Introduction

"How did it feel to be named a cause of the invasion of Iraq?" I ask. The overweight mullah on the sofa looks at me. Then he breaks into laughter. His wife appears in the doorway with some tea and biscuits. She is just back from work. It is 2004, and this is my second interview with mullah Krekar. It takes place in the living room of his small apartment in Oslo, Norway. On the wall above the sofa is a picture of the Kaba in Mecca. On another wall is a bookshelf with books in Arabic. In the corner is a desk with a computer and a phone.

On February 5, 2003, U.S. secretary of state General Colin Powell presented the United Nations with data that would be the basis for the American justification of the war against Iraq. He said: "But what I want to bring to your attention today is the potentially much more sinister nexus between Iraq and the al Qaeda terrorist network, a nexus that combines classic terrorist organizations and modern methods of murder." Powell described a situation where Ansar al-Islam, headed by mullah Krekar, was harboring al Qaeda fighters from Afghanistan and at the same time collaborating with Saddam Hussein. According to Powell, mullah Krekar's group was *the sinister nexus*, the link between Saddam Hussein and international terrorism, which

was a central argument for invading Iraq and making sure its potential weapons of mass destruction did not find their way to al Qaeda groups operating in Iraqi Kurdistan or other regions.[1]

It is hard to know exactly what was correct and what was not in Secretary Powell's assessment of the situation, and that is not really important here. It seems very likely that Mullah Krekar had links to al Qaeda, but he insists he did not have any contact with Saddam Hussein's regime.[2] After all, the Iraqi leader had used massive violence to crush Kurdish calls for autonomy. Being a Kurd, the mullah strongly disliked Hussein's policies. Mullah Krekar was the leader of the militant fundamentalist organization Ansar al-Islam, and in this capacity he was engaged in a civil war against secular Kurdish organizations competing for political control in Iraqi Kurdistan. He was a military leader fighting for the establishment of an Islamic state in the region. In the mind of a fundamentalist like mullah Krekar, however, the establishment of one small Islamic political entity must be seen as a step on the way to a larger goal: the (re)establishment of the Islamic caliphate.

Mullah Krekar is an example of how some fundamentalists use violent means to achieve their religious and political goals. In a later chapter of this book, I will return to this issue. I will look more closely at Muslim fundamentalist ideas about the caliphate, and I will discuss how fundamentalists in other world religions want to establish states, or change existing ones, to make politics conform closely to their conceptions of a religious ordering of society. Some Christian fundamentalists feel that the state should base its politics on biblical norms. Quite a few Buddhist and Hindu fundamentalists want a *Dharmarajya* (politics in accordance with religion), and some Sikhs want a Sikh state or *Khalistan*. Some Jews have religious visions of the state of Israel or reject the state as such on religious grounds.

[1] The case is treated in detail in Torkel Brekke, "Sinister Nexus: USA, Norge og Krekar-saken," *Internasjonal Politikk* 63, no. 2 (2005): 279–96.

[2] Brynjar Lia, Irak og terrortrusslen: Eit oversyn over terrorgrupper med tilknyting til det irakiske regimet. FFI/Rapport/2003/00940 (Kjeller: Forsvarets forskningsinstitutt, 2003).

In the worldviews of fundamentalists within these traditions, politics is a sphere of human activity and ideology that was originally tied to religion in an organic way. In their eyes, the separation of politics and religion is a tragedy. Many of them would add that the separation of religion from other spheres, such as law, science, or education, is a negative effect of the same process of modernization and secularization. However, before we look in detail at how fundamentalists in the world religions believe that each of these societal spheres should be reconquered by religion, which is the subject of Chapters 5 to 9, we need to establish a framework for our discussion. We can start by taking a brief look at the word "fundamentalism" and the debates that have taken place concerning its meaning, application, and relevance.

SHOULD WE USE THE WORD "FUNDAMENTALISM"?

The word "fundamentalism" is used to describe many different things in everyday speech. After the financial crisis of 2009, several economists criticized what they saw as *market fundamentalism*; that is, the conviction that markets correct themselves and that governments should stay out of the economy. In other words, the language of religion was brought into a different sphere to denote views and attitudes that were perceived as rigid and irrational. This use of the term "fundamentalism" probably tells us more about the views of the person using the term than about the nature of the thing that receives the negative label. In public debates and everyday conversation, the term "fundamentalism" is used widely simply to name persons or attitudes that we do not like.

There is also the opposite trend: the word "fundamentalism" is sometimes used in a very narrow sense. Some academics are of the opinion that fundamentalism is really an exclusively Christian phenomenon, and they believe that the term should not be used to describe people, organizations, and communities outside the

Christian world. They claim that it is meaningless to speak of fundamentalism in Islam or Buddhism, for instance. In a relatively recent work on the creation of an Islamic state in Iran, one author writes that she rejects the term "fundamentalism" in the case of Iran "as it reflects a different, Christian religio-political environment, and finds no corresponding term in Islamist vocabulary."[3] This way of discarding the term "fundamentalism" altogether simply by pointing out that it originated in a Christian context has become common among academics. One expert on Buddhism has argued that "fundamentalism" is a term that is not suited to describing Sinhalese Buddhists, even militants among them, because they do not want to return to the fundamental textual sources of their tradition and they are not concerned with the literal truth of those texts, unlike Christian fundamentalists.[4]

It is true that the word "fundamentalism" comes from a Christian context. It was first used in the early twentieth century by American Protestants who saw themselves as defenders of the fundamentals of the Christian religion against the onslaught of modern, liberal theology and critical textual scholarship that seemed to undermine the special status of the Bible. Fundamentalist is a good description of these Christians: they even used the word themselves. They saw their own activities as fundamentalist and were proud of that. To borrow a useful concept from the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, "fundamentalism" was an experience-near word to them.

In Geertz's thinking, experience-near words are the words we use in our daily life to describe our own activities and the world we see around us. Experience-distant words are words

[3] Vanessa Martin, *Creating an Islamic State: Khomeini and the Making of a New Iran* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2000), p. xxi.

[4] Richard Gombrich, "Is the Sri Lanka War a Buddhist Fundamentalism?" in *Buddhism, Conflict and Violence in Modern Sri Lanka*, ed. Mahinda Deegalle (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 22–37.

that are applied as analytical categories from outside.[5] Scholars who insist on saving the term "fundamentalism" exclusively for groups in the Christian tradition because it is a Christian word assume that we must describe social phenomena, such as religion, in experience-near terms. But this is an assumption that, if taken to its logical conclusion, makes all academic study of other cultures impossible. We can illustrate this by looking at the word "religion."

The word "religion" comes from a Christian context. It is a word in the Latin language. Cicero, one of the greatest writers to use the Latin language in the ancient Roman world, wrote extensively on the nature and origins of different conceptions of gods, and he used the word "religion" at least partly in the same sense as people use it today.[6] Modern European languages – such as English – have all inherited this word from the ancient Romans. No other culture or society used the word "religion" for the simple reason that their languages were not derived from Latin. Moreover, it is in Europe that people started seeing religion as a special sphere of social life that could be analyzed apart from other spheres, such as politics, science, or law.

In Arabic, one has the word "*din*," and this word refers to some, but not all, of the same things in the Arab world as the word "religion" in the Christian world. Likewise, in Indian languages, such as Hindi, we find the word "dharma," and there is some degree of overlap between dharma and religion. However, it is certainly not the case that the words "religion," "*din*," and "dharma" refer to exactly the same things. In fact, it is often impossible to find a word in a different language that means

[5] Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), p. 57.

[6] Of special interest is Cicero's attempt to define religion by offering an etymology of the word. In fact, he gave two different etymologies. See Cicero, *De natura deorum. Academica*, with an English translation by H. Rackham (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 192–93.

exactly the same as the words we use in English. This is one of the good things about studying a different language: one discovers that the world can be categorized in radically different ways from what one is used to.

If the word "fundamentalism" cannot be used to describe social phenomena in Islam or Hinduism merely because it is taken out of its Christian context, we can make the same argument for the word "religion." However, if we want to study and describe other societies and cultures, we cannot accept the claim that we must only use experience-near terms. If we insist on using only words derived from a culture and its language when describing social life in that culture, we effectively give up research altogether.

So, on the one hand, we should avoid using the word "fundamentalism" about all those views that we happen to find zealous or narrow-minded. On the other hand, we cannot restrict the word to developments in the Christian world. In my view, fundamentalism is a special kind of reaction to certain developments in the modern world that have taken place in many, perhaps in most, religious traditions. We find fundamentalism a notable religious response to global developments reaching different societies and cultures at different times between 1800, at the earliest, and today. In other words, fundamentalism is a reaction to processes that take place at a particular stage in world history.

THE FUNDAMENTALISM PROJECT

Since the 1990s, there has been a growing awareness about the renewed importance of religion in public and private life in many parts of the world. Most sociologists of the 1960s and 1970s insisted that modernity produced secularization more or less by necessity. Secularization means that religion is losing status and significance in society, and we will return to this idea shortly. However, since the late 1970s, things have happened in

the world that made it clear that religion was not about to disappear in spite of the predictions of the social sciences. One clear indication of the importance of religion in American culture was the reemergence of fundamentalism in the shape of a movement called the Moral Majority in the late 1970s. On the global scene, the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979 was a clear indication that religion could still play a significant political role. During the same period, labor migration to Europe from countries such as Turkey, Pakistan, and Morocco resulted in the creation of new religious communities of Muslims in many European countries and, at least since the 1980s, this has led to a new awareness of the religious identity of both immigrants and host populations.

It would be misplaced to offer reviews of a number of books about fundamentalism here, but there is one work that must be mentioned because it has set a standard for later studies of fundamentalism. This is the Fundamentalism Project commissioned by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Between 1988 and 1995, the Fundamentalism Project produced five volumes that approached fundamentalism from different angles. The Fundamentalism Project brought a lot of new data and new theoretical insights, but it has also received criticism from those who disagree with the basic premise of the project, that there exist religious movements across the globe that share enough traits to lump them together under one heading.

In order to study fundamentalism across cultures, the editors of the Fundamentalism Project had to take what we might call an *ideal type* as their point of departure, and the construction of this ideal type was a main goal in the first of the five volumes. Some scholars would reject such a research strategy and insist that we restrict the use of the term "fundamentalism" to its original context, Christian movements that are self-consciously fundamentalist, but this is a misconceived criticism, as I just explained.

The Fundamentalism Project is one important point of departure for this book, and to disregard its many important contributions would be ridiculous. However, the volumes were published

in the early 1990s, and much has happened in the world since then. There are now enough books treating Muslim fundamentalism exclusively to fill a small library. There are several reasons why Muslim fundamentalism has received more attention than other forms of fundamentalism. With the revolution in Iran, it became clear that Islam had potential for motivating and justifying strong social and political movements, although, as I will explain later, the Islamic revolution in Iran might not be a very good example of fundamentalism. As the modern jihadist network created in Afghanistan and Pakistan during the Soviet invasion started looking at the West as its enemy in the early 1990s, radical Islamic movements came to be perceived as a formidable security threat. Then came 9/11 and several other terrorist attacks, and interest in al Qaeda and related networks exploded.

There are now many books treating fundamentalism with different perspectives, but most of them have little to say about fundamentalism outside the Abrahamic traditions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This is partly because fundamentalism is most obviously present in the Abrahamic traditions, but it is also because people who are interested in fundamentalism often have their primary training in these traditions, whereas people who specialize in other religions, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, or Sikhism, have been reluctant to enter into a comparative debate to see whether "their" traditions fit the theories and concepts used to study fundamentalism in the Abrahamic religions. One aim of this book is to find a way to bring other religions into the debate about the nature and causes of fundamentalism. This is of particular interest to me because much of my background as a scholar is in the study of the religious traditions in South Asia.

FUNDAMENTALISM: WHERE AND WHEN?

Let me say a few words about the choices I am going to make in this book. I am going to look at a number of organizations,

movements, and individuals belonging to what we have come to know as "world religions." In the discipline called history of religions, or religious studies, it has for some time been fashionable to discuss how our idea of world religions arose and developed, but I will not go into this debate here. A basic assumption I am making is that there are movements, people, ideas, and practices in the world religions that are so similar that we can use the same word to refer to them. This is necessarily an assumption shared by any book dealing with fundamentalism as a cross-cultural phenomenon.

However, I work with an additional and stronger assumption that is not shared by many other books on the subject. I believe that the right way to study fundamentalism in the world religions is to look at movements within different traditions as sharing basic historical origins. The Fundamentalism Project and several other studies say that we can compare movements in different religions and put the label "fundamentalism" on them because they are similar. They share some characteristics. There is a family resemblance. I claim that there are movements in the world religions that we can call by a common name not only because there is a family resemblance but because they are in fact results of the same global historical processes. They have the same form *and* the same origins. It is the aim of the early chapters of this book to explain these common origins.

To do this, I will look at fundamentalism in Protestant Christianity in the United States; this is, after all, the "original case" of fundamentalism. I will also look at Muslim fundamentalists in the Middle East and South Asia. One important focus will be on Maulana Maududi and the fundamentalist party he established, the Jamaat-e-Islami, which has branches in several South Asian countries.[7] Maududi was the person who more than anybody formulated a modern Muslim fundamentalist ideology,

[7] It is not unusual to confuse South Asia with Southeast Asia. Whenever I use the term "South Asia," I refer to the region comprising India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Bhutan.

and he had a great impact in many Muslim societies. I will also look at relevant movements in other parts of the Muslim world, such as Egypt, and the Muslim Brotherhood will be an important example of Muslim fundamentalism in the Middle East.

Hindu fundamentalism is less well known than Christian or Muslim fundamentalism, but it could be argued that Hindu fundamentalists have had more political success than most others because they were able to put their leaders into government in the period 1999 to 2004. My focus will be on certain organizations, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), and certain key individuals, especially ideologues like M. S. Golwalkar (1906–1973) and Deendayal Upadhyay (1916–1968).

Buddhist fundamentalism will be discussed, too, and here I intend to focus on two societies in particular: Sri Lanka and Thailand. They both have majority populations belonging to the branch of Buddhism we call Theravada, and they have both experienced very dramatic changes in their meeting with the modern West since the nineteenth century, although the political contexts were very different. In the Buddhist case, I intend to focus on key leaders, religious and political, who have defined new religious roles since the late nineteenth century, such as the Sri Lankan activist Anagarika Dharmapala. I will also look at more recent movements, such as the Thai Buddhist movement called Santi Asoka, but for reasons of space I must skip the many interesting modern Buddhist movements of Japan, such as the Soka Gakkai, that have been favorite subjects for many sociologists of religion.

There are several important religious traditions that will not be dealt with in any detail. I will not look at Jewish fundamentalism partly because this is a tradition I know much less about than the ones mentioned so far and partly because it has been well documented and explained by others. Within Catholicism, the groups that are often called fundamentalists are the ones that rejected the changes in the Mass and other reforms after the Second Vatican Council, which opened in 1962 under