

What Is Fundamentalism?

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Fundamentalism and fundamentalisms

What is fundamentalism? One immediately thinks about the Middle East and Islam, but the term first appeared in U.S. Protestant circles, regarding a movement that developed prior to World War I whose followers occasionally referred to themselves as “fundamentalists” (Riesebrodt 1990, 49). Although this concept was developed in the heart of the Western world as a proud and positive self-definition, it is now being used to brand the “barbarians” who live outside of the Western world, and who prefer to call themselves “Islamists.”

The popular definition of fundamentalism is the claim to “derive political principles from a sacred text,” which serves to legitimize ancient secular norms and to judge their adherence to or deviation from the text on a case-by-case basis (Choueiri 1993, 29). In order to analyze the problem correctly, one must keep in mind that there are different kinds of fundamentalism. Jewish fundamentalism, for example, proclaims “the holiness of Eretz Israel” and the “supremacy of a higher law”; such movements possess a growing and worrisome vitality. They pit the “holiness of Halacha” (Eisenstadt 1993, 275) against existing political institutions, while Islamic fundamentalism upholds the sanctity of Sharia; in both instances, human societal norms have to be justified in the eyes of unimpeachable divine law.

We can find the same dichotomy in Catholic doctrine. For this reason, the renowned jurist Stefano Rodota saw a “move toward fundamentalism” in the sharp polemic against legislation on pregnancy termination in Pope John Paul II’s encyclical letter *Evangelium Vitae*. Just as there is no lack of books that draw a close parallel between the American Protestants of the early twentieth century and today’s Iranian Shiites, many polemics have discovered similarities between John Paul II and the leaders of radical Islamism. The former states: “Authority derives from God and is postulated by the moral order. If laws . . . contradict this order and the will of God, they cannot overpower individual conscience . . . in this case authority loses its claim and turns into abuse.” The second text proclaims: “The definite and essential point is that he who renounces the divine law in favour of another law, created by himself or other people, is practicing idolatry and tyranny, and is moving away from the truth, and he who governs on the basis of such law is an usurper.” The latter statement is by Maududi of Pakistan, considered to be one of the main leaders of today’s radical Islamism. According to Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of the Iranian Shiite revolution, every political regime must acknowledge the supremacy of divine law; it must not be absolute but bound by constitution, or in other words political power and human “rule” must be clear, as the Pope puts it, that it is not “absolute but acting on behalf of God” (Spataro 1996, 27–32). Finally, the influential Rabbi Eliezer Waldman resolutely opposes any Israeli withdrawal from Hebron by stating the citizens and “military must not follow any orders that violate any commandment of the Torah” (Lewis 1996).

Is the tendency to fundamentalism restricted to religion? A “laicism” arguing in this way would prove to be especially dogmatic. On a philosophical level, dogmatism means the inability to apply the same criticism to one’s own theories as to those of one’s opponents. If one subscribes to the definition of fundamentalism given earlier, one should also include the “holy writ” of human rights that is invoked to supersede domestic laws in some countries. This becomes even more obvious when those campaigns include explicit religious overtones: “There is sin and evil in the

world, and the Holy Book as well as the Lord Jesus Christ forces us to oppose them with all our might.” Those are the words of U. S. President Ronald Reagan on 8 March 1983, when he was trying to prop up the Cold War by turning it into a holy war (Draper 1994, 33). This concept of “holy war,” usually considered to be a feature of Islamic fundamentalism, played an important role in U.S. foreign policy of the last century, especially with Woodrow Wilson (Losurdo 1993, 166). Critical analysis of fundamentalism emphasizes its rejection of the principle of national sovereignty (Guolo 1994, 79–81). In the same way, the U.S.-led campaign for “human rights” insists on the right, even the duty, to intervene without regard for such superstitious beliefs as respect for states and national borders.

Maududi talks about an “international revolutionary party” (Choueiri 1993, 175); significant American political circles claim to support “liberal-democratic internationalism” (Draper 1994, 31–34). Since the collapse of communist internationalism, the only opposing sides left are apparently the internationalism based on “human rights” and the one that refers to the Koran. Islamic fundamentalism insists “on the interminable counterpositions of the ‘universal’ interests of the Western world and the equally ‘universal’ interests of Islam” (Guolo 1994, 81). The same view, with reverse value judgment, denotes the West’s “human rights” crusade.

Sometimes the Vatican joins this crusade. In the same way that a politician such as Ronald Reagan had no qualms about posing as a prophet, Pope John Paul II can easily appear as a jurist or theoretician of natural law when he demands an “international criminal law” that would be able to advance higher “moral values” even against political rights of individual states. But *quis judicabit?* [Who will judge?] The Pope seems to realize the dangers of an internationalist approach when he warns against the “law of the stronger, richer, and bigger” (Accattoli 1997). Catholic internationalism, with its delegitimization of existing law, is perhaps a little more restrained than “liberal-democratic internationalism,” even though the latter often denounces the former as a form of fundamentalism.

Fundamentalism, the modern world, and culture clash

The usual trite “enlightened” interpretation of fundamentalism criticizes its obscurantist rebellion against the modern Western world. But even a moderate sociological analysis shows that these movements have their mass basis mostly in the cities. At least in Egypt, “it is rare that they are able to secure mass support in the rural population, which is largely semi-illiterate” (Lawrence 1993, 176). As a “result of mass schooling,” the “Islamic activists” are mostly “youth under the age of thirty, generally well educated, with diplomas in their pockets but very poor employment prospects” (Spataro 1996, 72). In the area of Sunni fundamentalism “the typical activist . . . is a student at a modern, nonreligious institution with emphasis on applied sciences.” Often these activists include “agronomists, electronics technicians, doctors, engineers.” A leading role in the Shiite revolution was played by “Islamic student elites, who received an excellent education in the Iranian system, but were frustrated in their attempts at social advancement.” Largely with “U.S. diplomas,” achieved thanks to Iranian stipends, the “leadership and technocrats of the Islamic Republic” also have considerable international experience (Kepel 1991, 46, 42).

Islamic fundamentalism assumes “a hostile attitude toward traditionalism as well as the official religious institutions. . . . From both an intellectual and political point of view, it introduces a creative interpretation of the sacred texts” (Choueiri 1993, 31). This interpretation is revolutionary, not only because of the content, but also because it confronts the traditional Sunni clergy, the Ulemas, with a new group of intellectuals. In the Western world the loss, through the Reformation, of the clerical monopoly in the interpretation of the Bible was an important step in the rise of the modern world. A similar breakup is happening in the Middle East under pressure from fundamentalism.

The assumption of the role of “religious intellectual,” which makes every activist an Ulema, gives the Islamic movement an extraclerical character, which often turns into anticlericalism in the more radical groups. As part

of the first generation that through their schooling gained access to religious sources without expert interpretation, these “warriors of God” have an extremely revolutionary view of the Koran and the Sunna. (Guolo 1994, 137)

With this new intellectual segment, radical Islamism is in practical terms introducing a kind of modern political party into a mostly static society. It is a party that, according to its theoreticians, assumes a “vanguard” function, and whose spread depends among other factors on its ability to create a minimal welfare state with “organisations for mutual support” to help the poorest classes gain access to education and the “modern world.” Even in Great Britain, the spread of fundamentalism among Moslems was made possible by its ability to fill the vacuum created by the “policies of extreme economic liberalism of Mrs. Thatcher” (Kepel 1991, 39, 53).

In the relation of the sexes, reactionary aspects are obvious, but even there a closer look shows the matter is more complicated than one might think. First of all, it needs to be established that male-dominated morality is primarily a sociological and not an ideological phenomenon: especially the women of the “lower classes” provide “support” for the Shiite Iranian “regime” (Riesebrodt 1990, 180), and as we learn from Adam Smith, these classes tend especially in sexual matters to express a “strict,” not at all “liberal” morality (1981, 794). Fundamentalist organizations in Egypt operate in this way: “They provide transportation for female students, who would otherwise have to travel in the ‘promiscuity’ of overfilled buses, where they would be constantly harassed; the only condition is that women on the ‘Islamic buses’ wear the veil. They establish entrances to the lecture halls separated by sex which allows women, who usually lose out on getting seats in overcrowded auditoriums, to have reasonable access” (Guolo 1994, 129).

Radical Islamism sharply rejects the tradition of the marriage contract and insists on “absolute freedom of the woman to choose her partner”; it condemns the “systematic polygamy” of the harem and tries to limit and even discourage polygamy. Wearing the veil is not always or everywhere based on coercion. The girls respond to their conservative backgrounds. “The veil, worn even against their parents’ opposition, is a symbol for Islamic radicalism”

(Spataro 1996, 188–90, 74). This attitude means agreement with masculinist strict morals, opposition to the Western world, and a demand for cultural and political identity; a further aspect may be seen as reminiscent of Western feminist criticism about the marketing of the female body.

To emphasize the fallacy of explaining fundamentalism through the simple dichotomy of premodern vs. modern, one must remember that in only one country in the Middle East has fundamentalism been successful—Iran, the most modern country both on the socioeconomic and political level. Iran experienced the revolution at the turn of the last century as well as the democratic attempts of Mossadegh that were cut short by the CIA and Western intrigue in 1953. Finally, it should be mentioned that both early twentieth-century Protestant fundamentalism and contemporary Jewish fundamentalism refer to the country that has become the symbol of the modern world. Incidentally, the two are both distinguished by a “return” to the Bible.

The interpretation of fundamentalism as rejection of the modern world or as aggressive traditionalism does not fit with the equally widespread analysis that warns against the new totalitarian danger. In any case, it is worth mentioning that this accusation is only leveled against one of the many fundamentalisms that move today’s world. To avert totalitarian danger, the West is calling for a new crusade against militant Islam, which for its part is denouncing totalitarianism as a ruinous Western import (Spataro 1996, 25).

This second interpretation is no more convincing than the first. One should try a fresh attempt. Looking first at Islamic fundamentalism, we need to find out how it defines its enemies. In the view of Sayyid Qutb (the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood who was put in a concentration camp and later executed under Nasser), they are “human demons, crusaders, Zionists, idolaters, and communists, who differ from each other but are united in their opposition to Islam with all their might, to destroy the vanguard of the movements for the rebirth of Islam” (Guolo 1994, 75). Noteworthy are the arbitrary reduction of the enemy camp and the description of the conflict as a religious clash. The Manichaeism of this

interpretation is obvious, but it alone is not enough to characterize fundamentalism. Manichaeism is also found—only to mention the heroes of liberal-democratic internationalism—in the already quoted Reagan or Eisenhower, who described the international situation of 1953 in these words: “This is a war of light against darkness, freedom against slavery” (Lott 1994, 304). Those were the years when John Foster Dulles, who claimed to have an excellent knowledge of the Bible, advocated drawing political inspiration from it: “I am convinced that our political ideas and actions must as closely as possible reflect the religious faith according to which man has his origin and fate in God” (Kissinger 1994, 534). As secretary of state under President Eisenhower, Dulles condemned any attempt at neutrality as deeply immoral.

Let us return to further examination of the phenomenon of fundamentalism. How does Qutb identify his friends? We read: “An Islamic activist belongs to an ancient and noble tribe. He is part of an illustrious procession led by many exalted leaders: Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Josef, Moses, Jesus, and the seal of the prophet, Mohammed” (Spataro 1996, 71). We are dealing with the claim to an unbroken historical continuity of hundreds of years, to permanence. The current conflict is being projected back into a distant past, and into exactly this distant past leads the identity of friend and foe, especially since Qutb attributes the enemies with an “innate” drive to aggression (Guolo 1994, 101). The world of Islam is called upon to overcome the current decadence and crisis by a return to the situation prior to the military, ideological, and political Western aggression, and this means a return to one’s self and to origins that have undergone a mythical transfiguration. The point is to protect the Islamic identity from contamination and interference. The point is to put an end to centuries of ruinous religious subversion. This is a protection, a kind of “cultural cleansing,” against all Western political tendencies without differentiation, from liberalism to communism. The essential and decisive element is the fight not against the “modern world,” but against the West. Ideas and institutions that are considered unacceptable or dangerous are condemned as having no connection with Islamic identity. Operation “cultural cleansing”

includes a variety of expressions of culture, fashion, language: in Algiers there is a spreading fight against the French language, which is seen in a negative light as the “language of the colonial masters,” as opposed to the “language of Koran” (Kepel 1991, 60).

The wished-for purity is only imaginary. Surely the theory of an “international revolutionary party” as a “vanguard” is not of autochthonous origin. In reality, Islamic activists draw a number of elements from their enemies: critique of modern Western civilization is borrowed from European cultural critique. Qutb quotes Alexis Carrel favorably and at length, but dilutes this source acknowledgment by relaying the ideas of this man of “great knowledge, extreme sensitivity, great honesty and liberal mentality” back to the Koran (Choueiri 1993, 179–81). Islamic activists like to consider themselves as occupying the political and ideological center, but they claim this modern classification did not originate with the French Revolution but with a verse of the Koran that is rather freely interpreted and even manipulated.

Fundamentalism is characterized by the tendency to create an inflexible identity by ignoring the relations and mutual influences of different cultures. If a cultural tradition is being presented as compact, exclusive, and antagonistic toward all others, it is in danger of adopting an ethnic configuration. Fundamentalism is a cultural tradition that tends to become nature, a nature that is incompatible with other cultural traditions, which are also represented as being stuck in inflexible intransigence. Ideas and institutions are first and foremost judged by their real or imaginary ethnic origin. Criticism of Western rule turns into criticism of the West in general, and finally criticism of “Western man”: his leadership role, proclaims Qutb, is in an inevitable decline (Choueiri 1993, 161). The transition from the historical to the anthropological level corroborates the tendency to understand the conflict in a naturalistic way.

Fundamentalism and the awakening of the colonial peoples

Any culture can be susceptible to fundamentalism. But it is not good enough simply to switch from singular to plural to define this phenomenon. Fundamentalism is not the way of life of one or more

distinct cultures; it is a reaction to the encounter, or rather the clash, of two different cultures, a reaction characterized by entrenchment and the construction of a jealously guarded and exclusive identity. One could say that fundamentalism is the rejection of one culture by another and the tendency to regard both as natural phenomena. Such a tendency increases with the size of the gap between the cultures and the violence of the clash. This is quite compelling in the relations of the West with other parts of the world. The awakening of oppressed peoples and their subjugated and silenced cultures is also characterized by rejections. In this sense, fundamentalism is neither a new phenomenon nor one restricted to the peoples of the Middle East. Consider, for example, the 1857 Sepoy rebellion in India. One could simply view it as a reaction by the old caste system, as a rejection of the modern ways introduced by English rule. That is certainly one aspect. The rebellion did not target the modern world as such, however, but those modern elements that were imposed selectively (depending on British interests) in the wake of colonial expansion and went hand in hand with oppression of a nation and a culture that had after all produced the Mogul Empire. Disraeli was already perfectly clear what a significant role had been played by the national question in this case (Stokes 1986, 4).

In the colonial and semicolonial countries, rejection of Western culture and rule often followed experiences of naïve trust and bitter disappointment. The example of China is useful: the Taiping rebellion in the midnineteenth century was irreconcilably hostile toward the pro-Western ruling dynasty. The rebels were extremely critical of Confucianism (Esherick 1987, 323, 325) and oriented themselves toward Christianity, from which they drew monotheism as well as the messianic idea of the “peaceable heavenly kingdom.” Far from being xenophobic, this movement was “intolerant toward traditional culture.” This aspect restricted its basis and led to its defeat (Suzuki and Feuerwerker 1995, 125), especially since Great Britain did not intervene on the side of the innovators but on the side of the obsolete ruling dynasty, in opposition to the hopes and desires of the rebels. In 1900, a very different movement developed; the Boxer rebellion was directed not only against the invaders and their “accomplices,” but against

Western ideas and even technical achievements, while fanatically defending religious traditions and autochthonous politics. Neither the telegraph and railroad nor Christianity could escape the fury of the Boxers. These advances went hand in hand in China with the technological and ideological expansion of the West and the ensuing national humiliation of the country. "All modern inventions and innovations" were branded as "foreign," and Christianity was a "foreign religion." Anything alien to authentic Chinese tradition and the happy (or in retrospect seen as happy) years prior to China's clash with the great powers became subject of merciless condemnation (Purcell 1963, 267; Esherick 1987, 68). So at last we are dealing with a fundamentalist rebellion.

At about the time of the Taiping rebellion, Egypt also experienced an attempt at Western modernization. Those were the years when the London *Times* praised the country as an "extraordinary example of progress," and the Egyptian leadership went so far as to declare that "the nation no longer belongs to Africa but is a part of Europe" (Mansfield 1993, 98). As in China, however, this declaration of faith was not enough to curb the great powers. Constantly growing English expansionism was followed by the Mahdi rebellion in Sudan toward the end of the nineteenth century, possibly the first manifestation of true Islamic fundamentalism. In an ironic twist, its most famous victim became General Gordon, who had distinguished himself in the suppression of the Taiping rebellion. This succession of pro-Western and fundamentalist movements still continues today. The West has responded to attempts at modernization and emancipation in the Muslim world (Mossadegh, Nasser, Arafat, Afghanistan) not only by diplomatic or military means, but often by evoking and supporting religious traditionalism, which, in turn, frequently undergoes a developmental process forcing it to assume fundamentalist militancy. Before Islamic fundamentalism could expand through the Middle East, it had to get rid of Marxist and communist-oriented movements, which it was able to do with the help of the Occident (Kepel 1991, 27–30).

Integration and separatism: Zionism and "Nation of Islam"

The dialectic of acceptance and rejection of hegemonic culture appears in the case of Jews and African Americans as a dialectic

of integration and separatism. It is clear from the words of one of its most prominent spokespeople that the Zionist movement did not only originate from a real, sometimes dramatic, need for security. Theodor Herzl was especially concerned about the process of assimilation on the horizon:

Pressure and persecution cannot eradicate us. . . . Strong Jews return stubbornly to their tribe when persecution erupts. This was clear during the time immediately following the emancipation of Jews. Those Jews with more education or material goods were completely bereft of the feeling of togetherness. (Herzl 1940, 48)

Max Nordau expressed the same or similar fears:

Before the emancipation the Jew was without rights, a stranger among the peoples, but he would not have dreamed of rebelling against this situation. He considered himself the member of a special tribe, who had nothing in common with his countrymen. . . . The anthropological psychologist and recorder of customs realizes: whatever the intent of other people may have been, the Jews of the past thought of the ghetto not as a jail but a place of refuge. . . . In the ghetto the Jew found his own world, it was his secure home with the moral and spiritual meaning of a homeland. [After emancipation the situation changed radically, in a negative sense] . . . The Jew was in a kind of frenzy to burn all bridges behind him. He now had a new home, he did not need the ghetto. He now had new friends; he did not need to huddle with his fellow Jews. . . . Life-saving differences were replaced by opportunistic mimicry. (Nordau 1909, 47–50)

Nordau stated clearly that the desire to return to the land of the fathers was more than a response to new threats against Jews. “It is incorrect to say that Zionism is simply defiant or desperate gestures against anti-Semitism. . . . For most Zionists, anti-Semitism raised the necessity to think about their relations with other people, and those considerations have led to results that will remain their spiritual and emotional property even if anti-Semitism were

to disappear forever” (Nordau 1913, 5). It is becoming clearer why those Jews who oppose Zionism see in it a return to the ghetto, even though the “Palestine-ghetto” is larger and more comfortable than the traditional one (Luxemburg 1968, 143).

So Zionism is first and foremost interested in returning to its roots, by connecting with a glorious past on the other side of the gulf of hundreds and thousands of years of oppression and humiliation. According to Nordau, the new “political Zionism” enables Jews to become conscious again of the “ability of their race” that allows them to maintain the “ambition” to “preserve the ancient tribe for the distant future and to add new heroic deeds of the descendants to the heroic deeds of the ancestors” (1913, 4). Herzl says even more clearly: “That is why I believe a new generation of wonderful Jews will spring up from the earth. The Maccabees will rise again” (1920, 132).

The goal was to rebuild and uphold the Jewish identity by repressing all memory of thousands of years of Diaspora that, although painful and tragic, also meant the fruitful blending of different cultures, in order to return to a mythically transfigured beginning. The return to the origins went hand-in-hand with expulsion from Jewry of all those who oppose Zionism.

Those who can, want to, and must perish may perish. But the collective character of the Jews cannot, will not, and must not perish. . . . Whole branches of Judaism may die and drop off, but the tree must live. If some French Jews are complaining about this concept because they are already assimilated, my answer is simple: it is none of their business. They are Israelite Frenchmen, perfect! But this is internal Jewish business. (Herzl 1920, 51)

In excluding or threatening to exclude those who have assimilated, and who have after all shared centuries or millennia of history with the Zionists, Herzl connected directly with the Maccabees of the second century BCE: while they were the protagonists of a glorious national liberation struggle, their main characteristic was xenophobia, especially against the Greek-speaking community, and they indignantly refused any contact with Greek culture.

Exactly because Zionism does not mainly respond to a need

for security, the fear and dilemma that characterized its beginning remain, in spite of the foundation of a powerful Jewish state that has close ties with the only remaining superpower. As far back as the seventies, one can observe the development of different fundamentalist movements that “break with the temptations of secular society and base their existence solely on rules and prohibitions based on sacred Jewish texts. Such a break requires a clear distinction between Jews and gentiles, to combat assimilation, the greatest danger for the Chosen People” (Kepel 1991, 167). Palestinians and Arabs occupy a special but not exclusive place among these goyim. The voters that brought Netanyahu to power in 1996 did not only look at the Middle East conflict. Orthodox Jews were driven by another fear: the peace process envisioned by Perez would have led to “integration” and the appearance of “a new, Westernized Israeli society”; it would have endangered the “true identity of Israel as the Jewish state, with the result that Israel would have assimilated with the rest of the world just as the American Jews have assimilated in American society.” In this sense, the election amounted to a choice between “ghetto and global village,” with the ghetto winning the day (Friedman 1996).

A comparison with Blacks in America might be of interest. As long as they lived under slavery, the Blacks did not and could not perceive the problem of a confrontation between their culture and that of their white masters. Problems arose following emancipation. An initial hopeful phase of attempted integration was followed by disappointment, the painful experience of continued discrimination. The deep, seemingly indelible roots of racism brought about disappointment, despair, and separatist ideas and movements. Those movements were accused of taking up the segregationist slogans of the white racists, just as the Zionists were confronted with similar accusations in their time. Even Herzl was compelled to reject the “objection” that he was “helping the anti-Semites” by “preventing or compromising the assimilation of the Jews” (1920, 51). Of course, the victims of racism and anti-Semitism have very unlike histories and are on very different levels of homogeneity and internal unity. In order to emphasize their alienation from a society that has deported and oppressed them for centuries, and

continues to discriminate against them even today, some descendants of Black slaves seek to redefine their identity as the “Nation of Islam.” In this way, they are falling back upon a religion that, although it is not that of their ancestors, stands apart from white society (Christians and Jews) and refers to movements that are engaged in struggle against the West. At the end of the day, the Nation of Islam demands the right to set up a kind of Black Israel.

Incidentally, there are parallels in the histories of Israel and Liberia. The first African state to gain independence in 1847 had experienced a wave of settlement by freed Black slaves from the United States, but after their arrival in Africa they experienced conflict with the indigenous population (Moffa 1996, 47–49). The return to the land of their fathers was in the first place due to initiatives by former slaveholders, who were now against slavery but had in no way accepted racial equality. (Even Lincoln had held this point of view for a time.) Originally cultivated by whites, the separatist project is being pursued today by African Americans who want to claim their identity.

A similar transition is happening to Zionism. For a long time anti-Jewish and anti-Semitic circles wanted to replace the old ghetto with emigration or deportation of its inhabitants to a far-away colony (even Hitler appeared to be in favor of such a scheme for a while). The same dialectic characterizes the emergence of fundamentalist tendencies in Jewish or African American communities that have settled in a different cultural area from their origin, and it is always this dialectic that operates in different ways in Arab or Turkish communities in Europe.

Fundamentalism and Western national liberation movements

Fundamentalist reactions can also occur when two Western European cultures clash. This was the case, for example, in the post-Thermidorian and Napoleonic expansion in the relationship between France and such countries as Spain and Germany. France was unquestionably more secular, because it went through the Age of Enlightenment and de-Christianization of the great revolution, and because the towns and urban culture dominated the countryside.

At the same time, it had a more developed political structure. Not only was Germany lacking in national unity, it was also exposed to decades of French expansionism from the other side of the Rhine river. And yet French cultural hegemony was able to spread without much resistance: The Prussian king Frederick II not only spoke French and associated with French promoters of Enlightenment, he also made no secret of his disdain for German culture and language, which he only used for talking to servants. At the beginning of the French Revolution, no country was more in love with the idea of an intellectual (and political) alliance with France. For this reason, the crisis brought about by Thermidorian and Napoleonic expansionism appeared even more dramatic: at this point an essentially fundamentalist rejection took place. This concept should not be seen as exaggerated or absurd. Let us look at the ideology of anti-Napoleonic struggle. It was characterized not only by the desire to get rid of French military and political domination, but also by the rejection of any and all ideas pointing toward the hated “archenemies” of Germany; uncritical francomania was replaced by undifferentiated francophobia and teutomania. At this point, according to Heine, the Declaration of the Rights of Man began to be presented as “something alien, something French and American, something un-German.”

The search for German identity involved all aspects of cultural and social life and included first-rate intellectuals and philosophers. The transformation of Fichte is of special significance. Although he was an admirer of Rousseau, the French Revolution, and the *Grande Nation* that had spawned it after the defeat at Jena, he did whatever he could to praise the German nation, its customs, and its language. He ascribed to it an originality and authenticity that other nations could not even try to achieve. And that was not all; in the *Speeches to the German Nation*, Fichte pronounced and celebrated the emergence of an authentic “German statesmanship” as opposed to foreign and especially French models. Fichte was not alone in his thinking. Other anti-French exponents went even further: in opposition to French liberal sexual practices they presented “German morals,” “German fidelity,” even “German costume” that supposedly

promoted the necessary female modesty; these are obvious parallels to today's Islamic fundamentalism. Not even religion was free of the nationalization of culture. Certain patriots seemed to view "our German God" as subject of culture. Were they referring to the Christian God of Martin Luther, or, going back much further, the pagan Germanic God? This was not the main point for the adherents of teutomania; the important thing was disconnection from French religion.

The identity, created to oppose the enemy invaders, was being built up to a return to mythically transfigured origins. French intellectuals were subjected to hatred and contempt; the ordinary German people were being hailed as examples of original German-ness, especially regarding ancient origins that were being explored and worshipped. For this reason, the older terms *Teutschland* and *teutsch* were sometimes preferred over the newer terms *Deutschland* and *deutsch*. This was also the beginning of the glorification of the old, pure, and incorruptible Teutons (as described by Tacitus). Their customs and practices fulfilled the role that is today being ascribed to either the Sharia or Halacha by Islamic or Jewish fundamentalists respectively. This was the place to find the solution to Germany's political problems, not in constitutions or institutions that were alien to the authentic German soul. In the eyes of the followers of teutomania, the German people had forever been struggling against Roman invaders and oppressors, whether they came in the shape of the legions of Varus and Augustus, or the Roman papal clerics, or the troops of Richelieu, Louis XIV, or Napoleon. The French army was seen as the new Romans. Obviously, in this interpretation, cultural and political traditions of both countries were being presented as natural phenomena; permanent antagonism was considered the only form of intercourse between those two antagonistic identities. The deep influence on German culture and philosophy of such writers as Voltaire, Descartes, and Rousseau was forgotten. The characterization of Roman-French perpetual invaders led to the suppression of whole chapters of history, such as the chapter of the Duke of Brunswick, who headed the "crusade to extinguish" revolutionary France in 1789.

A similar development took place in Spain. The Napoleonic invasion eliminated the old feudal relationship of production and marked the start of the modern age, but at the same time it oppressed and humiliated national and religious identity. The Spanish people responded with a rebellion that was supposed to get rid of Napoleon's army as well as French cultural tradition as a whole and especially ideas of Enlightenment and revolution.

The Italian Risorgimento also constitutes a conflict between cultures. Italy had to reconstruct its national identity apart from the country that invaded and occupied it, in order to demand its independence on the political field as well. There was a strong trend to build up an essentially natural identity apart from and outside of history. This explains certain tendencies in Gioberti's philosophy: he praised "Italian primacy in morals and civilization"; he referred to a mythical indigenous population (the Pelasgians); he proposed the foundation of a "catholic, moderate, anti-French, anti-German, truly Italian" school of philosophy that "may use its influence to destroy the evil built up over three centuries." In this context, one can also fit some aspects of the national anthem by Mameli that praise "Scipio's helmet" and the courage of the ancient Romans.

Of course, national liberation movements are capable of more mature expressions. In his polemic against those who demanded the patriotic expulsion of German philosophy from Italy, because the writings were in the hated language of the Austrian occupiers, Bertrando Spaventa presented this thesis of exchange of ideologies: German philosophy could not have arisen without the Italian Renaissance, therefore it was not treason to refer to it; one cannot compare national stereotypes that have no relation to each other. This thesis was based on the teachings of Hegel, who in his day fought against teutomania by discovering the origin of French revolutionary ideas in the teachings of Luther. The elimination of French ideas is consequently pointless for the German philosopher, since the French proponents of Enlightenment and revolutionaries are following the trail of Luther's Reformation, giving secular substance to a movement that Luther saw basically as an internal affair.¹

Fundamentalism and conflict among the Great Powers

The resistance against Napoleon in Germany and Spain, and the Italian Risorgimento, were wars of national liberation. But fundamentalist tendencies can also emerge through imperialist contradictions between great Western powers.

Especially during total wars, there is also a clash of ideologies, which is often presented as “philosophical crusade,” to use Boutrox’s term. World War I was seen and understood by the opposing camps as a clash of cultures that had no relation to each other and were rigorously antagonistic. Their identity apparently was not influenced by historical developments, but instead had an anthropological and in the last instance ethnic basis. Cultural life, in all its aspects, came to be seen as ethnic in origin. A well-respected German philosopher praised “German faith,” “German ethos,” and even “German knowledge” and “German art”; the “German people” were supposed to have “their own particular intellectual freedom in religion, morals, knowledge, and art” (Eucken 1919, 20, 4); this characteristic had to be protected from any foreign contamination. There is also no lack of reference to mythical or mythically transfigured origins. According to Eucken, German ambitions from the time of Luther can be summarized thus: “free, Christian, German” (1919, 14). Other writers went back even further, comparing the war against Napoleon with Hermann’s fight against the Romans. Although the origins are defined differently on a case-by-case basis, the tenor is the same: close the ranks and repel every foreign element. On the other side, Maurras was calling upon his fellow citizens even before 1914 to reject “the intellectual and moral imports” or at least be “very suspicious” toward anything that carried a “foreign label” and a “non-French brand name”; this would be the only way that France could again become cognizant of its “unique history” and “reconquer its intellectual and physical household gods” (Girardet 1983, 211).

Fundamentalist tendencies also emerged on the other side of the Atlantic. In the United States, a witch hunt started against anything that appeared German. Many schools abolished German language lessons, and it became dangerous to play German music; families

and even towns with German names hurried to Americanize them to avoid incidents or to emphasize their patriotism. While Germany attempted to rid itself of everything that did not fully comply with Teutonic authenticity, a similar “cultural cleansing” took place in America to praise and defend Americanism. Wilson became the spokesperson for the “American spirit,” “American principles,” “true Americanism.” This climate became even stronger after the war, largely as a response to the challenge of the October Revolution. During the 1936 elections, the Republican platform accused the incumbent president of betraying the “American system,” while the Democratic platform declared it would reinstate the “American way of life” and “authentic Americanism.” The urgent insistence on an authenticity untouched by any foreign element went so far that Roosevelt not only praised “our American system,” but criticized Jefferson because he had been influenced too much by the “theories of the French revolutionaries.” In any case, fellow citizens were called upon to resist not only communism but “any other foreign -ism.” Of course, it would be absurd to put such different personalities and political-cultural circles on the same level, but the fact remains that the common references to “Americanism” made it possible to “ideologically expel” unacceptable ideologies and their adherents as being alien to the spirit and soul of America (Losurdo 1993, 167–70).

Fundamentalism and nativism

Encounters and clashes of different cultures are caused not only by war but also by massive waves of migration. Let us return to the movement that coined the term “fundamentalism.” The turning point was World War I, which not only gave clear political boundaries to the movement but also served to radicalize its positions. After 1914, or 1917 (the time of U.S. intervention), this movement did not differ much from the other fundamentalisms that had been evoked by the massive clash; all were attempting to explain their cultures in nationalistic and ethnic terms, to present their own national traditions as natural and at odds with those of the enemy country. But Protestant fundamentalism, which arose prior to World War I and continued after its conclusion,

represented something new; the characteristics of this movement are worth considering.

After the Civil War, a massive process of industrialization and urbanization took place in the United States, with a substantial influx of Irish Catholics, Eastern-European Jews, and others. Added to this was the expansion of African American churches made possible by the abolition of slavery and stemming from the desire of former slaves to find sanctuary from white persecution. The new wave of immigration not only brought other religions or faiths, but promoted the spread of new ideas such as socialism and anarchism. On the cultural level, the ruling morals and values were being challenged by the spread of secularization, especially the spread of Darwin's theory of evolution that questioned the biblical creation story. Other crisis points were the new sexual morals arising from the uprooting of large numbers of immigrants, the process of urbanization, and the ensuing weakening of social controls, and the rise of women's emancipation. On the socioeconomic level, the new European mass immigration led to sharper competition in the labor market, since the safety valve of the Far West was gone by that time. The sociopolitical conflict was associated with a serious identity crisis.

American fundamentalism was trying to find solutions to all these problems. The first task was to settle on the enemy. The new immigrants were the vector for the spread of political, social, and ideological disorder, as were all those who, although they were American citizens, had turned their backs on "pure Americanism" under the ruinous influence of foreign elements and doctrines (MacLean 1994, 22). The encounter with nativist movements and especially the Ku Klux Klan is therefore understandable. The antidote to the infections, deviations, and distortions was supposedly the return to "old-time, old-fashioned Gospel," which, freed from the demands and decrepitude of rationalist historical criticism, had regained its original and literal meaning, the return to "old-style religion" or "old-time religion" seen as the "true basis of our incomparable civilization" (MacLean 1994, 92). This is the context of the ban on the spread of Darwin's theory of evolution, which had been enacted in some states under fundamentalist pressure.

The reclaimed religion merged with the nation state in this way: “The Constitution of the United States is based on the Bible and Christian beliefs; an attack on one is an attack on the other.” Every school must have “a flag and a bible,” in order for America to overcome the crisis and regain its original identity as a Christian nation and civilization (MacLean 1994, 92, 11; Riesebrodt 1990, 57).

Morals were not free from the process of ethnicization. A proclamation of “Anglo-Saxon morality” was sharply critical of increasing excesses and lack of restraint (MacLean 1994, 126). Dance, jazz, and unseemly female clothing were visible symptoms of decline (Riesebrodt 1990, 62). Some state legislatures were proposing laws to fine or arrest girls and women whose dress was deemed too provocative (MacLean 1994, 31). It was no coincidence that fundamentalists played a decisive role in passing prohibition laws (Riesebrodt 1990, 13). Again this fundamentalism is characterized by the tendency to stereotype different cultural traditions and present them as natural phenomena. A researcher describes this Protestant fundamentalist view of Germany:

The essence and pernicious influence of German culture manifests itself on one hand in German rationalism in the form of a historic-philological critique of the Bible that was trying to undermine the basis of faith, on the other hand in the evolutionist (social-Darwinist) philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche that attacked Christianity from the outside. The barbaric WW I, triggered by the Germans, is a direct result of those tendencies. Furthermore German beer serves to undermine the basis of Christian morality. (Riesebrodt 1990, 64)

There is no mention of the contribution of Spinoza to rationalist exegesis of the Bible, or of the decisive role played by Darwin and Galton in developing the theory of evolution, to name only two examples. The German adversary gains rigidity without any nuances; his definition gradually moves from the field of history into that of anthropology (and nature).

On the other side, according to the American fundamentalists, there is a clear-cut continuity from original Christianity and Paul of Tarsus to the Pilgrims, who established the American colonies,

and the Founding Fathers. This history is sacred on both the historical and religious level: the content of the Bible and the American Constitution are seen as identical (Riesebrodt 1990, 73).

This fundamentalism is comparable to the current phenomenon of the Lega Nord in Italy. Massive migration from southern Italy and the clash of two different cultures did not pose a problem during the years of economic prosperity, but things have changed. On one hand, the *Wirtschaftswunder* [economic miracle] is over, and competition for jobs has sharpened; on the other hand, the process of secularization and the crisis of Marxism have weakened the very ideologies that used to promote integration. At this point, a nativist, fundamentalist movement emerges. The different historic and cultural context serves to explain the differences between the movements. The Lega Nord clearly has to invent its “old-time religion”—which explains its vacillations. On one hand, it exerts pressure on the Vatican (and attempts to orient Catholicism toward nativism); on the other hand, there is the temptation to develop a neopagan religion based on the cult of the river Po and the gods of Padania,² free from the contagious influence of cultures and groups alien to the authentic northern Italian spirit. The point is clearly to build up a mythical identity with its own peculiar values, which are incomprehensible and forever unachievable by southern Italians, the *sudici*.³ The elaboration of the nativist point of view goes so far as to postulate a Padanist and Celtic tribe of Padania, which has been called upon to rediscover itself and its authentic origins by ridding itself from the alien, irritating, and contagious elements.

The West from Manichaeism to fundamentalism

As we have seen, fundamentalist tendencies emerge also in the course of wars that take place in the West. But when we look at conflicts between the West as a whole, and militant movements in the colonies or the Third World, do we find fundamentalism exclusively with the latter? One should consider the warning of renowned sinologist Joseph Needham: “It is necessary to look at Europe from the outside, its failures and successes must be seen

through the eyes of the large part of humanity that consists of the peoples of Asia and Africa” (Abdel-Malek 1981, 73). This warning, which is much appreciated by Third World writers, provides a synthetic description of the methodological starting point of many of the great writings of European culture.

Is this tradition still alive? Especially since 1989, Western confidence does not seem to suffer from any doubts or contradictions, and it ascribes fundamentalism exclusively to its enemies or to everything that differs from the sacred and exclusive realm of civilization. But it is exactly this Manichaean attitude that is one of the prerequisites of fundamentalism. Manichaeism shows up clearly when conflicts sharpen. While in the fall of 1995 there was increased agitation by the Nation of Islam under the leadership of Farrakhan, there were assassinations in France that were ascribed to Algerian fundamentalism. A renowned columnist in a leading Italian paper paints a picture worthy of a closer look, since it is characteristic for mainstream ruling ideology. According to Barbara Spinelli, we are dealing with a planetary crash, whose camps have been clearly defined for centuries, or perhaps forever: on one side the “Jews and Christian civilization,” or “the Jewish and Western soul,” on the other side the “consciously anti-West, anti-European, and anti-Judeo-Christian” terrorists. The “anti-West hatred” that is raging in Israel is now unleashed in Europe: “today France is Europe’s Israel”; and Farrakhan, who has the audacity to strive for “a separate Islamic nation,” belongs mainly to “Islamic fanaticism” (Spinelli 1995b). There is such a lack of any attempt to understand the other side and to apply common norms and criteria to different cultures that the *Stampa* columnist does not even recognize an elementary problem: how to combine uncritical praise of Israel with demonizing Afro-American activists who are aspiring to a kind of Black Israel? One can (and should) criticize as unrealistic the ambition of the Nation of Islam to form an autonomous national state, but one must also consider the reasons for this demand. Instead of attempting a comparative analysis of the tendencies toward separatism in the Jewish communities of the late nineteenth century and contemporary tendencies toward separatism among African Americans, Spinelli simply

identifies the former with civilization and the latter with barbarism. For this reason, she always talks about fanaticism and fundamentalism in the singular form. Not a word about Palestinian victims of Jewish fundamentalism, although some settlers in Palestine worship Baruch Goldstein, the protagonist of the Hebron massacre, as a hero.

And is France really that innocent? In reality, the Paris assassination of 17 October 1995 marked a horrific anniversary. Thirty-four years previously there had been a kind of “Bartholomew night” in the French capital, to the detriment of Arabs and Maghrebians. “Dozens of bodies were thrown into the Seine . . . beaten, shot, drowned among the indifference of a ‘white city’ that permitted the flics to carry out an hours-long manhunt and murder in the great boulevards” (Benedetto 1995). “There were Parisians in the Flore who were amused by the spectacle and greeted the horrible scenes with applause” (Munzi 1995). The *Stampa* columnist, who in another article reconstructs the French-Algerian relations of the sixties (Spinelli 1995a), points to this and other episodes from the French occupation of Algiers. After all, the Algiers of the past evokes the Algiers of today: from the horrors of colonial oppression to the horrors of today’s civil war. In this case again, one must ask the question: is fundamentalism always and only found on the other side? From the many testimonials, let us choose one that has the advantage of having been published in the same paper where Spinelli so clearly draws the line between barbarism and civilization:

Let’s look at some of the stories collected by Amnesty [International] in the great silence of the Algerian bloodbath, for example the voice of a girl who had been kidnapped by the ruthless Sons of Allah. They went to her father to recite the first Sure of the Koran, which is spoken during the marriage ceremony. They had chosen her as ‘temporary bride’ for the enjoyment of the fighters. The father refused. They abducted the girl and raped her. When she returned home and the soldiers of antiterrorism arrived, they blew up the house claiming everybody was a “terrorist sympathizer.”

Another nameless mother tells this story: It was an evening like any other. Men in civilian clothing, masked

and armed like the praetorians of antiterrorism, knocked on the door. They took the four sons out into the street, forced them to lie down and executed them with a bullet to the head. When the father started to scream they shot him too. As they left, they told me: “An eye for an eye.” The police forced the mother to sign a preprinted document stating that her sons had been killed by terrorists. (Quirico 1996)

The complex character of the Algerian tragedy rooted in the anti-Islamic coup of 1992, the contradictory dialectics that have brought the masses of Algerians who used to support the FLN (which was in many aspects influenced by Western culture) to supporting fundamentalism, the ongoing frustrations that led African Americans from Martin Luther King Jr.’s dream of racial integration first to the revolutionary project of Malcolm X (influenced by Marxism and therefore Western culture) and then to the separatism of the Nation of Islam, the disappointment and despair of the Palestinian people subject not only to the temptations of Islamic fundamentalism but the threats of Jewish fundamentalism—all this is being suppressed and obliterated to make room for a war of civilizations or religions that has been going on for hundreds if not thousands of years.

In the course of the anti-Islamic crusade, further elements that signify fundamentalism appeared, besides Manichaeism. Especially informative is the praise afforded to the “Jewish and Western soul.” Although it is not the same as race, the soul is not exactly the same as culture either. Because of the theological tradition, the soul seems to refer to a realm that has something to do with eternity. For that reason, Rosenberg, the theoretician of the Third Reich, emphasizes in his tribute to the Germanic-Western soul that the “soul” is “the race seen from within” and the race is “the exterior of the soul” (Losurdo 1995, 75). With the “occidental soul,” journalism from Spengler to the Third Reich also glorifies “occidental man” (Losurdo 1995, 58, 100–104), thereby moving from theological to anthropological (in any case not historical) terrain. The acknowledgement of “occidental man” continues to play a significant role with Hayek (1960, 5, 19). The point is not to put such different positions on equal footing. Of interest, however,

is the more or less pronounced tendency to describe the conflict not in a historical (and sociopolitical) context but to portray it in categories that emphasize at least permanency, if not exactly eternity.

Yet another aspect of this argument points toward fundamentalism: the tendency to create antagonistic, stereotypical cultural traditions without any “exchange of ideas” among them. To better clarify this point, let us return to World War I. In an important phase of his development, Giovanni Gentile mocks the “pseudo-concepts” of the war ideologists, who were praising in Germany the “German loyalty,” the “German desire,” the “German morality,” and so on. The ideologues of the opposite camps acted in similar fashion: they all wanted to claim for themselves “the highest virtue and greatest human talents” by stating those belonged to one nation or one culture. The countries of the Entente especially valued one of those virtues, claiming for themselves respect for individuality. So the war was viewed as the clash of “two mentalities: Romanic and Anglo-Saxon (pluralistic) vs. Alemannic (monistic and pantheistic).” Gentile protests against this interpretation and asks: “Are the Germans Leibniz, Herbart, and Lotze monists? And on the other side is all of Romanic philosophy . . . pluralistic? Are Descartes and Malebranche pluralists? Is Bruno a pluralist?” And “who doesn’t know that Goethe’s pantheism was of exotic origin, and can be traced back to Spinoza, who was not German, and our very own Bruno?” (Losurdo 1997a, chap. 5).

The Italian philosopher, who at that time was a true Hegelian, clearly shows the two tendencies of the ideological climate of those years that we would consider fundamentalist: the nationalistic view of morals and culture, and the stereotypical contrast of two cultural traditions that are being considered natural, as is shown by the use of the concept of “mentality.” In his polemic against these tendencies, Gentile points to history and to Spaventa’s thesis of the circulation of ideas through Europe.

Two questions come to mind: do pseudoconcepts become valid if one replaces the adjectives “German” or “French” or “Romanic” or “Germanic” with the adjectives “European” or “Western”? And is an opinion no longer stereotypical if it does not contrast German

monism with Romanic and Anglo-Saxon pluralism, but instead holds up oriental monism (holism) against Western pluralism (individualism)? In the same way that Germany was described by its Western enemies, the Orient is being described by an Occident that now includes Germany.

If one understands individualism as the acknowledgement of every individual as possessing inalienable rights, regardless of class, gender, or race, then this result cannot in all honesty be attributed only to occidental history. Some of its most distinguished philosophers (Grotius and Locke, for example) had no problems justifying slavery in the colonies. The two countries that are usually seen as perfect examples of Western individualism are particularly tainted in this regard. One of the first acts of foreign policy of liberal England following the Glorious Revolution was the snatching of *asiento*, the monopoly of the slave trade, from Spain. Blacks were transported mostly across the Atlantic to the English colonies in America and later the United States, where slavery continued to exist, unhampered, until the Civil War. The generalization of human rights, today considered to be a characteristic of the Occident, has been promoted mostly by people living at the fringes of the Occident. Let us look at a few significant historical conflicts. Who expressed individualism better: the black Jacobin Toussaint-Louverture, who in the name of the Declaration of the Rights of Man demanded the abolition of slavery (“nobody, be he white, black, or red, can be the property of another”) or the liberal (French, English, and American) circles who were horrified by this extreme demand that was “incompatible with the entire system of European colonization,” as the London *Times* proclaimed? Who expressed individualism better: Mills and his followers in England and France, who preached “absolute obedience” of the “immature races,” or Lenin, who appealed to the “slaves in the colonies” to break their chains (Losurdo 1997c)?

The thesis of the exchange of ideas must be applied internationally and for the negative as well as the positive elements. There is widespread condemnation of Islam as the religion of “holy war” (along with fanaticism and intolerance), yet Mohammed adopted

this concept from the Old Testament, where it appears in a much more natural form. The motif of holy war and crusade is by no means a stranger to the Occident, where it plays an important role even in U.S. twentieth-century politics, from Wilson to Reagan.

“Judeo-Christian-Greco-Western” tradition vs. Islam?

In Manichaeism contrast with other cultures, the transfigured occidental identity is seen as part of a continuity that reaches far back into a distant and mythical past. Let us look again at the concept of the “Jewish and Western soul.” Even overlooking the disturbing noun, we see that the two juxtaposed adjectives combine complex and contradictory historical processes into seamless unity.

First of all, they suppress an obvious fact: Hitler and Nazism took advantage of a long-standing occidental tragedy when they unleashed the extermination crusade against the Jews, who came originally from the Middle East and were therefore labeled as “Orientals.” In this way, they had already been subjected to anti-Semitic mistrust and condemnation. At the same time, this concept has been developed by overlooking centuries of persecution of Jews and harsh confrontations between the two cultures, confrontations that, as we know, have not ended with the dissolving of the ghettos. The aftereffects are noticeable even today, at least according to a Jewish critic of Jewish fundamentalism. He reports that on 23 March 1980, “in Jerusalem hundreds of copies of the New Testament were publicly and ceremonially burned in Jerusalem under the auspices of Yad Le’akhim, a Jewish religious organization subsidized by the Israeli Ministry of Religions,” who took literally the urging of the Talmud to burn all copies of the New Testament wherever possible (Abraham 1993, 264). On the other hand, the counterposition of the Jewish-Western world vs. Islam does not take into consideration that throughout the centuries of Christian persecution the situation for Jews was much more favorable in the Islamic world and the Middle East, which is borne out by, among other things, the great Jewish culture in the Arabic language.

Even the Christian-Western tradition (to avoid speaking of the “soul”) shows problematic features, and not only because of the

geographic origin of Christianity. In the eyes of Nietzsche, monotheism itself has definite oriental characteristics, as it promotes the cult of an omnipotent and perfect God whose infinite distance minimizes or annuls individual differences in people. The idea of equality, which has triumphed in the West, of which the West is so proud that it presents it as the basis for its primacy and its mission, is rooted in oriental religion with the demand for universal subjugation of man under an absolute lord at its center. The spread of Judaism and Christianity in the Greek and Roman world, the victory of Christianity over polytheism and over a world that considered slavery and inequality as normal and natural—all this is viewed by Nietzsche as the victory of the Orient over the Occident.

The “*Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen*” (IV:4) characterizes Christianity disdainfully as a simple piece of “oriental antiquity” (Nietzsche 1967). The God of Judeo-Christian tradition, who condemns every sin or slight infraction of the norms he imposed as *lèse-majesté*, is “too oriental” (*Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, aphorisms 141, 135). Other indications that point to the Orient are the linear understanding of time and the more or less messianic expectation of renewal, which gained a foothold in antiquity among servants, slaves, and dropouts of all kinds, and later exerted its perilous influence in the revolutionary tradition. One could paraphrase a famous thought and grasp this idea of Nietzsche in the following synthesized form: *Judea capta Roman cepit* [the captured Judea conquers Rome]. The cultural defeat of Rome is the defeat of the pagan, polytheistic, and aristocratic Occident.

Nietzsche contrasts the Judeo-Christian ascendancy with the Greco-Roman ascendancy of the Occident. Today those two genealogies or genealogical myths are being juxtaposed without concern, thanks to another colossal suppression of centuries of fighting between Christianity and the antique world. This process has a long history. Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries considered its struggle against the Ottoman empire as one against oriental despotism, and applied the same interpretation to the fighting between Greeks and Persians (and between Rome and the barbarians). This ideology fails to remember Greek and Roman slavery, and the slave trade that was fully controlled by Spain and England,

in order for Europe and the Occident to glorify themselves as the exclusive island of freedom. This island assumes the heritage of the Greco-Roman world as well as the *res publica christiana* to continue the struggle against the incurably despotic Orient, which reaches from the Greco-Persian wars to the European and Christian war against Islam. The construction of the occidental identity, or the “Judeo-Christian-Greco-Western” tradition or soul, shows elements similar to any other fundamentalist mythology.

Although this genealogical myth in its diverse and contradictory configurations is problematic on the historical level, it is quite important for the understanding of Western self-assurance. Toynbee describes the American fundamentalism of the early twentieth century as follows:

Among English-speaking Protestants there are several fundamentalists who consider themselves the Chosen People, in the literal sense as the expression is used in the Old Testament. This British Israel is confident its ancestry can be found in the ten lost tribes. (1934, 215)

But does not the West as a whole act in the same way? The great English historian points to the fact that in the course of colonial expansion, from the discovery-conquest of America on, the West and especially the Puritans have identified with the Chosen People of the Old Testament while comparing the Indians (and the other colonial peoples) with the Canaanites, who are doomed to being eradicated to make room for the Chosen People, who are the carriers of Western civilization, inspired by God. The “Western race feeling” condemned by Toynbee is based on this conviction, but in our time this expression is inaccurate (Toynbee 1934, 211 and note 1). Not “race” but the “soul” and “Western man” are objects of veneration. We are returning to a concept that we have previously encountered in a leading theoretician of Islamic fundamentalism, albeit with reverse value judgment. Regarding Western fundamentalism, it is significant that the historian who cautions against this tendency is one who attempts to sketch a complete picture of universal development of civilization, and who is therefore more immune to the false ideology of subliminal and smug fundamentalism.

For a concrete analysis of concrete fundamentalism

The previously cited German researcher who compares American Protestant fundamentalism with Iranian Shiite fundamentalism defines fundamentalism as “religious nativism with claims to universal validity” (Riesebrodt 1990, 222). Although this definition grasps the essence of Western fundamentalism, it contains two errors or inaccuracies. The phenomenon does not necessarily have explicit religious form or universalistic ambitions. Those ambitions are missing in the Boxer rebellion and the teutomanic movement that developed during the course of the Napoleonic wars, while they are certainly present not only in Islamic but also in Protestant fundamentalism and the “Christian-Western” or “Jewish-Western” fundamentalism. The Lega Nord is a special case. It is a kind of subfundamentalism that fits into a fundamentalism with universalist ambitions: in adopting the concept of the West as the only source of civilization, the Lega Nord assumes within this sacred realm a mythical Celtic and Padanic identity and demands on this basis the secession from the southern barbarians, who stand apart from authentic northern and Western civilization.

One cannot ignore the complex and diverse phenomenology of fundamentalisms. This means they are not all the same in regard to the typology and concrete historical and political significance in any given case. One should consider how much they portray a certain culture and the conflict between cultures as something natural.

When the natural explanation reaches its culmination, fundamentalism turns into actual racism, and cultural cleansing turns or may turn into ethnic cleansing. Historical and political functions of fundamentalist movements also vary according to the sacred texts, or texts surrounded by a sacred aura to which they refer and to which they claim to return. Significant differences can occur even within the same religious and cultural tradition: one can refer to the Judaism of the prophets after the Babylonian exile or to the Pentateuch and those parts that legitimize the dehumanization and even eradication of the inhabitants of Canaan. Within Jewish fundamentalism, there are

segments that continue to insist on the essential qualitative difference between Jews and Gentiles (Abraham 1993, 266–67; Kepel 1991, 213, 230) and that have the tendency to dehumanize especially the Palestinian people. For this reason, the respected Israeli writer Yesayahu Leibovitz condemns them as followers of a “Judeo-Nazi” movement (Spataro 1996, 22–23). With declared racism, we find ourselves outside of the field of fundamentalism in its own sense.

When talking about today’s fundamentalism, unfortunately we usually refer to Islam and about movements that try, albeit in confusing and sometimes barbaric ways, to promote national independence or an identity that has been oppressed for centuries. How should they be judged historically and politically? Let us return to the struggles against Napoleon that developed in Germany and Spain. Although Hegel sharply criticizes all franco-phobia and teutomania (and with this any fundamentalist trend), he acknowledges the inevitable and progressive character of the anti-French uprising. Marx points out that in the Napoleonic era “all wars of independence waged against France bear in common the stamp of regeneration, mixed up with reaction” (1980, 403). Because these movements must regain national independence in the fight against the country of Enlightenment and revolution, they tend to see the culture of Enlightenment and revolution as a method of denationalization and assimilation, an instrument in the service of an expansionist policy and national oppression; i.e., they tend to identify the struggle against the invaders with the struggle against Enlightenment and the French Revolution. In this way, regeneration (the real process of liberation from the foreign occupation) combines with reaction (the confused and dismal ideology that accompanies this process and is the harbinger of further involution and regression).

Engels goes a step further when he sees in the anti-Napoleonic wars of the German people the beginning of the bourgeois-democratic revolutions. Interestingly, Lenin compares at the time of the peace of Brest-Litovsk the struggle of the young Soviet country against German imperialist aggression with the struggle led by Prussia against the Napoleonic invasion and occupation;

he characterizes Napoleon as “the same kind of robber as now the Hohenzollerns” (Losurdo 1983, 189–92).

Hegel, Marx, Engels, and Lenin strongly reject the fundamentalist ideology that led the anti-Napoleonic struggles, but see no reason to liquidate movements that express the demand for national liberation. The robust sense of historical focus is underscored by their vigorous support for the nationalist movements in Ireland and Poland, even though their ideological platforms were regressive in their significant reference to Catholicism (the ideology of restoration and reaction at least in the first part of the nineteenth century) and the immediate identification of national and religious consciousness, which is a typical fundamentalist trend. Should we take a different approach toward Islamic fundamentalism and similar movements? One thing is to be considered: even though the West dismisses the revolts of the Sepoys, the Mahdis, the Boxers as simple expressions of xenophobia and rejection of modern thought, in the countries themselves they are seen as nationalist revolutions or at least as their first crude expressions. For example, Mao Zedong characterized the Boxer rebellion as a “just war” against imperialism (Mao Tse-tung 1969, 182). Lenin also refused to interpret this rebellion in the framework of the Western crusaders as a simple expression of the silliness of “Chinese barbarism,” “hostility of the yellow race towards the white race,” or “Chinese hatred for European culture and civilisation” (Lenin 1960, 372–73). Should we view the Russian revolutionary as a spokesman of anti-Western fundamentalism? A reader of Hegel and Marx, Lenin had nothing in common with the Slavophiles. He argued against and mocked those who wanted to hold the “light” of the “mystical religious East” against the “materialist, decayed West.”

The sharp condemnation of capitalist exploitation, aggression, and genocide in no way constitutes the veneration of a precapitalist world untouched by modern Western thought. Far from a summary liquidation of European cultural tradition, Lenin condemned colonialist and imperialist thought on behalf of “European spirit” and “European culture” that had invaded the colonies that were beginning to rebel against their oppressors. In this view, there is no room for a stereotypical counterposition of static identities

without “exchange of ideas.” After taking power, Lenin called upon the Western revolutionaries to learn the lessons of October and to assimilate them creatively, but he also challenged the Russian revolutionaries and the Russian people to utilize the “best Western European models” on the state-political level, and then to transform and overcome them (Losurdo 1997a, 69–74). Sharp criticism of every form of fundamentalism does not mean dismissal or neglect of the legitimate ambitions that are in certain cases expressed in distorted form through fundamentalism, and it does not mean to reject a concrete analysis of concrete fundamentalism. Not even the leading crusaders against Islam refuse this concrete analysis; at least it can be said that the United States has observed the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan with a sympathetic eye, an obscurantist movement but one that tends to accept American and Western hegemony.

Let us assess the history of the Arab world over the last few decades. The process of colonial subjugation begins in the years following World War I, the same years that see the beginning of the worldwide process of decolonization, sparked by the October Revolution. This unfortunate chronological juxtaposition has likely increased the feelings of national humiliation on the part of the Arabs, especially considering that after World War II they saw a new state spring up in their midst that quickly became predominant, sees itself as a significant element of the Occident, and is a close ally of the country that personifies global Western hegemony. Although the fundamentalist answer appears distorted, dismal, and even barbaric, it is more rational than it seems at first glance. As early as the late nineteenth century, on 12 September 1881, the London *Times* summarized the situation in Egypt (and the Middle East) in this way: “We must remind you that the only domestic institution under Egyptian control at this time is the army. All others have been taken over, controlled or modified by French and English representatives” (Mansfield 1993, 102). The British daily forgot to add religion, which especially in those years with the Mahdi gave buoyancy to a strong national liberation movement. The history of the Middle East after World War II is one of resistance, which vacillated between calling upon the army (sometimes influenced by

the Soviet Union and Marxism) or religion in its attempt to act against Western hegemony.

The response to Islamic fundamentalism can certainly not be a crusade in the name of the supposed “Jewish-Christian-Western soul.” Such a crusade would only fan the flames and fully legitimize Islamic fundamentalism. The task is to come up with a position that combines criticism of the West with acknowledgment of its achievements. The weakening or dissolution of such a position is the reason that contemporary resistance movements against Western imperialism assume more and more the form of a religious or cultural war. Once the balance between criticism of the West and takeover of its achievements has been destroyed, there is only the holy war of the West against the holy war of Islam.

Epilogue: Suicide bombings, holy war, and fundamentalism

This essay, first published in Italian in 1997, underlines the danger of using the concept of *fundamentalism* in a dogmatic and trite way by applying it always to the enemies of the West and especially against Islam. Two years after publication, the war against Yugoslavia was unleashed. The attempts to justify or even praise this war were interesting. There was acknowledgment that the bombing of a sovereign state that had not committed any acts of aggression was contrary to international law, the constitution of the UN, and even that of NATO. But this was considered less important than asserting respect for human rights and the sacred moral norms. We need not go into the specifics of the accusations against Belgrade. It is more interesting to analyze the logical structure of the Western ideology of war. Positive legal norms were clearly differentiated from sacred and inviolable moral norms; in case of conflict between the two sets, the laws formulated by society are irrelevant. This priority of the sacred over the secular is solemnly emphasized in proclamations by the president of the United States, ending inevitably with the ritual intonation: God bless America! Here we find ideology and behaviors usually ascribed to Islamic fundamentalism; the difference is that in this case the ayatollah of Washington instead of Teheran decides unilaterally who the villains are. Current tragic events are more

enlightening. On at least one point, Bush and Bin Laden agree completely: this is a war of good against evil, and God, by definition, must be on the side of good. This is a holy war!

I have pointed out in this essay how important this motif is for Western political tradition. In view of recent developments, a few additional points need to be made. Let us look not at the crusades, but at contemporary and modern history, beginning with Bacon. In seventeenth-century England (not yet liberal, but proud of its exclusive “English or Anglican freedom”), Bacon wrote a dialogue of holy war (*sacrum bellum*) against heathens and savages, who are ultimately no better than wild beasts and deserve to be eliminated. The motif of holy war, conducted by the Chosen People, plays a significant role in the history of Western colonial expansion. Let us give the floor to a great English historian, Arnold Toynbee:

The biblical Christian of European race and origin, who had settled overseas among non-European peoples, identified inevitably with Israel in obeying the will of Jehovah by taking possession of the Promised Land; on the other hand he identified the non-Europeans, whom he encountered during his progress, with the Canaanites who were given into the hand of the Lord’s Chosen People, to be destroyed or subjugated. With this belief the English Protestant settlers in the New World are exterminating the North American Indians in the same way as the bison, from one coast of the continent to the other. (1934, 211–12)

The motif of holy war accompanies especially (in explicit religious or superficially secularized form) the rise of the United States to its status as the world’s only superpower. In 1898 Washington began its war against Spain with the accusation that Spain had unjustly robbed Cuba of its freedom and independence, and on an island “that is so close to our borders” had acted in ways that were despised by “the morality of the people of the United States” and that are a “disgrace for Christian civilization.” This extraordinary document closely combines indirect invocation of the Monroe Doctrine with a call for a crusade in the name of democracy, religion, and morality in order to excommunicate an arch-Catholic country such as Spain and bestow the consecration of a holy war on a conflict that was the launch of the United States as an imperialist power.

A good decade and a half later, leading U.S. politicians celebrated the intervention of the United States in World War I as a regular crusade, although the action was determined by substantial material interests. A large part of the population went along with this official line. Wilson declared in soulful and solemn tones, "The time is ripe, destiny has spoken. We have not come to this point thanks to a plan devised by us, but by the will of God who has led us into this war." And: "When people take up arms to free other people the fight takes on a sacred dimension." At times one seems to be reading the sermons that accompanied medieval crusades: "The sword will sparkle, as if its blade reflects the light of God"; in any case, there was no doubt that the American soldiers were fighting as "crusaders" of a "transcendental undertaking" (Losurdo 1993, 166–67). Reagan used a similar ideology for his victorious crusade against the "evil empire." "Holy" is by definition the war that is waged by the Chosen People. To put it as George W. Bush did: "Our nation has been chosen by God and has the historical mission to be a model for the whole world."

As outlined in this essay, one of the characteristics of fundamentalism is the attempt to construct stereotypical traditions that are compared without any relation to each other. Islam is accused of not being able to differentiate between politics and religion in the international realm, as if the Koran had not taken over the concept of holy war from the Old Testament, the same sacred text that continues to play such an important role in Western history.

Western fundamentalism manifests itself in the campaign that tries to inflame holy war against Islam with another argument: the claim that suicide bombings are only found in Islamic cultural and religious tradition; this supposedly proves Islam's innate disregard for human life and the dignity of the individual. This statement is obviously based on a lack of historical knowledge. Everybody should be familiar, at least through the movies, with the kamikaze fliers, those Japanese pilots who crashed their planes on the U.S. navy in the end phase of World War II. For another example from the Far East, let us jump back to nineteenth-century China: when the Taiping rebellion was crushed, hundreds of thousands preferred suicide to surrender (Chesneaux 1974, 2:127). Is the West immune to such behaviors? Both Israel and Jewish tradition as a

whole are seen today as integral elements of the West. For this reason two especially tragic chapters of Jewish history deserve our attention. After they had destroyed Jerusalem in 74 CE, the Roman legions were able after a long siege to conquer Masada, the last remnant of the Jewish state. During this siege, the Zealots at first fought determinedly against an overwhelming force and finally killed themselves rather than surrender. Over a thousand years later, the first crusade took place. It not only brought death and destruction to the Muslim world (which conceived on this occasion the concept of suicide assassins), but also attacked German cities that harbored Jewish communities. This led not only to suicide on a massive scale, but also to the killing of children of tender ages, who were in this way spared from the forced “conversion” to Christianity that was attempted by the crusaders (Chazan 1996). Judaism is no stranger even to suicide assassinations. In 1944 Hannah Arendt argued vigorously against Zionist groups who were flirting with the idea of creating “suicide battalions” to speed up the creation of the Jewish state (Arendt 1989, 213). This should not come as a surprise. The Old Testament honors the figure of Samson, who manages to break the columns of the temple with many Philistines inside. “Judges” reports the hero’s last words: “O Lord God, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me. . . . Let me die with the Philistines” (Judges 16:23–31). This event took place in the same region that is experiencing today suicide bombings by radical Islamic groups; the difference is that Samson was involved in a national liberation struggle against the Philistines, while today the Palestinians wage their war of national liberation against Israel.

Finally, such practices and behaviors arise in struggles that are characterized by despair and feelings of powerlessness. They are especially used by ethnic and social groups that have experienced cruel and lengthy oppression. In the case of the kamikaze pilots, they were certainly part of a great imperialist power that committed horrific crimes, but one should not forget that they only appeared toward the end of the war (after the battle of the Gulf of Leyte on 25 October 1944); Japan was already on the ropes and, since its air and naval forces were practically paralyzed, had to watch helplessly the destruction of its cities by the Americans, culminating in the

annihilation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki less than a year later. The assertion that suicide bombings are an Islamic invention is simply a Western fundamentalist fairy tale. It is hard to find a people more desperate than the Palestinians, whose tragedy has been unfolding for decades with almost total indifference from the “international community.” In examining specific practices and behaviors, one cannot of course neglect the role of cultural and religious traditions, but first of all one must look at the objective circumstances.

We have seen that the statements by Bush and Bin Laden are as similar as two peas in a pod. Of course, Bin Laden is not a head of state, but merely leads a “private” organization. Anyone analyzing the contemporary international situation objectively must conclude that the United States is the only state that refers in its international dealings to the ideology of holy war. Like quite a few of his predecessors, Bush explicitly speaks about the “crusade” against “evil.” Without being aware of it, he even returns to the language of the medieval crusaders. According to St. Bernard of Clairvaux, a crusader who killed a Moslem was not *homicida* but *malicida*; he did not kill a person but a vulgar incarnation of “evil” (Bernardus 1862, col. 924). Any analysis of fundamentalism that in any way promotes the crusade by the “secular” and “civilized” Western world against “barbaric” and “clerical” Islam is nonsensical in both the historical and logical sense, and a political catastrophe!

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Except for the references to Lenin 1960 and Marx 1980, all quotations have been translated from the German by the translator of this article.

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NOTES

1. Regarding the interpretation of the anti-Napoleon wars, see Losurdo 1983, 189–216; Losurdo 1989, chap. 1, par. 2, and chap. 14, par. 1; regarding the different trends in the Italian Risorgimento, see Losurdo 1997a, chap. 5.

2. An area that the Lega Nord claims includes all of Northern Italy, beyond the actual Po plain (*pianura padana*).

3. *Sudici* can mean southerners as opposed to *nordici* (northerners) but it can also mean dirty, smutty, etc.

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