend between themselves as to who represents Judaism most authentically, but they share a resistance to changes in Judaism, to pluralism, and to the modernizing effects of contemporary gentile culture. Their participation in politics has focused mainly, though not exclusively, on protecting and providing for the religious needs of traditional Orthodox Jews.

A third component of Judaism can be characterized as religious, messianic Zionists. These Jews are nearest in spirit and practice to Christian and Islamic fundamentalists. The best-known and most influential of these in recent years have been the Gush Emunim (Bloc of the Faithful). They are less visible as a distinct group in the early 21st century, but the influence of their outlook and policies remains strong. The Gush Emunim believe that the coming of Messiah can be hastened through Jewish settlement on land they believe God has allotted to Jews. Gush leaders established the first settlement (Kiryat Arba) in Hebron shortly after Six-Day War in 1967. Since then, more than 150 settlements, backed by the Gush, the Likud Party, and the financial and military strength of the Israeli government, have been established in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, to the outrage of Palestinian Arabs who regard the West Bank and Gaza as belonging to them. In Israel/ Palestine, two armed bands of fundamentalists—Jews and Muslims—confront one another in a struggle to the death over a tiny strip of Holy Land that each claims for itself.

The Gush seek to occupy the West Bank, to which they refer in biblical terms as “Judea and Samaria,” with the ultimate goal of permanently incorporating this territory into the state of Israel, thereby hastening the fulfillment of Jewish destiny. This includes establishing Jewish sovereignty over the entire biblically described Land of Israel, substituting authentically Jewish forms of governance for Western-style liberal democracy, rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem, and implementing the divinely ordained messianic Redemption. Direct political and military action, including acts regarded by the recipients and much of the rest of the world as terrorism, can be used to accomplish this cosmically ordained imperative. By abandoning territory, Israel is

## **Three Paths to Eden: Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Fundamentalisms**

weakened, and the imperatives God placed on Jewish people to inherit the land are contradicted and redemption is delayed. The Covenant must be fulfilled in one particular chosen place, the Land of Israel, and the holiness of the Land outweighs any other consideration. Any peace through compromise, as in Camp David or Oslo or Wye River accords or the Bush administration's "Road Map," is ipso facto invalid. Abandoning the settlements and giving up Judea and Samaria would be a mortal sin. Palestinian Arabs correctly realize, of course, that this agenda leaves no room for an autonomous Palestinian state.

As noted, the Gush Emunim as a distinct organization have lost prominence, but its fundamental outlook and policies have filtered into the mainstream of Israeli life and leadership and have been supported even by those who do not share its religious convictions. (This is similar to the situation in America, where the Christian Coalition is a shell of its former self as a distinct organization, in part because its ideals and goals have become a central part of the agenda of the Republican Party.)

### **Implications of Fundamentalisms in the 21st Century of the Common Era**

I have described forms of fundamentalism as they appear in the three main Abrahamic religions. Although numerous variations could be counted within the broad outlines, these are sufficiently similar to allow us to identify several common implications.

Each form of fundamentalism has considerable potential for causing problems for human society. We are keenly aware of the disruption and harm Islamic fundamentalists have caused in America and elsewhere, and they clearly have potential for a great deal more. If the deeply held convictions of Christian and Jewish fundamentalists carry the day with respect to Israel, hope for a peaceful solution to the Israel/Palestine conflict remains dim, and until some resolution to that complex problem is reached, much of the world will remain in great peril.

James Davison Hunter, through his book, *Culture Wars*, planted that suggestive term in our consciousness. He contended that the prospects for resolving the differences between

## **Three Paths to Eden: Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Fundamentalisms**

fundamentalists and either secular people or liberal religionists are not especially bright because these parties “do not operate on the same plane of moral discourse.” They do not merely disagree over goals and tactics; they represent, instead, “allegiances to different formulations and sources of moral authority.” This makes constructive debate quite difficult.<sup>3</sup> One ideal in public debate is to engage in constructive moral reasoning. Given the nature of the divide, this is not feasible, because neither side can ever persuade the other. Each side attempts to discredit the other, replacing dialogue with stereotyping, name-calling, denunciation, efforts to capture important symbols for themselves, and bigotry. Both sides are such outsiders to the other’s cultural world that they do not understand why the other is so insulted by their criticism. Only the naïve imagine that everything will work out in the end, and even hostile coexistence seems possible only so long as neither side gains decisive advantage over the other.

Samuel Huntington has made a similar argument, contending that the West and Islam are locked in a life-or-death struggle, a “clash of civilizations.”<sup>4</sup> Neither Huntington nor Hunter is terribly encouraging, and Huntington’s view is starker than Hunter’s. Hunter at least explicitly recognized that not everyone has enlisted in the Culture Wars, that these polar positions are not the whole picture. Alan Wolfe made this point more strongly by showing that most Americans are by no means absolutist about a wide range of beliefs and values.<sup>5</sup> In a more recent work,<sup>6</sup> Wolfe described the effect of dominant, pluralistic American values in shaping religious belief and practice, yet with a strong disinclination among most people, even devoutly religious people, to pass judgment on the religious and moral beliefs of others.

Just as Christian fundamentalism is subject to the moderating influences of American society and culture, so also are Jews and Muslims, both in the United States and elsewhere, learning to

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<sup>3</sup> James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1991): 181.

<sup>4</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Touchstone, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> Alan Wolfe, *One Nation, After All: What Middle-Class Americans Really Think about God, Country, Family, Racism, Welfare, Immigration, Homosexuality, Work, the Right, the Left, and Each Other* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1998).

<sup>6</sup> Alan Wolfe, *The Transformation of American Religion: How We Actually Live Our Faith* (New York: Free Press, 2003).

### **Three Paths to Eden: Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Fundamentalisms**

appreciate the benefits of pluralism. Jihad is preached in some mosques, but not in others, and not all Muslims go to mosque. Many Muslims are in America precisely because they left Iran or other places where fundamentalist religion had made life intolerable. In some of those countries, the tide of Muslim fundamentalism is being strongly resisted, even rolled back. I agree with Huntington's thesis to the extent that significant segments of Islamic society in some countries do see themselves in a struggle to the death with secular, modern society, but many report that these fundamentalists are far from a majority. Even a tiny minority, however, can make life miserable for the rest of us, if that is their intention. America is less free since 9/11, not because an invading army has overrun us but because we have surrendered many of our personal liberties in the interests of "Homeland Security."

Overall, fundamentalisms have difficulty with modernity and pluralism. Let me point to just three aspects that I find particularly notable.

First, fundamentalists tend to assume, at least in the realm of religion, that all that needs to be known is already known. Young boys in Pakistani *madrassas* (Wahhabi schools built and funded by Saudi petrodollars) rock back and forth as they chant memorized portions of the Qur'an. If we could look inside yeshivas in Israel, we would also see Israeli students rocking back and forth as they memorize Torah and study traditional interpretations of it handed down from the rabbis of the past. In America, we can watch fundamentalist Christian children in private schools that use the Accelerated Christian Education curriculum, raising their small American flags (instead of their hands) to ask a question, and being told, "All the answers are in the text." All these limited and limiting approaches share the view that to challenge received knowledge, or even to seek to add to it, is to risk offending God. I believe that view is mistaken. I not only believe it but, as a university student and professor for fifty years, I have bet my life on it.

Secondly, fundamentalisms assume that women are not equal to men. In so doing, they deprive themselves of the full talents, intelligence, energies, and participation of approximately half of their population. This mistaken assumption will inevitably undermine the vitality of any human

## **Three Paths to Eden: Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Fundamentalisms**

culture, especially if it must coexist with cultures where women are encouraged to develop their talents and energies.

And thirdly, Christian, Muslim, and Jewish fundamentalisms invite civil war when they assert that politics must be subservient to religion. Jesus did his followers a great favor by saying, “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s,” thereby acknowledging a distinction between religious and civil (or secular) society. James Madison and Thomas Jefferson, drawing both on Jesus and the lessons of history’s millennia of religious wars, said (I’m paraphrasing): “Let’s not let the state use religion to reinforce and extend its authority, and let’s not let religion use the state to impose its doctrines or rules on others.” This separation of church and state was a novel notion in their time, perhaps the only truly novel notion in the U.S. Constitution, and it has worked wonderfully to maintain our peace. We must not surrender it. We ought to commend it to others.

Worldly power in religious hands—Islamic, Roman Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, whatever—has hardened into more than one tragic episode. Men and women convinced of the correctness of their convictions and the purity of their ideals need to be aware of a crucial truth: certainty corrupts; absolute certainty corrupts powerfully. We do well, even when speaking knowledgeably and authoritatively of fundamentalism, to remember the words of Oliver Cromwell, a man well acquainted with the tension between noble ideals and the will to power: “I beseech you, in the bowels of Christ, think it possible that you may be mistaken.”

In the title of this essay, I refer to the Garden whose name summons an image of ideal earthly existence. In the story of Eden, honored alike by Jews, Christians, and Muslims, Adam and Eve were tempted by the illusion that they could be perfect, like God, completely in charge. When they swallowed that poisoned fruit of pride, they became like us: fallen, imperfect, often mistaken—human. And they were cast out of Eden. Permanently. The cherubim and the sword that turned in every direction set the limits of their humanity. God told them (I’m paraphrasing again): “You found out about good and evil. Now you must live in a world in which they are

### **Three Paths to Eden: Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Fundamentalisms**

always mixed up together. The proportions will differ, but you will never get rid of evil. You will never return to Eden.”

Eventually, according to the story, God said (still paraphrasing): “I know it is difficult being human. I’ll make a covenant with you. I’ll tell you how to live, how to be the best humans you are capable of being. I know you will disappoint me, but I’ll do it anyway. This is what I require of you: Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream....Do justice, love kindness, walk humbly....Love your neighbor as yourself. If you do that, then someday...well, We’ll see...but that will be up to Me. In the meantime, you can never return to Eden. You must not try. My sword will cut you down. And besides, you wouldn’t like it. It’s crawling with snakes.”