Fundamentalism, Violence and Religions- Theoretical Introduction

Intellectual Output 2, Unit V

Version No.	Author, institution	Date/Last Update
1	- Laurent Klein - Renaud Rochette, *Institut européen en sciences des religions – Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, PSL* - Chrystal Vanel	*04/09/2018*

What is Fundamentalism? Theoretical introduction

Fundamentalism can be described as **a will to go back to the "fundamentals"** of a religion. It stems from the idea that **a given religion was pure at its beginnings** and becomes **corrupted as time goes by**. It is often marked by a **strict literalism**, since interpretation outside the literal meaning of sacred texts is seen as corruption. Another significant feature is the importance **of in-group and out-group distinction**: the world is divided between true believers and the others (either non-believers or mistaken believers).

In the modern era, this return to a previous, mythical ideal is most of the time a **consequence of modernity**: modern/secular values are considered to go against religious values, and are seen as a seed of corruption.

It is useful and interesting to look more closely and make some distinctions from other terms often related to "fundamentalism".

Traditionalism means **the strict following of a consolidated tradition**, which however does not necessarily coincide with the supposed original purity. There is not an emphasis on a distant, mythical past, but more on a nearer one, transmitted by the collective memory of the community.

Integralism is a conception of society in which **every dimension** (politics, culture, education...) **must be "integrally" modeled according to the norms of religion.** Integralism basically refutes a pluralistic secular worldview, that is, that religion is considered one of the various possible worldviews, according to personal faith. This is why fundamentalism and integralism have often resemblance in meaning, but not always: for some neo-Orthodox Jews, for example, the dictum is to be Jewish at home and a citizen in the outside world.

Fundamentalism is not necessarily violent. The rejection of the modern world and the importance of the in-group/out-group distinction may lead to two different kinds of opposition. In some cases, fundamentalists live in **closely knit communities** and **avoid contact with outsiders**. In other cases, fundamentalists want **to force their views on religion on others** (integralism stance), which can lead to violence. This violence is directed at non-believers and bad believers (sometime considered worse than non-believers). When it comes to conflict, then we can speak of connection between fundamentalism and radicalism.

Radicalism, which today is a term of great success, should be considered more generally a synonym of extremism, in relation to even non-religious contexts: it has a militant character because the **conflict is the propellant of the action/struggle** for the fulfilment of an ideal considered inalienable. Such an ideal, by the way, could be also political, racial, nationalist and lead to terrorist activity.

Related Digital Modules
- **Religions and Fundamentalisms**
- **Globalization, fundamentalism, and maximalism**