

Making the Old-Time Religion New

FUNDAMENTALISMS OBSERVED. Edited by Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby. Univ. of Chicago. 872 pp. \$40

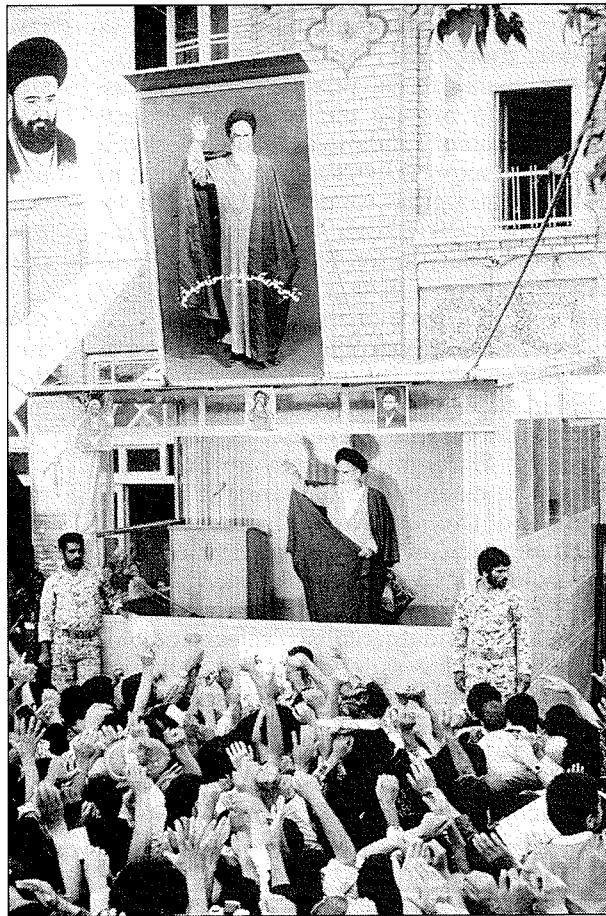
Who would have predicted that at the end of the 20th century we would be worrying about religious fundamentalism? A century ago, Mark Twain sought to kill religion through bitter, almost virulent ridicule. If late 19th-century liberals such as Washington Gladden believed that the Christian religion might still prosper in modern times, their Christianity was so amorphous and progressive that one could hardly be certain it was religious at all. Sigmund Freud, the prophet of the new era, thought that religion would simply wither away, as irrelevant to society as it was to him personally.

This massive book sounds a very different note. Indeed, it trumpets the contemporary power not only of religion but of religion in its most extreme form—"fundamentalism." Weighing in at nearly 900 pages, bearing the imprimatur of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, *Fundamentalisms Observed* serves as a kind of academic icon. Lifting this volume to one's desk will disabuse any reader of the notion that fundamentalism remains a national joke, as it was 70 years ago. Far from being a relic, fundamentalism has emerged the world over as the most robust cultural movement of the late 20th century. In *Fundamentalisms Observed*, author after author illustrates how and why fundamentalist movements may have effects on this century's life and culture that easily outrival those of Marxism and communism.

The editors—Martin Marty, professor of religious history, and Scott Appleby, a research associate, both at the University of Chicago—begin this volume with a survey of fundamentalism in the United States.

They are right to do so. The concept of religious fundamentalism originated early in this century in the reorientation of conservative American Protestantism. This was signaled by the publication in 1909 of the *Scofield Reference Bible*, with its fundamentalist "dispensationalist" view of the scriptures—a work which to this day remains one of Oxford University Press's steadiest-selling reference books. Then, between 1910 and 1915, Los Angeles oil millionaires Lyman and Milton Stewart published *The Fundamentals*, a dozen popular paperbacks on conservative Christian doctrine, which gave the movement the name by which it is now known.

What makes *Fundamentalisms Ob-*



served required reading for every student of modern world history is the transit it describes from that relatively docile American fundamentalism to the extraordinary panoply of fundamentalist movements that has emerged in virtually all the world's major religions. Within the United States, the political involvement initiated by Jerry Falwell was an exception to an older tradition of self-contained proselytizing—a tradition to which American fundamentalists now have returned in good measure if not wholly. Fundamentalism elsewhere in the world is a radically different—and highly political—order of business.

But how can we—if indeed we can—discuss Christian and Islamic and Confucian fundamentalists together, as though there were a “generic” fundamentalism? These movements are historically discrete, deriving from tendencies and tensions within their own “orthodox” traditions. There seems to be relatively little cross-fertilization among the religions. American Protestant fundamentalists, for example, often express extraordinary interest in Judaism and great support for modern Israel, but clearly their fascination is dictated by loyalty to the Pauline Epistles and concerns with spiritual orthodoxy, not by any real influence of Judaism itself.

Yet, despite warning us that the term *fundamentalism* is “not always the first choice or even a congenial choice at all for some of the movements here discussed,” Marty and Appleby go on to describe an essential fundamentalist mentality. And the characteristics of that mentality are, in fact, revealed in each of the volume's 15 substantial essays.

The first part of this characterization is negative. Fundamentalists reject individualism, secular rationality, and religious tolerance with its tendency toward relativism. But fundamentalists do more than merely reject or protest. They exhibit positive or, as the editors put it, “fighting” characteristics. First, they *fight back*. Militancy is crucial to their identity. Second, they *fight for*. They possess an extraordinary sense of their own foundations and of

their principled character. Third, they *fight with*. That is, they reach back to real or presumed pasts in order to shape their present milieu. Fourth, they *fight against*. Their enemies are evil, not merely mistaken. And finally, they *fight under God*. Their cause is transcendent, not merely temporal.

The aggressive character of fundamentalism became a matter of international concern in 1979, when the Shi'ite revolution succeeded in Iran. That Iranian model inspired Islamic fundamentalist activity elsewhere. In 1981, Egyptian fundamentalists assassinated President Anwar Sadat, believing that after his murder, as historian John Voll writes, “faithful Egyptians would rise in holy war against the unbelieving state.” Sadat had promoted, Voll says, a “modern technocratic elite, more congenial to the perspectives of Islamic modernism than to revivalism.” For Sunni fundamentalists, Sadat's dramatic assassination was as logical as it was bracing, and it in turn has stimulated further agitation, if not an armed religious revolt. This past January, Algeria's parliamentary elections were cancelled after Sunni fundamentalists overwhelmed other parties in the first round of voting.

Despite such examples, it would be erroneous to see fundamentalists as simply antimodern. Marty and Appleby protest that religious fundamentalists are grossly misunderstood when they are described as “in every case committed to violence, as obstructionists, as unthinking foes of progress, or as inherently representative of a regressive trend in religion and in human civilization.” Marty, Appleby, and in fact most of the other contributors treat fundamentalism as a part of the modernization process rather than as a force of blind opposition to it, a kind of spiritual Luddism.

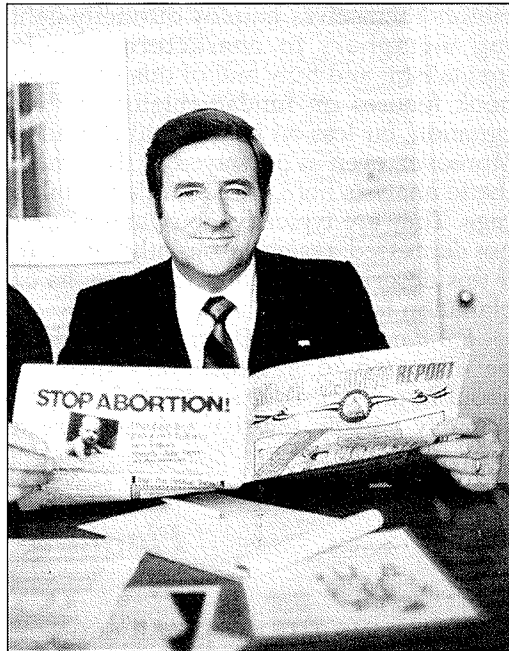
Late-20th-century fundamentalism thrives *on*, not merely *in*, a vibrant, gritty, urban milieu. Fundamentalists are nearly everywhere urban and middle class rather than rural and lower class. Muslim, Sikh, and Christian fundamentalists attempt to discipline the present, to subject it to an-

cient and transcendental criteria. They do not reject the present. Nor do they retreat from the contemporary world in the fashion of Shakers or Mennonites.

Marty and Appleby can thus argue that “fundamentalists demonstrate a closer affinity to modernism than to traditionalism.” Fundamentalists may find the modern world sinful, but this sinful world has also created opportunities and technologies, notably with electronics, that allow them to proselytize more effectively than ever before. Hassidic Judaism, Latin American Protestant evangelicalism, Arab and non-Arab Muslim fundamentalism, Thai Buddhist reform, and Indian Hindu fundamentalism are rooted so deeply in urbanization, industrialization, and political modernization that they are inconceivable without them.

Even in mental outlook, fundamentalists are more akin to modern secularists than either likes to imagine. The literalist reading that fundamentalists give to spiritual texts is quite in keeping with the literalism and materialism of most contemporary science and of modern pragmatic thought in general. Without doubt, fundamentalists’ reduction of “spiritual matters” to simple theological certainties suits the “sound-bite” demands of radio and television, and fundamentalists everywhere have adopted the electronic media as major tools of proselytization. (Yet not even the fundamentalists’ “simplicity” is truly simple: The same fundamentalist Christians who imbibe a facile television broadcast will then reach for the *Scofield Reference Bible*, 1,300 pages long, for dense, knotty advice on correct biblical interpretation. Their Muslim counterparts apply the most complex fine points of Sharia, traditional Islamic religious law, to quite modern problems.) But as for the fundamentalists’ supposed antagonism to materialism—try walking through any parking lot where fundamentalists park: Their cars are usually loaded with purchases, suggesting a relationship of religion to possessions that would have made Max Weber smile.

Fundamentalists also embrace the state



more often than they reject it. Jerry Falwell’s campaign to create a “moral majority” was a modest venture into politics compared to the Islamic revolution in Iran or Indian Sikh demands for a separate state. What Mumtaz Ahmad, a political scientist at Hampton University, observes of Middle Eastern fundamentalists is true elsewhere: Control of the state seems the logical consequence of their worldview.

This is so because fundamentalists consider religion not merely a nicety but a necessity. They tend to see nonbelievers and nonobservers as an insult to the gods that must be expunged. The modern state possesses awesome coercive powers which—whether in the United States, Iran, or India—the “moral majority” seeks to use to advance its religious truths and to suppress others’ religious outrages. Only rarely do fundamentalists see the irony of this adaptation: that the powers of the modern state far outstrip those of the mythologized historical societies they claim to idealize.

Marty and Appleby decry the efforts of those journalists who emphasize fundamentalist violence and ignorance. Yet the

editors themselves employ distinctly fighting metaphors to characterize fundamentalism, and fully half of this very thick book focuses on fundamentalist political agitation, far less on its spiritual character. Moreover, even as portrayed by the sympathetic analysts here, these fundamentalists rage. They are typically angry and furious, not depressed, resigned, or withdrawn. Yet if this description is commonplace, its explanation is not.

Fundamentalisms Observed should not be expected to answer every question about its subject. Four substantial and presumably equally massive volumes are to

follow. These will assess the motivations of the leaders and the temperament of the followers, the roles women play, and the consequences of fundamentalisms for public policy. These five volumes should finally erase the suspicion that academics and intellectuals still harbor toward fundamentalism. Certainly no one will laugh while lugging them home from the library.

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Planning Without War

DISMANTLING THE COLD WAR ECONOMY. By Ann Markusen and Joel Yudken. *Basic*. 314 pp. \$25

America's post-World War II manufacturing dominance has succumbed to intense competition from around the globe. As consumers both abroad and at home shift to products made outside the United States, evidence mounts that the U.S. economy is failing the competitive test. America is losing manufacturing jobs, and its overall standard of living is falling. The 1992 presidential election may well turn on this lamentable state of affairs.

To be sure, many factors lie behind America's competitiveness problem, including failures by management and labor in the private sector and a lagging educational system in the public sector. But *Dismantling the Cold War Economy* concentrates on one particular failure, that of the U.S. government. Washington has let the industrial system that helped the West win the Cold War collapse, and so far it has failed to replace it. I use the word "system" in order to avoid the loaded phrase *industrial policy*, a term used overseas (and in America among Democrats in the early 1980s) to denote any government's plan for its national industrial future.

Such a plan—without any label at all—was quickly created in Washington after World War II, when a hostile Soviet Union threatened our future. In 1946, under Secretary James Forrestal and Admiral Howard Bowen, the navy—with the army and the air force quickly following suit—spent millions on defense research contracts that nourished new industries and helped establish U.S. manufacturing superiority. Defense Department research and development (R&D) spending soon mounted into the billions of dollars. A strategy for winning the Cold War had the side benefit of propelling the domestic economy ahead—at least through the early 1970s.

Ann Markusen and Joel Yudken, both specialists in industrial development at Rutgers University, take as their subject the cluster of industries nourished by this Cold War strategy. They call that sector the "ACE complex," meaning defense-related industries mainly in aerospace, communications, and electronics. More precisely, their topic is defense contractors—a set of firms, their employees, and surrounding communities—who after 40 years of success now face a questionable future.

When the Soviet Union unexpectedly dissolved and the Cold War ended, the U.S. government's demand for weapons—the