The Global Emergence of Modern Religious Fundamentalism

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Abstract

Over the past fifty years, religion has made a return to political prominence that few could have predicted in the middle of the 20th century. Even more surprising is that the reemergence seems to have been led by religious "fundamentalists," those who are so religiously devout that even the deeply religious might have considered them radical in the mid 20th century. This "sudden" religious revival has resulted in an environment where neither secularists or "fundamentalists" deeply understand each other. This paper hopes to foster greater understanding between secularists and the deeply religious by exploring "fundamentalism" from a secular point of view. This, this paper explores various definitions of "fundamentalist" and discusses some of fundamentalism's defining characteristics and the stages that most fundamentalist movements tend to go through. Next, this paper explores two "fundamentalist" movements in more detail, specifically Evangelical Christianity in the United States and Islamic Shi'ism in Iran. This paper then concludes with a discussion of some of the issues and implications that its analysis has raised.

Outline
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Research Question: What do the similarities and differences between the causes of the contemporary rise of Christian fundamentalism in the United States and of Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East tell us about the contemporary rise of religious fundamentalism in general?

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I Introduction

On November 4th, 1979, Iranian revolutionaries shocked the Western world when they stormed the American embassy in Iran and started the infamous 444-day-long hostage crisis. Western analysts watched as the revolutionaries tore down a secular government and replaced it with an Islamic theocracy – a government institution that many had previously doubted could possibly gain prominence in the modern age. The Iranian revolution turned secularists' predictions on their heads and showed that religion, and a deeply conservative "fundamentalist" take on religion at that, would play a prominent role in modern politics.

Perhaps Western observers should not have been so surprised by the religious nature of the Iranian revolution. After all, Evangelical Protestants had been gaining political power in America around the same time. However, to proponents of the secularization thesis – the idea that as nations modernized the role of religion would diminish until it played a negligible or near-negligible role on politics – both religious developments were equally surprising. How could religion possibly play a strong role in a society dominated by science and reason? How could otherwise reasonable and rational people be proponents of Biblical literalism when there

was so much scientific evidence to the contrary?

There was, and to a large degree still is, a dearth of understanding between strict proponents of secularism and their religious counterparts. This lack of understanding can lead to bad policy decisions, unnecessary hostility, and at times flat-out racism. It is neither prudent nor feasible to maintain this status quo; Western secularists cannot afford to ignore the religious phenomenon that has become popularly known as "fundamentalism." This paper seeks to explore the phenomenon of religious "fundamentalism" from a secular point of view in hopes of bridging the disconnect between secular and religious perspectives. In Section II, I will discuss fundamentalism as a phenomenon in general. In Sections III and IV, I will discuss specific histories of Christian Protestant fundamentalism in the United States and Shi'a fundamentalism in Iran. Finally, in Section V, I will conclude with a discussion of some of the implications of religious fundamentalism.

II Religious Fundamentalism as a General Phenomenon

The first challenge faced when trying to understand religious fundamentalism is defining fundamentalism. There have been a number of studies that have tried to give a comprehensive characterization of fundamentalism which is both comprehensive enough to include all religious traditions that have been deemed fundamentalist and specific enough to exclude the religious traditions that have not been deemed fundamentalist, but most proposed definitions have been met with criticism.[1] By far the most extensive study of fundamentalism ever conducted is Martin Marty and Scott Appleby's Fundamentalism Project, a massive five-volume work that studied eighteen different fundamentalist religious traditions across the world in an attempt to

1 Michael O. Emerson and David Hartman, "The Rise of Religious Fundamentalism," *Annu. Rev. Sociol.* 32 (April 5, 2006).

characterize fundamentalism.[2] In their final volume,[3] they present the following nine characteristics, five ideological and four organizational, that define fundamentalism:[4]

- Reactivity to marginalization of the religion
- Selectivity
- Dualistic worldview
- Absolutism and inerrancy
- Millenialism and messianism
- Elect, chosen membership
- Sharp boundaries
- Authoritarian organization
- Behavioral requirements

This definition invites criticism from The Fundamentalism Project itself; one scholar[5] points out that "only two of the eighteen religious movements studied score high on all nine traits" and that non-Fundamentalist religious movements such as "Jehovah's Witnesses score high on all traits."[6] This is indicative of the difficulty involved with trying to characterize a complex set of a wide range of religious movements using a single all-encompassing definition. Even the most comprehensive study of fundamentalism struggles to find strong common themes.

The anthropologist William Beeman proposes a different set of qualities that define

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2 Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, eds., *The Fundamentalism Project, vol. 1, Fundamentalisms and Society: Reclaiming the Sciences, the Family, and Education* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 1993).

3 G. A. Almond, E. Sivan, and R. S. Appleby, "Fundamentalism: Genus and Species," in *The Fundamentalism Project*, ed. M. E. Martin and R. S. Appleby, vol. 5, *Fundamentalisms Comprehended* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1995).

4 Emerson and Hartman, "The Rise of Religious Fundamentalism."

5 L. R. Iannaccone, "Toward an Economic Theory of 'Fundamentalism,'" *Journal of the Institute of Theoretical Economics* 153 (1997).

6 Emerson and Hartman, "The Rise of Religious Fundamentalism."

fundamentalism:[7]

- Revivalism
- Orthodoxy
- Evangelism
- Social action

Revivalism is essentially the idea that social change causes people to fall back on some old fundamental identity; orthodoxy expresses the ideas of religious purity and literalism; evangelism captures the urge to spread one's religion; and social action accounts for the marriage of politics and religion. Beeman's chosen definition places more emphasis on the organizational and actionable aspects of fundamentalism than the one proposed by The Fundamentalism Project, but ideological aspects of fundamentalism still play an important role in the orthodoxy quality. This is an important distinction to make, especially when attempting to craft public policy, since it is often the actions of fundamentalists that worry political leaders and not their ideologies *per se*.

Given Beeman's definition, however, one could make the argument that a great number of political movements are essentially fundamentalist, even if those movements are not religious. For example, the Tea Party movement in the United States obviously fits the evangelistic and social action qualifiers. The Tea Party also derives many of its beliefs from literal readings of the Constitution and a set of patriotic ideals, which could satisfy the orthodoxy qualification. One could further argue that the Tea Party is a revivalistic movement that seeks to return to the roots of American values, which would satisfy the revivalism qualification. Under Beeman's definition, then, a non-religious organization such as the Tea Party might be considered

7 William O. Beeman, "Fighting the Good Fight: Fundamentalism and Religious Revival," ed. J. MacClancy, *Anthropology for the Real World*, last modified 2000, http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Anthropology/publications/FUNDMNTALISM.htm.

fundamentalist. Taking his definition, any study of fundamentalism would require much deeper sociological analysis of the forces that drive people to organize into large groups. This problem is, practically speaking, relatively easy to fix; all we need to do is specify that we are only examining religiously fundamentalist groups. The shortcomings of his definition, however, once again reinforce the complexity of the issue of defining fundamentalism.

Two other sociologists, F. Maurice Ethridge and Joe R. Feagin, examined fundamentalism from a more empirical point of view. They conducted studies of two Protestant denominations by asking them questions on their beliefs and analyzing the range of answers in an attempt to create an empirical test that could determine whether a group was fundamentalist or not.[8] They assessed two denominations on their relative organizational-ritual fundamentalism, socio-cultural fundamentalism, and theological-supernaturalist fundamentalism. They found that the more fundamentalist denomination had scored higher on organizational-ritual fundamentalism; in other words, the group that was more fundamentalist was so largely because of the organizational and ritual aspects of their denomination.[9]

Kristen Monroe and Lina Kreidie conducted a similar empirical study of Islamic fundamentalists by interviewing fourteen Muslims from different parts of the spectrum of religiosity and different sects of Islam.[10] They determined that one of the major differences between the worldviews of secular Muslims and fundamentalist Muslims is that fundamentalists perceive that the interests of the group as a whole are more important than their individual self-interest and that Rational Choice Theory therefore could not be applied to fundamentalists without imposing an Enlightenment-era worldview on fundamentalists.[11]

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8 F. Maurice Ethridge and Joe R. Feagin, "Varieties of 'Fundamentalism': A Conceptual and Empirical Analysis of Two Protestant Denominations," *The Sociological Quarterly* 20, no. 1 (Winter 1979)

9 Ibid.

10 Kristen Renwick Monroe and Lina Haddad Kreidie, "The Perspective of Islamic Fundamentalists and the Limits of Rational Choice Theory," *Political Psychology* 18, no. 1 (March 1997).

11 Ibid.

This empirical and comparative approach allows for the explicit comparison of two different groups of fundamentalists and gives researchers a tool to empirically determine firstly whether one group is more fundamentalist than another and secondly why one group may be more fundamentalist than the other. Unfortunately, this method also has its limitations; a great deal of complexity is lost whenever the beliefs and an entire group of people are reduced to a single value. Furthermore, the method is very labor-intensive, requiring interviews or carefully-interpreted surveys. It is telling that Ethridge and Feagin were only able to compare two denominations[12] and that Monroe and Kreidie only interviewed fourteen people.[13]

Emerson and Hartman point out another problem with trying to find a strong definition of fundamentalism: any attempt to define fundamentalism is inherently tautological in nature, since the process involves first choosing groups that one deems to be fundamentalist, then examining commonalities between them, and finally concluding that the groups originally chosen were indeed fundamentalist.[14] Furthermore, when one finds that the definition of fundamentalism one has produced might encompass groups that were not originally deemed fundamentalist, as in the cases of the definition produced by The Fundamentalism Project or the definition proposed by Beeman, one's natural reaction is to modify the definition of fundamentalism to be more exclusive instead of considering whether the previously unexamined groups should be considered fundamentalist.

Further complicating the issue is the development that fundamentalism as a term has taken on in the media an exotic form of "Otherness," a new orientalism that inhibits cross-cultural understanding and discourages people from engaging in meaningful conversation. Fundamentalism has become what the anthropologist Judith Nagata calls a form of "verbal

12 Ethridge and Feagin, "Varieties of 'Fundamentalism.'"
13 Monroe and Kreidie, "The Perspective of Islamic Fundamentalists."
14 Emerson and Hartman, "The Rise of Religious Fundamentalism."

ammunition against ideological and political enemies."[15] Attaching the label of fundamentalist to people following religious traditions in certain ways risks marginalizing their interests and privileging the interests of the labeler.

Corroborating this problem is the fact that those we call fundamentalists today rarely refer to themselves as fundamentalists. The term "fundamentalist" was first used in the late 19th century by American Protestants who sought to return to the "fundamentals" of Christianity.[16] At that time, they did refer to themselves as fundamentalists, but very few people refer to themselves as fundamentalists today. For example, most conservative Evangelical Christians, who are typically labeled fundamentalist under most definitions, are not willing to call themselves fundamentalist until the connotations of fundamentalist under the specific conditions of the interview are clarified.[17] This problem is further exacerbated when referring to Muslim religious conservatives, since many Muslims view the term fundamentalist as a Western term which is applied to Islamic conservatives for the purposes of fear-mongering and control.[18] Another criticism is that the term "fundamentalism" has no place in Islam because Islam holds that the words of the Qu'ran are the literal words of Allah, as opposed with most Christian denominations, which usually holds that the words of the Bible are only inspired by God. In the Islamic system, there is little room for deviating from what is explicitly stated in the scriptures, so there is never a need to return to the fundamentals.[19] By most definitions, this literalism would characterize all Muslims as fundamentalist, regardless of their relative religiosity.[20]

Another obstacle in understanding fundamentalism from a secular perspective is that

15 Judith Nagata, "Beyond Theology: Toward an Anthropology of 'Fundamentalism,'" *American Anthropologist* 103, no. 2 (June 2001).
16 Karen Armstrong, *The Battle for God: A History of Fundamentalism* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2001).
17 T. M. Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012)
18 Emerson and Hartman, "The Rise of Religious Fundamentalism."
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.

fundamentalists and secularists have different worldviews that prevent the successful application of Rational Actor Theory. This idea was first proposed by Roxanne Euben[21] and was later further analyzed by Monroe and Kreidie.[22] They determined that Rational Actor Theory so failed to predict the behavior of Islamic Fundamentalists because Rational Actor Theory and fundamentalism arise from a different set of assumptions. In particular, Rational Actor Theory assumes that all human beings act "rationally" – that is, in a way that will maximize perceived self-interest. This is an Englightenment-era idea that has formed the cornerstone of capitalism and much of Western sociological and economic thought.[23] Fundamentalism, however, starts from a different assumption. In a worldview where divinity is omnipresent, the interests of the individual are inherently inferior to the interests of the group or religion as a whole.[24] Thus Rational Actor Theory cannot account for fundamentalist behavior because Rational Actor Theory presupposes that all decisions any person makes are made in the pursuit of self-interest.

That is not to say that Islamic fundamentalists are less capable of using reason or making rational decisions. On the contrary, Monroe and Kreidie found not that Islamic fundamentalists were incapable of making self-interested, "rational" choices, but rather that they chose not to do so when making religious decisions.[25] At their cores, Rational Actor Theory and Rational Choice Theory privilege the individualistic self-interest that dominate the thinking of the Western world and marginalize value systems which do not place the individual as the most important. They create a dichotomy between the "rational" and the "irrational," essentially positing that those who do not act in their own self-interest are somehow non-human. Like the conceptualization of fundamentalism as an essential "Other," Rational Actor Theory and Rational Choice Theory

21 Roxanne Euben, "When Worldviews Collide: Conflicting Assumptions about Human Behavior Held by Rational Actor Theory and Islamic Fundamentalism," *Political Psychology* 16, no. 1 (March 1995)
22 Monroe and Kreidie, "The Perspective of Islamic Fundamentalists."
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.

when applied to fundamentalism act as methods of discrimination. They are more examples of the Western world's tendency to impose its value systems on other cultures, and their failure is not that surprising when viewed in this light.[26]

It is not prudent to discuss fundamentalism first discussing the media's portrayal of fundamentalism. When fundamentalism is used in the media, it is almost exclusively used to refer to Islamic fundamentalists, and it is usually paired with stories of terrorism or other unlawful and often harmful activity. The media have painted a picture of fundamentalists as radical Islamists who wish to tear down the West and impose their own worldview on others. It is important to emphasize that this is not always the case. For the first fundamentalists in the United States in the late 19th century, fundamentalism was an attempt to recover the deeper meanings of life. Modernism and its accompanying crises of meaninglessness left a "God-shaped hole" in Western consciousness, and all the advances of science could not answer the questions of "why?"[27] In the current-day middle east, fundamentalism can be viewed through a lens of political change, and Islam can work as a rallying point around which to base a revolution. Contemporary religious fundamentalism is also a reaction to modernism and accelerated modernization and Westernization, a drive to find meaning in an increasingly meaningless world.

A characteristic that has come to be associated with fundamentalism as a result of this media portrayal is violence. Since the September 11 terrorist attacks, Islamic fundamentalism has become synonymous with radical and backward religious radicals who wish to tear down the civilized Western world with violence. However, there is nothing about religious fundamentalism in itself that makes it particularly violent. Rather, it is only when religious

26 Euben, "When Worldviews Collide."
27 Armstrong, *The Battle for God.*

fundamentalists are also marginalized politically that violence becomes a factor. In essence, it is more useful to view violence associated with religious fundamentalism through the lens of underprivileged minorities fighting for representation than through the lens of religious wars like the Crusades or jihadism. For example, most religious fundamentalists in the United States have not historically resorted to violence. Rather, they tend to effect political change through the existing political system. Important exceptions are bombings of abortion clinics and violence against abortion providers, which is an example of what can happen when any underrepresented group feels that the existing political infrastructure has failed them. Similarly to American fundamentalists' relative non-violence, Iranian Islamic fundamentalists have not engaged in terrorist activities since the Iranian revolution. The cause of this may seem obvious; a ruling political power has no need to commit acts of terrorism, since it can garner control in other ways. However, this re-emphasizes the point that religious fundamentalism is not inherently violent. In the cases where religious fundamentalists turn to violence, such as with the Sunni fundamentalist group Al Qaeda, the violence is often a reaction to a myriad of other political and economic forces.

The wide range of problems associated with defining fundamentalism in a simple and concrete way notwithstanding, it is not practical for a paper focusing on the rise of religious fundamentalism to devote its entire being to discussing why fundamentalism is a murky and problematic term instead of discussing characteristics of religious fundamentalist movements and tracing the general arc of their rises. For the remainder of this paper, then, the author will refer to specific groups of religious “fundamentalists” whenever possible. However, it may still be necessary to refer to fundamentalism as a general phenomenon when, for example, examining the overarching paths that fundamentalist movements tend to follow. The author thus asks that

the reader keep the complexities inherent in discussing fundamentalism in mind when the author attempts to characterize certain aspects of fundamentalism as a general phenomenon.

Keeping that disclaimer in mind, we can now begin discussing some of the stages that have characterized the history of fundamentalism over the past century or so. Generally, these stages are the following:

- Development of fundamentalism as a modern approach to finding meaning
- Seclusion of religious fundamentalists from larger society
- Return of religious fundamentalists in countercultural movements
- Rise of religious fundamentalism to political prominence.

The first stage in the long development of fundamentalism is a revival of religion as an answer to the metaphysical question that modernism could not answer. To give this development some context, many modernists hypothesized, in a so-called secularization thesis, that once Western progress reached its peak, rational science would be able to answer all the questions that had plagued human thought for centuries, and non-empirical approaches to finding meaning would become relegated to obsolescence at best or private life at home at worst. Indeed, some people still believe in the secularization thesis today, even though religion has proven that it can play a strong role in modern politics.[28] For the time being, however, the secularization thesis has proven itself to be a failure, for it has not predicted the mainstream revival of religion in politics. The reasons for its failure are manifold, but central to its failure is an inability to predict and answer the essential crisis of Modernism – the sudden realization that the value systems that had been held without doubt for centuries were hopelessly flawed and that that void in meaning had to somehow be filled.

Fundamentalism was but one approach in filling that void. In many ways,

28 Armstrong, *The Battle for God*.

fundamentalism is a distinctly modern take on religion, one that could only have arisen in the same environment that produced the scientists who were grasping for the fundamentals of physics and math. Early 20th century physicists were searching for the fundamental laws quantum mechanics; mathematicians were re-examining the regimes that they had taken for granted for centuries; Impressionists were exploring the idea that all events in life were fleeting and that nothing was permanent except for impermanence; and Modernist writers like Woolf were celebrating the complexity of human interactions and the richness of observing every single detail in stream-of-thought masterpieces. Every idea was being examined under smaller and more skeptical lenses. The natural course of action was to subject religion to the same lens and return to the fundamentals.

Indeed, the late 19th century marked the first time that Biblical literalism became popular; prior to that time, religious texts were often interpreted symbolically or allegorically.[29] This reveals exactly how modernist this new movement was. Like their counterpart physicists, mathematicians, and artists, religious fundamentalists approached the "fundamentals" of religion with the zeal of those who are about to stumble upon a breakthrough. Given this revivalist energy, the next stage in the development of fundamentalism may have been a little hard to predict.

For most secular modernists, it was not enough that religion be interpreted with a new lens, especially when that lens led to a literal interpretation of what, from a scientific perspective, was obviously untrue. The rise of Modernism brought with it a rejection and marginalization of religion as people rejected all old forms of thought, especially those that contradicted the greatest scientific discoveries of the day. Modernization and its accompanying rejection of religion breathed new life into the secularization thesis, and all over the world, religion seemed to take a

29 Armstrong, *The Battle for God.*

backseat to other value systems derived from theories of Freud or Marx. Thinkers such as Marx further championed the secularization thesis by positing that religion itself was the "opium of the people"[30], and religious movements around the world lost virtually all political prominence. From the point of view of a modernist during this period of seclusion, all evidence pointed to the ultimate end of religion as a political force.

Although religion no longer played a strong role in the public eye, however, religious fundamentalists were not completely eradicated during this time of seclusion. As the name of this stage suggests, religious fundamentalists did not vanish completely but instead went into hiding,[31] waiting for the proper political climate into which they could return and reclaim their political prowess.

The perfect political climate came during the Cold War, when countercultural movements began gaining widespread momentum throughout the whole world. These countercultural movements differed depending on which specific country the movements happened in, but generally speaking they were similar in that they opposed the existing establishment on moral grounds. For the religious fundamentalists, such an environment was the perfect one to emerge into. Counterculturalists were opposing the very institutions that had marginalized religious fundamentalists decades before, and the counterculturalists were doing so on a moral basis, which many fundamentalists considered religion particularly apt at handling. As countercultural movements tore down the existing establishment, religious fundamentalists joined into the fray and began establishing their own power.[32] Furthermore, as countercultural movements became more and more mainstream, fundamentalist movements were poised to launch religiously-based political platforms anew.

30 Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, ed and trans. Joseph O'Malley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).
31 Armstrong, *The Battle for God*.
32 Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back*.

As the Cold War died down and the countercultural movement as a whole began to lose prominence, religious fundamentalist movements stayed in power and used the gains they had made during the counterculturalist era to launch a platform for political action. From televangelists and strong Evangelical Protestant voter turnout in the United States to a full-blown revolution in Iran, religious fundamentalists captured political power. For many secularists, this was a complete surprise; many had not been aware of the increasing religious infrastructure that had been developing during the counterculturalist movements, instead assuming that most counterculturalists were themselves inherently secular in nature. As a result, many secular leaders were still proponents of the secularization thesis and may have even believed that the counterculturalist movements were affirmations that religion as it had existed for hundreds of years would never play a major role in secular politics again. In a way, they were right; modern religious fundamentalism is a radical departure from both the traditional ways of dealing with religion and the marginalized religion that secularists favored.[33] In either case, those predicting the "death of God" were deeply unprepared for the extensiveness and widespread appeal of religious fundamentalism.

The result has been a combination of bad foreign policy decisions and heated debates over domestic policies. Because so few secularists had seriously considered the possibility that religious fundamentalism could ever play a major role in politics ever again, it took ten years for the scholarly community to catch up with and try to understand the contemporary rise of religious fundamentalism. To this day, there is still not a comprehensive sociological or anthropological understanding of fundamentalism as its own phenomenon, as the discussions on finding a simple definition of fundamentalism should demonstrate. This is partially because it is difficult to conduct a detailed analysis of a phenomenon while that phenomenon is still

33 Armstrong, *The Battle for God.*

developing and evolving around the analyzer, but it is probably also a result of differences in worldviews between secular scholars and religious fundamentalists. These are important considerations that will be discussed further in the Findings section. For the next two sections, however, there will be specific discussions on the history of Christian Protestant fundamentalism in the United States and the history of Shi'a Islamic fundamentalism in Iran.

III History of Christian Protestant Fundamentalism in the United States

To understand the nature of Protestantism in the United States, it is first useful to have some historical context about the role of religion in the United States. The stories of the first European settlers to come to the United States are multiplicitous and varied, but many settlements were characterized by a fervent religiosity and a search for religious independence in the United States. Early colonial North America, especially the parts that are now the northeastern United States, was settled by Protestants who took their religion very seriously. That Puritan legacy has led to a number of developments in the United States that did not take place in Europe. Considering the strongly religious nature of the earliest European settlers of what is today the United States, it is perhaps not surprising that religion plays a much more prominent role in the United States today than it plays in European countries. When one further considers that the founding fathers of the United States were Enlightenment thinkers, it is not surprising the the conditions of Modernity that foster fundamentalist thinking also existed in the United States. Indeed the bilateral focus on religion and secularism that is present in the United States has led to a number of religious revivals throughout the history of the United States. These periods have generally been known as "Great Awakenings," and they have occurred roughly from 1730-1760, 1800-1840, and 1890-1930.[34] The current period of religious revival

34 Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back*.

could also be considered a Great Awakening, but for the purposes of this paper, it will not be referred to as such to distinguish the contemporary rise in religious fundamentalism from other historical religious revivals.

The First Great Awakening was a religious revival movement in the mid-18th century that was spawned by Puritans' concerns that Americans were not as religious as they should have been. Ideas such as only letting elect, or "chosen" members of Christianity go to church had been proving unsustainable for years, and many church leaders had decided to loosen the requirements necessary to be admitted into church. This created a backlash that eventually led to the First Great Awakening, where leaders such as George Whitefield strove to revive church membership by focusing on strong emotional appeals instead of traditionally-strict church practices. Out of this movement was born such appeals as "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," an emotional sermon by Jonathan Edwards that aimed to convert people to Christianity by making them fear the fury of God and Hell. Such emotional appeals share many aspects of modern religious revivals, in particular the revivalistic[35] or behavioral[36] aspects that have since been named as characteristics of fundamentalism.

The Second Great Awakening was a similarly emotionally-charged movement, but it also championed a concrete political goal: the abolition of slavery. The Second Great Awakening shared aspects with the First in that it encouraged people to explore religion in a deeper and more personal way than as was traditional, but it also took on the aspect of social action that has been identified as an important part of fundamentalism.[37] This movement was in part a reaction to some of the modernization and skepticism that the Scientific Revolution and the Englightenment so championed, so the Second Great Awakening shares another important feature with modern

35 Beeman, "Fighting the Good Fight," *Anthropology for the Real World*.
36 Almond, Sivan, and Appleby, "Fundamentalism: Genus and Species," in *The Fundamentalism Project*.
37 Beeman, "Fighting the Good Fight," *Anthropology for the Real World*.

fundamentalist movements in that both are reactions to broad secular movements. However, one important difference between the earlier Great Awakenings and the modern fundamentalist movement is that the first Great Awakenings did not take on a literalist approach to the Bible.

The Third Great Awakening, was, similarly to the first two, charged with emotion and personal approaches to Christianity. It shared characteristics with the Second Great Awakening in that political proponents of the Third Great Awakening also championed social issues such as prohibition and the Social Gospel movements. The Third Great Awakening also shares another important aspect with modern Christian fundamentalism, and indeed laid many of the roots for modern Christian fundamentalism, in that the term "fundamentalist" was first used during the Third Great Awakening, and Biblical literalism appeared in its full force for the first time during the Third Great Awakening.[38] These two aspects are key parts of modern fundamentalism, so their development in the Third Great Awakening mark the early stages of the development of the modern fundamentalist movement in the United States.

The first use of the term "fundamentalism" marked a transition of Christian Protestant Evangelism from relatively traditional forms of worship to a distinctly modern form of religious worship. The deeply religious began searching the Bible for the "fundamentals" of Christianity much as physicists, mathematicians, and artists were searching for the fundamentals of their respective fields. This process demanded a non-hermeneutic interpretation of the Bible – that is, an interpretation of the Bible that was strictly, literally true and not open to metaphorical or allegorical interpretation.[39] In the age of scientific reasoning and empirical evidence, Biblical scientists – that is, religious conservatives who tried to use scientific evidence to prove that the claims of the Bible were literally true – rose to prominence and began searching through the

38 Armstrong, *The Battle for God*.
39 Nagata, "Beyond Theology."

Bible for clues they could use as evidence for the literal truth of Christianity. A literalist, scientific interpretation of the Bible as arose during the Third Great Awakening was in essence fundamentally modern. Traditional interpretations would never have scoured the Bible or the world for empirical evidence of its truth.[40] The first step in the development of fundamentalism as a general phenomenon is a reaction and utilization of modern paradigms and approaches to knowing, and this distinctly modern approach to Christianity marked the first step in the development of modern Christian fundamentalism.

The next step in the develop of fundamentalism is seclusion, and the trial that brought about the political end of the Third Great Awakening led to the seclusion of deeply religious conservatives. The trial in question was the trial of a science teacher who was being prosecuted for teaching evolution instead of creationism in school. The trial, popularly known as the Scopes "Monkey" Trial and immortalized in the classic *Inherit the Wind*[41], pitted the religious Democrat William Jennings Bryan against the secular attorney Clarence Darrow. Although Bryan technically won the trial, he won it at great cost. The trial was the subject of extensive media coverage, and over its course Darrow made Bryan and his literalist interpretation of the Bible seem backwards and flatly in denial of reality. To a secularist proponent of the secularization thesis, this trial would have seemed like the last nail in the coffin of religion playing a serious role in politics. In the wake of the Scopes trial, deeply religious conservatives retreated into seclusion. Over the next few decades, secular liberalism dominated American politics, starting with the rise of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal and culminating in Johnson's Great Society. To many secular observers, it seemed as if religion would never play a prominent role in politics ever again. They could not have and indeed did not predict the role that counterculturalism

40 Armstrong, *The Battle for God*.
41 Jerome Lawrence and Robert Edwin Lee, *Inherit the Wind* (Dramatists Play Service, 1951).

would play in rebelling against the status quo and in the process giving the deeply religious the opportunity they needed to rise to prominence again.

The countercultural movements of the 1960's arose as a response to Cold War developments and costly "hot" wars in Korea and Vietnam. Proponents of racial equality, gender equality, and peace alike all joined together to protest the status quo. Along the way, they rejected traditional value systems that placed value on materialistic enterprises such as accumulating wealth. In their place, many counterculturalists began searching for meaning in avenues that had never been explored before. One scholar posits that one of the reasons that J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* series was so popular was that it provided a value system and painted the world in a strictly black and white way, simplifying the complexity of the world and providing a sense of solidity and order to a world that was otherwise cold and meaningless.[42] Another thinker hypothesizes that a show like *Doctor Who*, which first started in 1953 and just recently celebrated its fifty-year anniversary in 2013, could have played a similar role, providing value systems to people who otherwise might have been completely disenchanted by their counterculturalism.[43] In essence, *Lord of the Rings* and *Doctor Who* became *ad hoc* religions for many counterculturalists.

It is not surprising, then, that some counterculturalists turned to actual religions to provide them with value systems in their time of need. Indeed, given that those whose religious lineage could be traced back to the likes of William Jennings Bryan were distinctly non-mainstream and secluded by the time that countercultural movements rose in popularity, they were decidedly not part of the establishment that counterculturalists were fighting against anymore. In fact, some deeply religious conservatives found young counterculturalists to be a

42 Jake Mandel, "Lord of the Rings," *The Concord Review* 11, no. 2 (Winter 2000).

43 "Is Doctor Who a Religion? | Idea Channel | PBS Digital Studios," YouTube, video file, posted by Mike Rugnetta, October 3, 2012, accessed January 23, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Csjr8bXvPw.

particularly apt demographic for conversion. T.M. Luhrmann recalls a story of one who, after meeting counterculturalist, converted his home into a meeting place for counterculturalists who turned to religion for its value systems and essentially started one of the first churches that might be characterized as fundamentalist.[44]

To adapt to the influx of countercultural support, deeply religious "fundamentalist" organizations adapted some of their practices as well. Luhrmann reports that such organizations adapted their methods of worship to make religion a largely communal practice, with a deeply personal god who was not the distant, judgmental god of traditional Christianity.[45] In a sense, this is not surprising, since a religious movement adopting counterculturalist ideas might very well reject the interpretation of the Bible that was popular in the mainstream. In this case, mainstream religion, in the capacity that it existed in a time of mainstream secularism, very much practiced a traditional view of God as a distant figure. Another reason that deeply religious branches of Christianity adopted an intensely personal relationship with God may be that, like the Great Awakenings that foreshadowed it, religious revivalism always tends to bring with it an increasing degree of emotionality. As the proponents of the earlier Great Awakenings advocated a relationship to religion that was more intensely emotional than was traditional, proponents of modern Christian "fundamentalism" advocated a relationship to God that was more intensely personal than was traditional.[46]

Luhrmann further observed that this new method of approaching religion may be a method for reconciling the requirements of Biblical literalism with the demands of modern society. Luhrmann observed that doubt, especially in a world dominated by secular skepticism, was an important part of the process of converting to "fundamentalist" Christianity.[47] From a

44 Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back*.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.

secular point of view, the allowance and expectation of doubt may simply be a method for reducing cognitive dissonance; however, it plays another sociological role in that it gives people a mindset that can help them deal with the ambiguities of reality that have come to the forefront of Modern and Post-Modern philosophy. Another method for dealing with the reconciliation of Biblical literalism and the demands of a secular society actually arises from an interpretation of God as intensely personal: the argument goes that because God is intensely personal, the literal truths of the Bible can present themselves to different people in different ways. There is therefore some room for different interpretations in a "fundamentalist" Christian view. Under this regime, even the most religious Christian denominations are therefore not, as some would claim, non-hermeneutic[48].

Given what we now know about the popularity of religious "fundamentalism" among counterculturalists and the fact of its persistence in seclusion since the Scopes trial, the step from seclusion to political action is no longer surprising. "Fundamentalist" Christian movements had existed for years at a level that most mainstream secularists did not notice, and the interaction with the counterculturalist movement of the 1960's both gave the movements fresh political perspective and changed them into more charismatic versions of themselves, with characteristics that would make evangelizing easier. Christian religious movements were poised to take center stage in American politics again. The first signs of this political change came along with the rise of televangelists like Billy Graham. For the first time since the Third Great Awakening, conservative Christians were evangelizing in a widespread way. The use of television reflected both the nature of the media landscape at the time and once again the fact that fundamentalist movements are distinctly modern ways of both worshiping and spreading religion.

This widespread revitalization of conservative Christianity was no doubt facilitated by the

48 Nagata, "Beyond Theology."

Cold War ideologies that dominated Western thinking at the time. From the anti-Communist perspective of those such as Joseph McCarthy, any ideas that were Communist or Socialist were potentially harmful; atheism was one of the most distinct aspects of Communism; therefore atheism was harmful. Taking this idea one step further, being a serious participant of religion could be viewed as distinctly anti-Communist and thus possibly patriotic. With a critical mass of those who would at least declare themselves Christian in the United States, conservative Christianity could easily find a foothold in mainstream United States.

Another event that largely galvanized conservative Christians was the Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion. This development suddenly gave deeply religious Christians a political goal to fight for, much like abolition and prohibition galvanized proponents of the Second and Third Great Awakenings. Because Christian "fundamentalists" could not outlaw abortion through conventional legal means, however, some resorted to violence, bombing abortion clinics and threatening the lives of abortion providers.[49] Other issues that drove the deeply religious to engage in social action included the teaching of evolution in schools, the issue that drove the original Christian fundamentalists to engage in political debates during the Third Great Awakening.

Finally, a religious fundamentalist movement on the other side of the world also played a major role in the return of Christianity to political power. Only months after the Carter administration had deemed Iran the United States' most stable ally in the Middle East, Iranian revolutionaries stormed the United States embassy in Iran and started the process that would lead to both a hostage crisis and a theocracy. Ironically, the Carter administration thought at first that the religious leaders of Iran might be reasoned with because they were religious and therefore would not turn to Communism. This idea soon proved to be wrong; the Iranian hostage crisis

49 Emerson and Hartman, "The Rise of Religious Fundamentalism."

lasted for an astonishing 444 days. This not only made the largely-secular Democratic party look weak and ineffectual but also gave American religious "fundamentalists" a concrete enemy to fight against, an entity that was antithetical to everything that was good about America and the American way.

Americans expressed this shift in opinion decisively in the presidential elections: Ronald Reagan won the election in a landslide, due in no small part to an impressive turnout of Evangelical Protestants.[50] Political organizations such as the Moral Majority developed for the explicit purpose of utilizing the rise in popularity of Evangelical Protestantism for political advantage. By Reagan's election, it was clear that Christianity would play a major role in American politics for years to come.

This has, for the most part, held true over the past few decades, even to this day. Since Reagan's time no president has ended a speech without saying "God Bless America," a practice that was not commonplace before Reagan's presidency.[51] George H.W. Bush carried his first election in part due to the turnout of Evangelical Protestants, and George W. Bush was re-elected due in no small part to support from Evangelical Protestants concerned over the issue of abortion. However, the political tides have begun shifting again, and Christianity may no longer play as strong a political role as it has played before. The current president, for example, was re-elected even though he endorsed gay marriage, a policy that Evangelical Protestants, for the most part, do not endorse. The Defense of Marriage Act and the Don't Ask, Don't Tell policies have also recently been ended, developments which are indicative of the changing political climate.

However, religion continues to play an important role in many Americans' lives, and it

50 Stephen D. Johnson and Joseph B. Tamney, "The Christian Right and the 1984 Presidential Election," *Review of Religious Research* 27, no. 2 (December 1985).

51 David Domke and Kevin Coe, *The God Strategy: How Religion Became a Political Weapon in America* (New York, USA: Oxford University Press, 2010).

would be premature to declare that America were going to shift to a political climate as secular as Europe's. The future, as always, is uncertain. Even though the secularization thesis has failed for the past hundred years, it still has some proponents who believe that the contemporary rise of religious fundamentalism was in many ways a "last gasp" of religion before it transitions to the non-political position so long predicted by many secularists. What also remains to be seen is how Christian fundamentalism in the United States will interact with other religious fundamentalisms around the world. Christian fundamentalism was in part galvanized by Iranian religious fundamentalism; such may be the case again in the future. To understand religious fundamentalism from a global perspective and perhaps discuss some of the connections between Christian fundamentalism and other religious fundamentalisms, it is now necessary to turn to a discussion of the history of Islamic Shi'a fundamentalism in Iran.

IV History of Shi'a Fundamentalism in Iran

To understand the nature of Shi'a fundamentalism, it is useful to first have an understanding of the background of the split between Shi'a and Sunni Islam, the two major branches of Islam. The split dates back from early in the history of Islam, when the question of who would act as the political successor to Muhammad arose. Those who eventually became the Sunni branch of Islam[52] argued that religious leaders could elect new leaders (known as caliphs) from the ranks of those who were not directly related to Muhammad, while those who eventually became the Shi'a branch of Islam[53] argued that only Muhammad's relatives could be considered for the caliphate. As one might imagine, the branch that advocated a more inclusive policy for the position of caliph, namely the Sunni branch was more popular among religious leaders. As a

52 Henceforth just the Sunni branch or Sunnis.
53 Henceforth just the Shi'a branch or Shi'ites.

result, Sunnis have always outnumbered Shi'ites. This difference in numbers played a major role in the religious war that broke out over the issue of who should be given the caliphate. The Sunni majority overpowered the Shi'ite minority, and Hussayn, one of the early leaders of the Shi'a and one of the Shi'a-proposed candidates for caliph, became a martyr.

This legacy has persisted throughout the life of Islam, and the conflict between Sunnis and Shi'ites has been codified through cultural, religious, and political differences. One of the distinct qualities of Shi'ism that is prevalent to the discussion of religious fundamentalism in Iran is Shi'ism's nature as a sort of underdog, revolutionary religion. Because Shi'ites have always been outnumbered by Sunnis, there is a vein of rebelliousness in Shi'ism that makes it very apt as a banner for revolution.[54]

Shi'ism first came to prominence in Iran during the Safavid Dynasty, under the rule of Shah Ismail. Prior to the Safavid Dynasty, the Iranian population had been mostly Shi'a, but Ismail forced the population to adopt Shi'ism as its official state religion when he conquered Iran and brought the Safavids to power.[55] Ismail adopted Shi'ism for a number of reasons, but one of the most prominent reasons was likely as a way of distinguishing Iranian Islam from the Islam of the Turks and the Arabs in the rest of the Middle East. A uniqueness of religion reinforced the Iranian people's ethnic uniqueness. Many Iranians trace their ethnic history to and derive great pride from the Achaemenid Empire, better known as the Persian Empire. This was the empire of Cyrus the Great and Darius, the empire that practically invented the bureaucratic innovations that make running an empire possible. By emphasizing the differences between Iranians and other Muslims in the Middle East, Shah Ismail helped create a sense of unity on the Iranian plateau.

The modern legacies of this history are manifold, but for the purpose of studying the rise

54 Roy P. Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet: Religion and Politics in Iran* (Oxford: One World, 1985).
55 Jerry H. Bentley and Herbert F. Ziegler, *Traditions & Encounters: A Global Perspective on the Past*, fifth ed. (New York, NY: McGraw Hill, 2011).

of religious fundamentalism in Iran, the major consequence is the role that religious leaders have played in the modern history of Iran. The religious leaders in Iran are known as mullahs, and they played a pivotal role in the Constitutional Revolution of Iran, which took place in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Before the Constitutional Revolution, Iran had been ruled by a Shah in a non-Constitutional monarchy.[56] By this time, the monarchy, specifically the Qajar Dynasty, had been steadily losing sovereignty over its provinces to European colonial powers. In 1905, a group known as Constitutionalists started protests in what would eventually come to be known as the Constitutional Revolution of Iran. Constitutionalists had a number of demands, among them independence from European (primarily British) imperialism, and in this respect the Shi'a religious leaders played a major role in supporting the Constitutionalists. The ulama, which is the leading class of Islamic scholars in Iran, and the mullahs were strong supporters of independence from European imperialists, and the establishment of a constitutional monarchy in Iran might not have been possible without the support of Shi'ite leaders.[57]

In this respect, this religious activity in Iran parallels with the religious revivalism that characterized the original fundamentalist movement in the United States. However, a notable difference is that this religious political activity did not constitute a revivalism of Islam, for the religion had played a role among the Persian population since it was first established by the Safavid dynasty. However, the positions in which their respective religions were left in the early 20th century in Iran and in the United States were similar in that both had, at that time, a degree of political power. The next step in the development of fundamentalist movements is a period of seclusion, which began when Shah Pahlavi I took power in 1925.

The Constitutional Revolution of Iran, although it had technically managed to establish a

56 Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet.*
57 Ibid.

Constitutional Monarchy, had not been able to free Iran of *de facto* European imperialist control. That was not achieved until Reza Shah established the Pahlavi Dynasty in 1925. His regime valued secularism in large part, and this value on secularism decreased the power of the religious leaders of Iran and led the religious leaders down a path of seclusion that was similar to the path of seclusion led by fundamentalist Christians in the early-mid 20th century. Like many leaders of developing countries at the time, Shah Pahlavi I implemented policies intended to foster modernization and secularization. In fact, to a Western secular observer, Shah Pahlavi I's policies would have seemed to be a strong affirmation of the secularization thesis. Shah Pahlavi I's reign came to an end around the beginning of World War II, and he was soon replaced by his son Shah Pahlavi II.[58]

In contrast to his father, Shah Pahlavi II initially wielded limited control of his government and preferred to let the Iranian parliament deal with legislative issues. Into this democratic constitutional monarchy came Mohammed Mossadegh, who had been educated in Western countries and adopted a very liberal interpretation of the Qu'ran. For example, he argued in a thesis that the passages in the Qu'ran condoning multiple marriages were not made in the spirit of Islam and therefore did not have religious validity.[59] Mossadegh, an accomplished and charismatic politician, was eventually elected Prime Minister, and one of his first actions as Prime Minister was to nationalize Iranian oil, which had previously been British-owned.[60] The British were opposed to this decision, and they immediately began to make plans to overthrow Mossadegh's regime. When they asked the CIA for help, they were initially refused. However, two years later in 1953, the CIA, under a new president, caught signs of some of Mossadegh's potential Communist ties, and under a Cold War ideology decided that it would be best to

58 Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet*.
59 Ibid.
60 Daniel Fu, "American Foreign Policy Decisions and the 1979 Iranian Revolution," *The Concord Review* 24, no. 1 (Fall 2013).

remove Mossadegh. The coup that was eventually staged was relatively simple and ironically utilized some religious groups who had grown increasingly disenchanted with Iran's ever-progressing modernization but who would eventually play a role in the Iranian Revolution of 1979 that so shocked Western observers.[61]

With the fall of Mossadegh, Shah Pahlavi II returned to power, but this time wielding much more power and governing Iran much more directly. Like his father before him, Shah Pahlavi II put into place a number of policies meant to secularize Iran and make it conform to Western standards. At one point, in fact, Shah Pahlavi II actually exiled Ayatollah Khomeini, who was the most radical of the Shi'a leaders in Iran at the time of his exile.[62] This continued the pattern of seclusion and the apparent continued affirmation of the secularization thesis. However, the economy soon started doing badly, and perfect conditions for revolution soon began to arise. Some American administrations urged Pahlavi II to implement reforms to appease his people, and Pahlavi II did implement a series of land reforms known as the White Revolution to appease the American administrations, but the reforms enacted by the White Revolution eventually proved ineffectual.[63] Once protests began, mixed messages from Pahlavi II, along with the memory of the CIA-led overthrow of Mossadegh, eventually led to his final downfall.[64]

The question, however, of why the regime that replaced Pahlavi II was an Islamic theocracy instead of a secular regime still remains. The reasons underlying fundamentalist Islam's return to power are complex and multi-faceted, but there are several clues about why Islamic fundamentalism may have been especially apt to replace Pahlavi II.

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61 Fu, “American Foreign Policy Decisions.”
62 Gene Burns, "Ideology, Culture, and Ambiguity: The Revolutionary Process in Iran," *Theory and Society* 25, no. 3 (June 1996).
63 Fu, “American Foreign Policy Decisions.”
64 Ibid.

One reason that Islamic fundamentalism was able to gain power in Iran was that American foreign policy makers vastly underestimated the revolutionary potential of Islamic fundamentalists.[65] American policy makers, keeping with their Cold War era ideologies, felt much more threatened by the possibility that the Shah might be overthrown by Iran's Communist Tudeh Party. Indeed, the seeds of some anti-Westernization thoughts were coming from thinkers associated with the Tudeh Party, such as Iranian thinker Jalai Al-e Ahmad.[66] However, Al-e Ahmad was not expressing sentiments particular to the Tudeh Party; rather, he was expressing sentiments that the average Iranian might feel, namely fears that an Iran that focused so heavily on Westernization would risk losing its own unique identity.[67] Sentiments like Al-e Ahmad expressed were the first seeds of anti-Westernization and fears of "Westoxication," as Ayatollah Khomeini later put it so famously.

These anti-Western sentiments were particularly apt to be wielded by Islamic Shi'a fundamentalists for two main reasons. First, the analogues between the plight of the martyr Hussayn and the much more powerful and plentiful Sunnis echoed the contemporary plight of Iranians against the Americans, who had their leader on a virtual leash. This analogy was reinforced by the fact that Ayatollah Khomeini, the chief religious leader at the time, was ruling not from within Iran itself but rather from outside (specifically Iraq).[68] In essence, the Iranian people felt that they were underdogs in the battle against American imperialism, and fundamentalism Shi'ism was uniquely suited to foster this feeling of underdoggedness. Second, Islam provided a symbol that the people could rally behind, not necessarily for its specific ideologies but rather because it was vague enough that almost everyone could identify with it in

65 Robert Dreyfuss, *Devil's Game: How the United States Helped Unleash Fundamentalist Islam*, The American Empire Project (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2005).
66 Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet*.
67 Ibid.
68 Dreyfuss, *Devil's Game*.

some way. To paraphrase the sociologist Gene Burns, Islam was universal enough that everyone understood its basic premises, but religious revolutionary leaders kept their specific policies secret to not alienate anyone.[69]

Furthermore, the other potential revolutionary groups probably could not have organized well enough to overthrow the Shah. The Tudeh Party, for example, suffered from far too much infighting among its various factions to mount any meaningful resistance against the Shah (which incidentally did not stop American policy makers from fearing them more than religious fundamentalists).[70] Secular leftist supporters of Mossadegh's old regime would have faced considerable resistance from both religious leaders and American policy makers fearing the adoption of Communism in Iran. In any case, Mossadegh had died more than a decade earlier, and it would have been difficult finding a political leader capable of replacing him.[71] In a sense, religious fundamentalists eventually overthrew the Shah simply because there was no one left.

V. S. Naipaul, a British writer who wrote about his journeys through Iran the time of the Iranian Revolution of 1979, captured a consequence of this sentiment when describing the views of his translator.[72] Naipaul's translator was raised in a Communist household and felt that the religious fundamentalists who had overthrown the Shah had created a new regime that would not differ much from the previous one. Religious police were searching for any signs of Communism at the time, and Naipaul's translator compared the experience to being oppressed by SAVAK, Shah Pahlavi II's secret police force.[73] Naipaul's translator, in essence, did not feel a great deal of loyalty to the Islamic fundamentalists who had "liberated" Iran from the clutches of the Shah and American imperialism, especially since they were forcing Islamic law on people

69 Gene Burns, "Ideology, Culture, and Ambiguity."
70 Fu, "American Foreign Policy Decisions."
71 Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet*.
72 V. S. Naipaul, *Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981).
73 Ibid.

who had grown used to a secular lifestyle. There is evidence that a large number of Iranians felt the same way that Naipaul's translator felt.[74] Thus, even though this religious movement had taken on the characteristic of social action, it was still primarily concentrated within the upper echelons of religious leadership.

Given that enthusiasm for religious fundamentalism was not universal even immediately after the religious fundamentalists overthrew the Shah, one may wonder what the future of the Islamic theocracy in Iran is. A secularist might even hypothesize that the secularization thesis might still be viable in Iran's future. The current political climate of Iran and the rest of the Middle East does seem to be pointing in more secular directions; the recent revolutions in the Arab Spring are moving the Middle East into a more democratic sphere. While Iranians are Persian and are distinctly non-Arab, Iran may well be influenced by the politics of its neighbors. Iran's recent green revolution indicates that democracy may be able to replace a theocracy sometime in the near future. The future, as always, is impossible to predict, but it would appear that the heyday of Iranian religious fundamentalism has passed.

V Findings

The modern rise of religious fundamentalism is an extraordinarily complex topic, and it is not possible to cover it comprehensively in a single paper. Indeed, Marty and Scott's monumental Fundamentalism Project spanned many volumes, and even it has not yet managed to produce a comprehensive narrative of fundamentalism.[75] Part of the problem is that the term "fundamentalism" is very difficult to define. Analysis of the definitions that have been proposed to characterize fundamentalism thus reveals that the problems with trying to create a single

74 Marguerite Del Giudice, "Persia: Ancient Soul of Iran," National Geographic, last modified August 2008, accessed January 19, 2013, http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2008/08/iran-archaeology/del-giudice-text.
75 Martin and Appleby, *The Fundamentalism Project*.

comprehensive definition of fundamentalism are manifold. When definitions are created broadly and without reams of empirical data they are often incomplete or too inclusive. Empirical studies, on the other hand, are extraordinarily labor-intensive and risk reducing complex realities into singular and inherently oversimplified values. These problems are further complicated by the ethical implications of labeling certain religious groups as "fundamentalist," since such labels may only serve to alienate minorities and impede greater understanding.

The problems with defining fundamentalism partially stem from a lack of historical perspective on the part of historians. It is virtually impossible to accurately predict how contemporary movements will change over time and what effect they will have on the future. Consequently, it is difficult to tell which movements will follow a "typical" fundamentalist arc, if any such generalization can be accurate. Greater historical perspective would help historians in developing a more holistic view on events and would allow them to compare and contrast a wider range of religious movements over time.

In spite of these problems, however, most fundamentalisms, or at least the two examined in this paper, seem to at least loosely follow the four general stages of development as an approach to finding meaning, seclusion from larger society, return in countercultural movements, and rise to political prominence. Both Evangelical Christianity in the United States and Iranian Shi'ism follow these stages to some extent. In the United States, the stages manifested themselves in the original fundamentalists and Biblical literalists, seclusion form the Scopes Monkey Trial, counterculturalist religious revivals during the 60's, and political power around the Reagan years, respectively. In Iran, the first stage did not manifest itself in a single series of events, since Shi'ism had been used as a way of finding meaning for hundreds of years, and the third stage would only correspond to the relatively brief period when fundamentalists were

seeking political power. The second and fourth stages, however, are very prominent: seclusion under Shah Pahlavi II and a return to power under Ayatollah Khomeini. This suggests that the second stage, that of seclusion, may be the most important in galvanizing religious groups and putting them in a position to claim power.

To an observer in the mainstream, the idea that secluding a group could help it gain widespread political support may seem counterintuitive. But on a closer analysis, two forces may present themselves as promising explanations. First, seclusion and marginalization of a certain group creates an "echo chamber" effect, in which the members of that group may draw closer together and use each other to reinforce their beliefs. Second, a period of seclusion from mainstream society allows the religious movement to later be presented as a new and revolutionary movement, one that can be used to oppose mainstream beliefs. Such a development played a prominent role in the rise of Evangelical Christianity in the United States, since deep religiosity could be presented as one way of fighting the mainstream. It may have played a different but equally important role in the Iranian Revolution by potentially misleading US intelligence to dismiss the Islamic fundamentalists as incapable of leading a revolution. These two forces work in conjunction to make the stage of seclusion a very important part of the "fundamentalist arc."

The counterintuitive effect of seclusion raises an important question about the future of religious movements. It is unlikely that all religious movements will just come to a sudden and unexpected "end" at any point in the foreseeable future, but religious movements do seem to be losing political power, as evidenced by the beginnings of a relaxation of tensions between Iran and the United States, as well as the passing of progressive legislation that would not be accepted by most deeply religious conservatives. If this trend in progressively decreasing religiosity

continues, religion as a political force may eventually become nonexistent. However, such a stage bears striking similarities to a stage of seclusion, which previous experiences have shown may eventually lead to a return to the political sphere. The resolutions of this question, as well as the closely-related question of whether the secularization thesis will ever come to fruition, are uncertain, and it may be the case that only time will be able to tell how they resolve themselves. They are nevertheless fascinating questions to explore in depth, and they present themselves as promising areas of future research.

The nature of the topic of religious fundamentalism also raises an important question about the approach used in this analysis. This paper has attempted to approach the topic of religious fundamentalism from an objective point of view, but such an approach must be inherently secular. The fundamentalist and secular worldviews have profoundly influenced each other's development, and some scholars argue that the worldviews start from radically different assumptions.[76] Given this interplay between fundamentalism and secularism, it is not clear whether it is feasible for an exclusively-secular approach to accurately capture a comprehensive analysis of the situation. If possible, some research should be done to explore the question of what limitations a secular approach has. If a secular approach is incapable of capturing the entire situation, it may be necessary to conduct analyses from a number of different points of view. Regardless of the theoretical necessity of such analyses, more data about the views and practices of different groups of fundamentalists should be gathered, since it can only help develop a more complete picture of religious fundamentalism.

The complex relationship between fundamentalism and secularism has important ramifications for those on either side of the divide. Fundamentalists and secularists often have competing goals and political interests. If either side does not put in the effort to fully

76 Monroe and Kreidie, "The Perspective of Islamic Fundamentalists."

understand the other, both sides may reach an impasse that is impossible to overcome. If one side holds much more political power than the other, as is the case between the United States and terrorist organizations like Al Qaeda, the weaker group may resort to violence in the effort to achieve its goals. If both sides are nations, as is the case between the mostly-secular United States government and the fundamentalist Iranian government, misunderstandings could lead to diplomatic disasters and war. Clearly, the consequences of not fostering greater understanding between fundamentalists and secularists could be dire. In light of these consequences, the most prudent course of action seems to be for both fundamentalists and secularists to engage with members of the opposite group in an attempt to foster understanding between them. A corollary to this conclusion is that neither group should try to drive the other into seclusion. Besides being potentially unethical, such an approach is only likely to galvanize the excluded group and put them in a position to return to the political stage with fresh vivacity.

The conclusions of this analysis have broader philosophical implications as well. Post-Modernism has dominated western philosophy for the past few decades, but the popular rise of religious fundamentalism seems to contradict one of Post-Modernism's main tenets. Post-Modernism is hard to define,[77] but it tends to view systems of thought that can claim absolute certainty with deep skepticism. In a Post-Modern world, a system of beliefs as absolute and comprehensive as religion should not be prospering, yet religion has enjoyed substantial political power the past few decades. In other words, the failure of the secularization thesis presents a problem for Post-Modernism. It suggests that the future of philosophic thought may be some sort of "Post-Post-Modernism" that rejects the absolute relativity of Post-Modernism and allows for comprehensive systems of thought such as religion. However, the future is

77 This is partially because the very act of defining Post-Modernism seems to contradict Post-Modernism. Post-Modernists tend to assert that all meaning is relative and that there can be no definitive "Truth." Trying to define Post-Modernism and give it a single, static definition amounts to an attempt to create "Truth" and thus contradicts Post-Modernism itself.

virtually impossible to predict, and that task is even more difficult when it is applied to the future of a philosophy that is already very murky and ill-defined.

The aforementioned sociological and philosophical questions and implications only represent a small subset of the potential questions and implications that the study of religious fundamentalism raises. Each question and implication deserves to be fully explored in a paper of its own, so this paper has likely raised many more questions than it has answered. However, it has become clear throughout this analysis that there needs to be greater understanding between secularists and their religious counterparts. The author sincerely hopes that this paper can help facilitate that understanding.

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