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Modernity: The Great Satan

Fundamentalism is a radical reconstruction and redeployment of a tradition for contemporary purposes. The best way of adding flesh to those definitional bones is to explain just what it is about the modern world that fundamentalists find so objectionable. In the case studies in the next two chapters I shall consider the circumstances that dispose people to fundamentalism and encourage them to mobilize in organized movements. Here I shall concentrate on the general focus of fundamentalist ire. The problem will be taken in two parts. I shall first describe and explain the creation of a secular culture in the modern industrial democracies of the West. This identifies what irks fundamentalists in those countries. I shall then consider the focus of fundamentalism in non-Western societies. Some of the unacceptable changes are the same as those in the West. Although the pace of change is much accelerated, we can think of them as indigenous or naturally occurring. Some are directly imported from, or are imposed by, the West. Some are a product of the interaction between the developed and under-developed worlds.

We should note that starting with the West does not imply that its history sets the standard, either in the sense that it is particularly worthy of imitation or that what happened there must come to pass everywhere else. I begin here because it is where modernization first had its effect and because, as we shall see, the Western powers have exerted considerable

influence on the rest of the world. Where features of other religions are compared and contrasted with those of Christianity, this is not an expression of partisanship but a recognition that Christianity will be more familiar to most readers than any other religion, and it makes sense to work from the familiar to the unfamiliar rather than the other way round.

Modernization and the division of life

Life in Manchester or Birmingham after the end of the twentieth century is very different from life in the Merrie England of the first Queen Elizabeth. It would take a very large book to describe comprehensively the novel characteristics of the modern world. This account selects a few features of modernization that have had the greatest consequences for the nature and public position of religion and explains them in sketch form.

Part of what we mean by modernization is the fragmentation of social institutions into ever more specialized units and the division of social life into distinct spheres, each with their own values and procedures. In agrarian societies the family was a unit of production as well as the institution through which society was reproduced. In modern societies, economic activity is conducted in distinct settings that have their own values. We leave home to go to work and at work we are supposed to treat customers alike, paying attention only to the matter in hand, which we define very narrowly. We are not supposed to vary our prices according to the race or religion of the purchaser. We hire the best person for the job, not the most pious. While the public sphere is meant to be instrumental and rational, the private sphere is expressive, indulgent and emotional. At home we are supposed to behave in a discriminatory manner: to treat my wife and children like all other women and children is to miss the point.

In addition to the indirect effects to be described shortly, increased specialization has the direct effect of secularizing many social functions which in the Middle Ages were either the exclusive preserve of the Christian Church or were dominated by the clergy. Education, healthcare, welfare and social

control now have their own realms dominated by their own expertise, values and assumptions. Where religious institutions retain secular functions, they are discharged largely by lay professionals trained and accredited by secular bodies. For example, the Catholic Church in the United States provides various forms of residential social care, but its social workers are tested in secular expertise, not piety, and they are answerable to secular state, rather than church-determined, standards. Spiritual values may inspire Catholic involvement in university education, for example, but there is very little in the expression of that inspiration that distinguishes it from secular provision.

As the functions of society become increasingly differentiated, so the people also become divided and separated from each other. Although wrong in much else, Karl Marx was right that the economic growth implicit in modernization created an ever greater range of occupation and life-situation. Rural communities grouped together small numbers of people of every station in life. Like a fractionating column in a chemical refinery, industrialization separated out like-situated people and brought them together in large 'manufactories'. The emergence of social classes, defined more by occupation than by place in a feudal hierarchy, was usually accompanied by increasing class conflict; it was certainly accompanied by class avoidance. In feudal societies, masters and servants lived cheek by jowl. The master might ride while the servant walked, but they travelled together. In modern cities neighbourhoods have clear class identities and modern trains have first- and second-class compartments.

Modernization also meant ever faster change. The notion that there is a single God who made the world, material and social, is most plausible when the social structure that supposedly mirrors the supernatural world is relatively stable. With the proliferation of new social roles and increasing social mobility, traditional communal conceptions of the moral and supernatural order began to fragment. As classes became more distinctive, so each generated religious visions better suited to its interests. Feudal agricultural society had a hierarchical religion where the great pyramid of pope, bishops, priests and laity reflected the social pyramid of king, nobles, gentry and peasants. Independent small farmers or the rising

business class in the growing towns preferred a more democratic religion, hence their attraction to such early Protestant sects as the Presbyterians, Baptists and Quakers.

However, modernization was not simply a matter of the religious culture responding to changes in the social, economic and political structures. Religious innovation itself was a cause of differentiation and influenced its shape. Belief systems differ greatly in their propensity to fragment (and, a point I shall consider in the final chapter, in their potential for fundamentalism). Much of the variation can be explained by the assumptions about ease of access to authoritative knowledge. To simplify the possibilities to two extremes, some religions claim a unique grasp of the truth while others allow that there are many ways to salvation. The Catholic Church claims that Christ's authority was passed to Peter, the first bishop of Rome, and was then institutionalized in the office of pope. The Church claims ultimate control of the means to salvation and the right finally to arbitrate all disputes about God's will. So long as that central assertion is not disputed, the Catholic Church is relatively immune to fission and schism. As the beliefs that one needs to abandon in order to depart from Rome go right to the heart of what one believed when one was a Catholic, such departures are difficult and are associated with extreme upheavals, such as the French Revolution. And they tend to be final. Thus in Catholic countries the social forces of modernization, which impacted later than in northern Europe, split the people into those who remained within the religious tradition and those who openly opposed it. So Italy, France, Spain and Portugal divided into conservative Catholic traditions and powerful left-wing movements.

In contrast, the religion created by the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century was extremely vulnerable to fragmentation, because it removed the institution of the church as a source of authority between God and man. If, by reading the scriptures, we are all able to discern God's will, then how do we settle disputes between the various discernings that are produced? Being theists who believed in one God, one Holy Spirit which dwelt in all of God's creation, and one Bible, the Reformers could hope that the righteous would naturally agree, but history proved that hope false.

Tradition, habit, respect for learning or admiration for personal piety – all restrained the tendency to schism but could not prevent it. The consequence of the Reformation was not one Christian church purified and strengthened but a large number of competing perspectives and institutions. In Protestant countries social differentiation took the form, not of a radical divide between the purple of the Church and the scarlet of revolution, but of a series of schisms from the dominant traditions. Rising social classes were able to express their new aspirations and ambitions by reworking the familiar religion into shapes that better accorded with their self-image.

Modernization and the growth of society

In the pre-modern world, political units such as empires and monarchies could encompass large numbers of very different communities because they required little or nothing of the ordinary people. The linkages were only of small elites or were for very specific purposes such as trade. Most English people of the sixteenth century had little or no sense of being 'English'; they lived their lives and drew their sense of identity from their small village communities. The shift from a subsistence economy to a manufacturing one greatly increased communication and required a high degree of integration; there had to be a common language, a shared legal code, structures of social control powerful enough to prevent banditry and pillage, and so on. Life became increasingly enmeshed and organized, not locally but societally, with that society typically being the nation-state. As the subsistence farmer and the craftsman working for his immediate neighbours gave way to the commercial farmer, the factory owner and his workforce, so the closely integrated community was replaced by the modern state with its massive, impersonal bureaucracies, and the village was replaced by the town and the city.

Religion drew its strength from its roots in the community. The Christian Church of the Middle Ages baptised, christened and confirmed children, married young adults and buried the dead. Its calendar of services mapped on to the temporal order

of the seasons. It celebrated and legitimated local life. In turn it drew considerable plausibility from being frequently reaffirmed through the participation of the local community in its activities. When the total, all-embracing community of like-situated people working and playing together gave way to the dormitory town or suburb, there was little in common left to celebrate.

One consequence of this fragmentation was that the plausibility of any single overarching moral and religious system declined and was displaced by competing conceptions of the divine. While any of the many alternatives could address privatized individual experience, none could successfully shape the performance of social roles or the operation of social systems. In being relegated from the public to the private world, religion retained subjective plausibility for some people, but lost its objective taken-for-grantedness. Faith was no longer a matter of necessity; it was a choice and a leisure activity.

Again it is worth stressing the interaction of social and cultural forces. The fragmentation of the Christian tradition which resulted from the Protestant Reformation hastened the development of the religiously neutral state. Where there was religious consensus, a unifying national high culture could be provided through the dominant religious tradition. The clergy could continue to be the schoolteachers, historians, propagandists, public administrators and military strategists. Where there was little consensus, the growth of the state was secular. In Ireland and the Scandinavian countries, a national education system was created through the Catholic and Lutheran churches respectively. In Britain and the United States it was largely created by the state directly. However, even where a dominant church retained formal ownership of areas of activity, those still came to be informed primarily by secular values. Britain and then the United States enjoyed such a lead in economic and military power over the rest of the modernizing world that their culture came to predominate. The secular state became a model, even for countries that lacked the religious diversity of the United Kingdom or the United States; religious liberty came to be seen as simply part of what it meant to be a modern democracy.

Modernization and rationalization

While differentiation and societalization are essentially changes in the structure of societies, a third significant process – rationalization – concerns changes in the way people think and consequently in the way they act. Again, social and cultural forces interacted. Social changes rationalized culture, but they did so by amplifying existing rationalizing tendencies that had religious origins. Peter Berger has plausibly argued that the rationality of the West has Jewish and Christian roots (Berger 1969: 115). The religion of the Old Testament differed from that of surrounding cultures in a number of important respects. The religions of Egypt and Mesopotamia were profoundly cosmological. The human world was part of a cosmic order which embraced the entire universe, without any sharp distinction between the human and the non-human. Gods interfered to the extent of having sex with humans and producing semi-divine offspring! Such continuity was broken by the religion of the Jews. In the myths of ancient Rome and Greece, a horde of gods or spirits, often behaving in an arbitrary fashion and at cross purposes, made the relationship of supernatural to natural worlds unpredictable. First Judaism and then Christianity were rationalizing forces. By having only one God, they simplified the supernatural and allowed the worship of God to become systematized. Serving God became less a matter of trying to please a whimsical despot and more a matter of correct ethical behaviour. Judaism was also a rationalizing force in the second sense. By elevating him, it removed God from the world. He created it and he would end it but, between start and finish, the world could be seen as having its own structure and logic. This conception of God and the universe was carried over into Christianity and Islam.

As the Christian Church evolved, the cosmos was remythologized with angels and semi-divine saints. The Virgin Mary was elevated to mediate between God and humankind, almost on a par with Jesus. The belief that God could be manipulated through ritual, confession and penance undermined the tendency to regulate behaviour with a standardized

and rational ethical code. No matter how wicked your life, redemption could be bought by funding the Church. However, this trend was reversed as the Protestant Reformation demythologized the world, eliminated the ritual and sacramental manipulation of God, and restored the process of ethical rationalization.

Since what was pleasing to God could be codified, morality and ethics could become detached from the supernatural. The codes could be followed for their own sake and could even attract alternative justifications. For example, 'Do unto others as you would be done by' could be given an entirely utilitarian justification in a way that 'Placate this erratic God or suffer' could not. In that sense, the rationalizing tendency of Christianity turned against its progenitor.

A similar point can be made from the way in which people thought about various aspects of the social and material world. Science is not easy for cultures which believe that the world is pervaded by unpredictable spirits and divinities. Systematic exploration of regularities in the behaviour of matter requires the assumption that matter is indeed regular. It is hard to discover the laws of physics if one supposes that volume may be measured by the displacement of water one day but not the next. Such a culture may produce the odd Archimedes, but it retards the development of a community of scholars directing sustained effort to the study of the material world. In that sense the three Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, by simplifying a supernatural menagerie to one God and supposing him distant from the material world, made way for modern science.

The less that God was directly implicated in the day-to-day operations of the universe, the freer people were to explore that universe and elaborate theories of its operations that paid only lip service to the creator. Many early scientists assumed the existence of God and wanted to demonstrate the wonders of his creation, but the development of a healthy tradition of rationalistic scrutiny in time subverted what it had been intended to protect. By freeing the way for empirical enquiry, and for pragmatic and instrumental treatment of this world, the Judeo-Christian tradition created its own problems.

A related sense of rationalization involves the pursuit of technically efficient means of securing this-worldly ends. One

of its most potent forms is technology. Technically efficient machinery and procedures reduced uncertainty and thereby reduced reliance upon faith. The domain over which religion offered the most compelling explanations and the most predictable outcomes shrank. Innovating farmers found that crop rotations did more to clean the soil of weeds and parasites than did prayer. The growth of technical rationality gradually displaced supernatural influence and moral considerations from ever wider areas of public life, replacing them by considerations of objective performance and practical expedience.

The Reformation played a particular role in demystifying the world. Just as the medieval Church retarded and temporarily reversed the ethical rationalization inherent in Judaism and early Christianity, so the development of science was retarded by the Church's attempts to impose orthodoxy on all fields of thought. The ability of powerful religious institutions to prevent the growth of rational scientific exploration of the world will be considered again in the final chapter. All that needs to be said here is that the Reformation, by breaking the power of the Church, made way for a variety of thought and for the questioning of tradition which is so vital to natural science.

I have deliberately placed science and technology after structural and social differentiation in my explanation of secularization because I want to make clear the relatively small part played by science in displacing religion. Often science and religion are seen as competing systems of explanation and it is supposed that the latter was pushed out by the former. Of course, many of the beliefs of the early Christians have been shown to be wrong. The earth is round and not flat. The earth moves round the sun, not vice versa. The earth and human life are vastly older than the ages traditionally taken from biblical accounts. While scientists recognize that there are still huge gaps in our knowledge, there is a consensus that an evolutionary model along the lines of Darwinism offers a better explanation of the origins of species than does the account of divine creation in seven days given in the Old Testament book of Genesis. For all that, science probably did little direct damage to religion. Nineteenth-century arguments between Darwinists and church leaders may have gripped the middle classes, but they hardly penetrated to ordinary people.

Anyway, to insist that one set of beliefs lost popularity because another proved it wrong is to miss the difference between truth and plausibility. There are all sorts of ways in which we can insulate our beliefs from apparently contradicting evidence. We can avoid hearing the troublesome evidence or we can dismiss it by blackening the character of those who bring the bad news. For example, many American fundamentalists accuse evolutionists of being sexually promiscuous and left-wing. But such neutralizing strategies require social support. The isolate who stands against the consensus is a lunatic and will be treated as such. To maintain a shared belief system one needs a social strategy that organizes shared defences against the cognitive threats. Where such resources are available, new ideas, no matter that they might be better supported by the evidence, can readily be ignored or rejected. It is far less easy to avoid being influenced by widespread and powerful, but subtle, assumptions about the nature of the world.

The relationship between science and secularization can best be put this way: religion is challenged less by specific scientific discoveries than by the underlying logic of science (indeed, of rationality). Science and technology have given us a notion of cause and effect that makes us look first for the natural causal explanation of an event. When an aeroplane crashes with the loss of many lives we ask not what moral purpose the event had but what was its cause. And in so far as we keep finding those causes (a loose engine nut or a terrorist bomb), we are not prevented, but we are subtly discouraged, from seeking the moral or religious significance.

Science also undermines the notion of a fixed and unchanging truth. Where religion looks back, science looks forward. The fundamentalist seeks explanations of new events by prayerfully rereading the Bible or the Qur'an. The scientist constantly seeks to explain better what we thought we understood. The religious scholar derives benefit from reading the ancient books of his tradition. For the scientist, old books have value only as historical curiosities. Indeed, modern science is now developing so fast that it outstrips the pace of conventional publishing. Leading journals use the Internet and no longer produce paper editions. Although science is, strictly speaking, anti-relativist in that it supposes that we can rationally improve our knowledge and that it is possible to distinguish between good and bad explanations, science does

undermine the notion of an unchanging and authoritative knowledge. It makes truth provisional.

As David Martin (1969: 116) says, with the growth of science and technology 'the general sense of human power is increased, the play of contingency is restricted, and the overwhelming sense of divine limits which afflicted previous generations is much diminished'.

In the contemporary West, religion is most often and extensively used for the areas of human life over which control has not been established by technology: personal unhappiness, extreme stress and the like. When we have tried every cure for cancer, some of us pray. Even committed religious believers suppose that a scientific research programme is more likely than a mass prayer meeting to produce a cure for Aids. Our space for the divine is thus much smaller than that of pre-industrial man. This is not to trivialize the events and problems which still cause many of us to turn to God. The unexpected death of a loved one or the injustice of some act of suffering may be enormously important to us. In that sense the 'gaps' in our rational control and intellectual understanding of our world may loom very large. But they do so in an individualized manner, in legal language 'severally' rather than 'jointly'. They are personal, not social problems.

To summarize, I am suggesting that the effect of science and technology on the plausibility of religious belief is often misunderstood. The clash of ideas between science and religion is less significant than the change in their relative scope, the power technology has given us to resist fate and the more subtle impact of naturalistic ways of thinking about the world. Science and technology have not made us atheists. Rather, the fundamental assumptions that underlie them has made us less likely than our forebears to entertain the notion of the divine.

Modernization, egalitarianism and cultural diversity

One very important element of modernization has not yet been explicitly laid out: egalitarianism. The link between modernization and inequality is paradoxical. We need not

explore the many differences between modern and traditional sources of power to note that, at the same time as creating classes shaped by what Marx called the forces of production, industrialization brought a basic egalitarianism. As with all the previously mentioned social changes, it is important to recognize here the contribution of religious innovation. Although the Protestant Reformers were far from being democrats, one major unintended consequence of their religious revolution was a profound change in the importance of the individual. By denying the special status of the priesthood and by removing the possibility that religious merit could be transferred from one person to another (by, for example, the living pious saying masses for the souls of the impious dead), Luther and Calvin reasserted what was implicit in early Christianity: that we are all equal in the eyes of God. For the Reformers that equality lay in our sinfulness and in our obligations, but the idea could not indefinitely be confined to what we owed. Equality in the eyes of God laid the foundations for equality in the eyes of man and before the law. Equal obligations opened the way for equal rights.

Although the details of his case need not concern us here, Gellner (1991; 1994) has plausibly argued that egalitarianism is a requirement for industrialization; a society sharply divided between high and low cultures and frozen in a rigid social structure could not develop a modern economy. The spread of a shared national culture required the replacement of a fixed hierarchy of stations and estates by more flexible class divisions. Economic development brought change and the expectation of further change. And it brought occupational mobility. People no longer did the job they always did because their family always did that job. As it became more common for people to better themselves, it also become more common for them to think better of themselves. However badly paid, the industrial worker did not see himself as a serf.

Even if we do not believe that economic development *required* egalitarianism, there is no doubt that the former permitted the latter. The medieval serf occupied just one role in a single all-embracing hierarchy and that role shaped his entire life. A tin miner in Cornwall in 1800 might have been sore oppressed at work but in the late evening and on Sunday he could change his clothes and his persona to become a

Methodist lay preacher. As such he was a man of prestige and standing. The possibility of such alternation marks a crucial change. Once occupational status became freed from an entire all-embracing hierarchy and became task-specific, it was possible for people to occupy different positions in different hierarchies. In turn, that made it possible to distinguish between a role and the person who played it. Roles could still be ranked and accorded very different degrees of respect, power or status, but the people behind the roles could be seen as in some sense equal. To put it the other way round, so long as people were seen in terms of just one identity, the powerful could not accept that we were fundamentally the same. For a king to treat a peasant and his feudal superior alike threatened to turn the entire world upside down and destroy the position of kingship. But once an occupational position could be judged apart from the person who filled it, it became possible to maintain a necessary order in the factory, for example, while operating a different system of judgements outside the work context. The mine-owner could rule over his workforce but sit alongside (or even under) his foreman in the local church. Of course, power and status are often transferable. Being a force in one sphere increases the chances of influence in another. The mine-owner could expect to dominate the congregation but he would do so only if his wealth was matched by manifest piety. If it was not, his fellow churchgoers could respond to any attempt to impose his will by defecting to a neighbouring congregation.

To recap, the fragmentation of the all-embracing feudal order with its organic communities allowed the radical individualism inherent in the Protestant Reformation to emerge in three closely related ideas: that everyone was in some deep sense much of a muchness, that the individual was (at least in theory) autonomous and that societies would have to deal primarily with individuals and not communities. The practical consequences of these ideas were slow to be worked out and many changes came only with considerable struggle and blood-letting. The old elites were not keen to give up their powers, but gradually the principles of egalitarianism and individual autonomy gave birth to the rights to own property, to be free from the arbitrary exercise of power and to select one's political leaders. Sadly, on achieving liberty for

themselves many rising groups were less than keen to allow others behind them to benefit. Nonetheless, the modernization of the economy allowed the gradual expansion of the notion of rights and of the scope of those rights.

Modernization brought with it increased cultural diversity in three different ways. First, populations moved and brought their language, religion and social mores with them into a new setting. Second, the expansion of the increasingly expansive nation-state meant that new groups were brought into the state. But even without such changes in the population that had to be encompassed by the state, modernization, as I have argued above, created cultural pluralism through the creation of classes and class fragments with increasingly diverse interests. Especially in Protestant societies, where such class formation was accompanied by the generation of competing sects, the result was a paradox. At the same time as the nation-state was attempting to create a unified nation out of thousands of small communities and to impose a national culture, it was having to come to terms with increasing religious diversity. The result was that, for Britain and the United States, religion could no longer be at the heart of that new national identity. Or, more exactly, it could only occupy that position if it was stripped of most of its specific content. Thus the founding fathers of the United States could talk of 'one nation under God' but the God in question could not be that of any particular church or sect and within a century the God that the nation could plausibly be under could not even be Christian.

Egalitarianism is crucial to the story because it eliminates what was until very recently the most common human response to diversity. A society in which almost everyone shares a particular religion can give that faith pride of place in its operations. An authoritarian hierarchical society can ignore or suppress religious minorities (and even religious majorities). Dissenters need not be tolerated; they can be massacred or exiled. But a society that is becoming increasingly egalitarian and democratic and more culturally diverse has to place social harmony above religious orthodoxy. The result was an increasingly neutral state. Religious establishments were abandoned altogether (as in the case of the constitution of the United States) or were neutered in practice (the British

case). As already noted, this reduced the social power and scope of organized religion. While freedom from embarrassing entanglements with secular power may have allowed churches to become more clearly spiritual, their removal from the centre of public life reduced their contact with, and relevance for, the general population.

Once established, social innovations can become attractive in their own right, even in circumstances that do not possess the characteristics that made those innovations necessary. The gradual rise of religious liberty in Britain, the radical secularism of the French Revolution, and the combination of the two in the foundation of the United States, created the general notion that a modern state should permit religious liberty. Hence by the end of the nineteenth century one finds political reformers in the Lutheran countries of Scandinavia, which had very little diversity, nonetheless arguing for religious toleration as part of a package of democratic reforms.

The separation of Church and state was one consequence of diversity. Another, equally important for understanding secularization, was the break between community and religious world view. In sixteenth-century England, every significant event in the life cycle of the individual and the community was celebrated in church and given a religious gloss. Birth, marriage and death, and the passage of the agricultural seasons, because they were managed by the Church, all reaffirmed the essentially Christian world view of the people. The Church's techniques were used to bless the sick, sweeten the soil and increase animal productivity. Every significant act of testimony, every contract and every promise was reinforced by oaths sworn on the Bible and before God. But beyond the special events that saw the majority of the people in the parish troop into the church, a huge amount of credibility was given to the religious world view simply through everyday social interaction. People commented on the weather by saying 'God be praised', and on parting wished each other 'God speed' or 'Goodbye' (which we often forget is an abbreviation for 'God be with you').

The consequences of increasing diversity for the place of religion in the life of the state or even the local community are fairly obvious. Equally important but less often considered are the social-psychological consequences of increasing

diversity; it reduces the certainty that believers can readily accord their religion.

Any set of ideas is at its most convincing when the ideas are universally shared. Then they are not beliefs at all; they are just an accurate account of how things are. The elaboration of alternatives provides a profound challenge. Of course, believers need not fall on their swords just because they discover that others disagree with them. Where clashes of ideologies occur in the context of social conflict (of which more below), or when alternatives are associated with people who can be plausibly described as a lower order and thus need not be seriously entertained, the cognitive challenge can be dismissed. But as I noted with regard to science, such immunizing strategies only work for as long as they are widely shared. They are thus undermined by the same condition – diversity – they were designed to treat. And that condition is more virulent when religious diversity is internally produced through fragmentation within one society than when it comes through migration or state expansion. When it is your own people who deviate, it is less easy to demonize or dismiss them.

Once a common religious tradition fragments into competing alternatives that have some fairly obvious self-interested connection to the social classes that support them, then the human origins of religion become all too apparent. Even believers begin to suspect that they have chosen God rather than the other way round.

Modernization and gender roles

One of the most powerful and far-reaching consequences of increasing egalitarianism is the change in the social position of women. Pre-modern societies ascribe very clearly different roles and rights to men and women. For very many reasons, modernization undermined sex segregation. Once it became common currency, the language of democracy could not easily be confined to men. In a simple economy where the household is a major part of the social organization, a gender division of labour makes sense. It is less well suited to a world of towns and factories. Improved health and prosperity reduced family

size and created an ever larger proportion of women who were not yet, were no longer, or never would be, mothers. Later changes in the nature of modern work removed men's competitive advantage over women.

It is not just misogyny that explains why religious conservatives have had great difficulty in coming to terms with the change in gender relations. Or, at least, the misogyny has religious roots. We do not need to explain it (for that would take another book); we need only appreciate that all religions have at the heart of their social teachings a considerable, one might say obsessive, interest in sexuality and the family. Having spent centuries elaborating theological defences of particular patterns of gender relations, religions find it harder to change their stance on gender relations while insisting that nothing much has changed than similarly to change their attitudes to race or class. No major strand of Christianity has ever made it a core belief that only white people or rich people can be clerics; for most of their centuries-long histories Christian churches excluded women from the ordained ministry. No widely used Christian liturgy has required blacks or working-class people to accept domination by whites or by the bourgeoisie. The standard Christian marriage services did precisely that for wives and husbands.

That gender looms larger than race or class in religious considerations is hardly surprising. In most societies, race and class are shifting and ambiguous categories, of concern to only some people and in some places. But gender relations are of vital importance to almost everyone. Add to this the fact that the household is where one generation passes its faith to the next and we can readily see why fundamentalists are so particularly opposed to changes in the roles of men and women.

Modernization: a First World summary

I will recap the above by drawing out the more abstract principles that underlie the changes. One key feature of modern societies that fundamentalists find objectionable is the notion that people should be accorded the same freedoms irrespective

of their faith and their piety. We now take this for granted, but most religious traditions for most of human history have found abhorrent the notion that the godly and the ungodly, the righteous and the sinner, should be equally favoured.

Equally abhorrent is the idea that life can be lived in discrete compartments, that you may choose your spouse on the grounds of religion but not your workmates. Or that you may sing God's praises in church but not in school or at work. Even for those who accept it, the division between the public and the private creates difficulties because it requires agreement on where the boundary lies. We might agree that a large company or a state agency should not be allowed to pick its workforce by colour or creed and that individuals may choose their friends by any principle they like, but can we permit a football club such discrimination? We may accord a Mormon the freedom to raise his children without interference in his Mormon faith, but does that entitle him to practise polygamy? Does the principle of liberty in the private sphere allow him to object to school textbooks that are explicitly or implicitly critical of Mormonism?

Those are questions about how we reconcile conflicting imperatives within the basic division between the private and the public. But that division itself is anathema to religious conservatives because it shortens the reach of religion. The United States allows the Mormon to structure his private world around the principles of Mormonism but requires him to accept that the Mormon god does not rule in the public world. For those who place social harmony before religious imperatives, compartmentalization is the solution to the potential conflict inherent in cultural diversity. For those who would place obedience to God above all else, compartmentalization is the problem.

It has its cognitive parallel at the level of epistemology or theories of how we know the truth. It is possible to tolerate error without giving up the right to distinguish it from truth, to say that I am sure I am right but I do not mind your being wrong. But in practice the social grounds for tolerating competing views weakens our certainty and eventually our faith in the possibility of certainty. Modern societies are relativistic in two senses. Most obviously they have intellectual elites that argue that truth is impossible. Postmodernists insist that,

because we are incapable of freeing ourselves from our own cultural preconceptions, biases and interests, objective and neutral knowledge is simply impossible. First popular in the arts, where it was expressed as the assertion that one could not establish a correct interpretation of the text of a Jane Austen novel, for example, or rank works of art on some neutral scale of virtue, relativism has now spread. We can now find scholars arguing that scientific knowledge can have no claims to predominance because it is just yet another socially constructed cultural product. The influence of intellectuals is less than they think or wish, but self-conscious postmodernism is a symptom of the greater underlying change: the widespread acceptance of a vague relativism. This takes the form of supposing that it is somehow undemocratic to argue with others. Although it is rarely put so bluntly, it is an operating procedure of much social life that no one has the right to contradict anyone else. My views are as good as yours. If it works for you, then that is your truth. I may have a different truth but that is my business, not yours. Even those people who are charged with producing authoritative knowledge are often hesitant. Consider the nature of much mass-media reporting. Obviously there are many facets of life that are reasonably viewed as arenas for choice between equally valid contending views. It has therefore long been common for political reports to balance the pronouncements of the governing party with the ripostes of the opposition. But that notion of balance is now often applied to scientific and medical controversies. Rather than seek to discover the truth, reporters merely present alternatives. Although this may not be their intention, the result is to suggest that we cannot distinguish truth and falsehood; there is just opinion.

The practical attitude of relativism is obviously useful for culturally diverse societies that permit individual freedom. It greases the wheels of social interaction and reduces friction. But it is a major threat to all monotheistic religious traditions. Allowing that you can have your God and I can have mine prevents us having to argue about who is right, but for religious conservatives it is an unacceptable compromise because it effectively denies that any religion is true. This is the well-known paradox of liberalism. It is accepted as fair only by liberals and excludes conservatives who insist that there is a

truth and they have it. Practical relativism does not contest any particular interpretation of the Bible or the Qur'an. It does worse: it denies that such texts can have a correct interpretation. The committed humanist or rationalist at least does religion the credit of bothering to argue with it. The de facto modern relativist trivializes religion.

We should add to all of the above the final affront to the Christian fundamentalist: almost all the churches have colluded in the above changes. Like an army in slow retreat, they repeatedly tried to create new defensive lines, but by the middle of the twentieth century most Western churches and denominations had come to terms with the secular state, had accepted the public–private divide, had scaled down their truth claims and had become de facto relativists, and were well on the way to ordaining women. The focus of religious activity shifted from the social world to the individual self. The primary purpose of religion used to be to glorify God; personal contentment, happiness, good health and wealth were fortunate accidental consequences, to be hoped for but not necessarily expected. Now its primary purpose is therapy. Religion has been displaced and denuded, and the guardians of orthodoxy have either actively promoted the new order or acquiesced in it.

Modernization in the Third World

In the last quarter of the twentieth century there was a marked change in the attitude of western scholars to what has been variously called the Third or under-developed world. In the nineteenth century the white man's burden was to feel responsible for civilizing what he took to be the backward races. At the start of the twenty-first century, the burden of the white middle classes is to feel responsible for (in the sense of feeling guilty about) the manifest defects of the newly independent states. In the next chapter we shall see examples of the Western powers exploiting countries of the Middle East and insensitively imposing elements of their own cultures on those societies. But we shall also see examples of local elites deliberately espousing Western values and culture, and the sorts of changes

described above occurring spontaneously in new settings. I mention this because there is a danger that concentrating solely on the detrimental effects of Western imperialism may lead us to accept uncritically the claim of some Islamic fundamentalists that everything to which they object has an external cause.

Social change is usually so complicated that we cannot readily divide what happened in, for example, the Ottoman Empire (and the political entities that succeeded it) between 1900 and 1950 into things that occurred because of Western interference and things that would have happened anyway. Nonetheless we can be fairly confident that at least some of the social innovation in Islamic countries was indigenous. In many countries democratization has been accompanied by increasing religious tolerance. Economic development, at least for the elites, has been accompanied by a decline in religious orthodoxy. But the secular culture of the West has also been imported into, and intruded upon, the Third World. Changes that took centuries in the West and that occurred sufficiently slowly for them to appear natural have been imposed on the East in a few decades. In England the change from feudal monarchy to parliamentary democracy took two hundred years, if one dates it from the execution of Charles I in 1649 to Russell's Reform Bill of 1832, and a longer trajectory is plausible. In the 1800s, before they lost their nerve and became more interested in respectability than egalitarianism, the Methodists allowed women to preach. Women did not get the vote until a century later. In parts of the Arab world and Asia similar changes were compressed into a single life span.

Development in the Third World was thus not a slow process of social institutions adapting to economic progress or to changes in each other. Rather than proceeding evenly, it was frantic, spasmodic and abrupt. The distinction between natural and unnatural is easily exaggerated, but we can appreciate the point that Western interference, irrespective of motives, could be profoundly distorting. In the West religious toleration was a necessary accommodation to religious diversity. The signatories to the US constitution had learnt the value of religious toleration from the unhappy experience of the Puritans in England, from conflicts in the early colonies

and from the fact that, although most of the colonies had 'state' churches, they were not the same church. But where the vast majority of the population are, for example, Sunni Muslim and the ruling elites at least believe that their own tradition provides a satisfactory way of dealing with religious minorities within their boundaries, then Western notions of toleration will be seen as an unwarranted imposition.

Rapid social change will always be traumatic for some social groups. In stable societies expectations and explanations will correspond to opportunities and realities; notions of what life should be like will roughly fit with the actuality. Even those people who benefit from change will feel dislocated by it and will need to adjust their culture to accord with the new circumstances, and that is as true for change that is generated by indigenous forces as for change that is imposed from outside.

The simple point to be made in any comparison between the Western powers and the Islamic countries is that the latter for most of the twentieth century have suffered from a variety of additional difficulties that have created a market for radical reconstructions of the dominant culture. As my main purpose is to explain fundamentalism, it does not much matter where one lays the blame for these things.

In most Islamic countries there was (and still is) little scope for popular political participation. The structures of the modern state were borrowed from the West but operated by clan-based monarchies or military dictatorships. Increasing wealth was concentrated in the hands of very small ruling elites. Crucial to the 'great Western transformation' was the growth of an entrepreneurial middle class. Though we can argue the fine detail of the extent of social mobility in Britain or the United States, the basic fact of considerable mobility is undeniable. In most Islamic societies increasing national wealth simply increased the gulf between the now-very-rich rulers and the masses. The absence of a middle class was reflected in the very limited opportunities for higher education and professional training. As Saudi Arabia or Iran lacked universities and technical institutions, opportunities for their own people were limited and those people who were wealthy enough to afford such training for their children had to send them to the West, which was both a pointed reminder of their

under-developed status and a cause of the rapid intrusion of alien culture (Lawrence 1990: 237).

More will be said about this in the next chapter. The point to make here is that the many changes which religious conservatives in the West disliked also affected the rest of the world. And they did so in a manner which was much more disruptive because they occurred very rapidly and unevenly, so that social institutions did not have time to evolve in a manner which kept them in balance and cultures did not have time to adjust to accommodate the new order. In addition, the military and economic power of the West was such that, by the time the Ottoman Empire collapsed in 1918, the Islamic world was additionally burdened with being on the wrong end of an invidious comparison. As well as having the specific problems of being part of the Third World, it had the general problem of being aware of its relative under-performance.

It is worth adding one unusually specific element of friction between the West and Islamic societies to this general background: the establishment of the state of Israel. When Osama Bin Laden refers to the United States and European countries as crusaders, he is able to link across centuries an ancient and a contemporary battle. Although many Jews were sent into exile in the eighth, seventh and sixth centuries BC, the main dispersal dates to the Roman crushing of the Jewish revolt between 66 and 70 AD. The original Crusades of the eleventh and twelfth centuries were attempts by European Christians (especially the Franks) to regain Palestine for Christianity rather any attempt to promote the interests of the Jews. The current state of Israel has its origins in the migration of Zionist groups in the late nineteenth century and in the decision in 1917 of the British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour to encourage the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine, a preference which became effective policy after the First World War, when Britain was given a League of Nations mandate to administer that part of the now-defunct Ottoman Empire. In 1939 the British attempted to restrain Jewish migration to Palestine, but already levels had reached a point that made peaceful cohabitation between Jewish incomers and Arabs unlikely. In the face of attacks by Jewish terrorists, the British abandoned the mandate, and in May 1948 the Jews declared the creation of the state of Israel.

Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq declared war that has more or less persisted, sometimes hot, sometimes cold, to this day. One reason for Arab and Muslim hostility to Israel is its control of two sites sacred to Islam, the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa mosque, both located on the site of the first and second Jewish Temples. But the more pressing reasons are the displacement of almost a million Palestinians from Israel into the neighbouring states and the affront to Arab power, which has repeatedly failed to destroy Israel or even to force it back to its 1967 boundaries.

For most of the recent conflict, Palestinian resistance was led by the secular (and often left-leaning) Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Fatah party led by Yasser Arafat. Since the 1990s it has been increasingly displaced by Hamas (the name of which is an Arabic acronym meaning 'zeal' from the initials of the Islamic Resistance Movement). Hamas advocates jihad to destroy Israel and create an Islamic state in Palestine and, despite being Sunni and enjoying considerabe backing from rich Saudi Arabs, it is also funded by the Shi'ite regime in Iran.

For all that Islam in theory regards Judaism and Christianity as fellow religions, sharing a common descent from Abraham, Islamic fundamentalists are often anti-Semitic. President Ahmadinejad of Iran is far from alone in denying the fact of the Holocaust. The state of Israel is thus loathed because it displaced Arabs, because its survival shows the impotence of Muslim states, because it promotes the interests of Jews and, finally, because it is supported by the Great Satan. The United States not only gives vast sums of money to support Israel but it also acts as its protector of last resort. To which we might add that fundamentalist opposition, as examplified, for example by Osama Bin Laden, gains an additional emotional charge from the belief that the Arab states (and ultimately the Muslim religious leaders within those states who have acquiesced in this) have been corrupted by Western wealth and power into accepting Israel and abandoning the Palestinians.

Protestant fundamentalists have entered the field on the Israeli side. Many believe that crucial events of the end times (such as the battle of Armageddon) will occur on Israeli soil. Some hold that the building of the Third Temple in Jerusalem

will be a precursor to the Day of Judgement. Most others manage a general sympathy for the Jews. Although they have had little direct impact on US foreign policy, Protestant fundamentalists have probably played some part in reinforcing US commitment to Israel.

Thus a promise made almost absent-mindedly by a British politician in 1917 leads eventually to Islamic fundamentalists having a very specific focus for their hatred of the West.

Conclusion

We can trace two sorts of links between modernization and fundamentalism. The short route, which we shall illustrate with the example of Protestant fundamentalism in the United States, is a direct reaction to local and immediate change. Modernization creates the conditions for Islamic fundamentalism in two ways. Some of the social processes that have altered the nature and role of religion in the West have also affected Islamic countries; in that sense there are indigenous causes of Muslim fundamentalism. But modernization has also been thrust upon Islamic countries from the outside. That is, Islamic fundamentalism is a response both to the modernization of Islamic societies and to the influence of the West.

3
Islamic Fundamentalism

An excellent introductory book on Islam starts with a chronology of the major events in the religion's development and spread. The first item on the list was obvious: 'c. 570 CE Birth of the Prophet in Mecca'. The last was a surprise: '1998: Pakistan becomes the first Islamic country to test a nuclear weapon' (Elias 1999: 11). That stark sentence is a useful reminder of three things.

First, the relegation of religion to an inconsequential leisure pursuit is a peculiarly modern Western phenomenon. Religion used to matter a great deal and in most of the globe it still does. We will not understand Islamic fundamentalists unless we begin by remembering that Muslims once ruled large parts of the globe and that their domination was built on military power. Southern Spain in the eighth century was Islamic because Muslims from north Africa conquered it; it became Christian in the tenth century because Christians from northern Europe drove the Muslims out. Or, to make the point more generally, shifts in the distribution and popularity of the great world religions owe little to the modern notion of the converting individual and a great deal to coercion. Second, the reference to nuclear weapons reminds us of the attention-grabbing value of violence. Westerners became interested in Muslim fundamentalists when they took hostages and blew people up. Third, that Islam getting the bomb is deemed worthy of mention reminds us of the other ideologies that

already possessed it: capitalism and communism. The end of the twentieth century saw the collapse of the Soviet empire, and the disappearance of communism as a world force strengthened Islam in three ways. It removed one competitor, it gave an enormous morale boost to Osama Bin Laden and others who had fought the Soviets in Afghanistan and it created the potential for a number of new Islamic nation-states.

A brief history of Islam

Islam is a founded religion. Just as the Christian faith claims to complete and supersede the religion of the Jews, so the divine revelations received by a merchant in Mecca in the seventh century are held by Muslims to supersede both Judaism and Christianity and to release God's revelations from the distortions of the two earlier versions. Islam is thus not just another religion; it is a religion fundamentally at odds with the religions of the Jews and the Christians. It claims the same history and many of the same sacred places, which, as we saw with the Dome of the Rock/Temple Mount site in Jerusalem, is a recipe for conflict.

Muhammad believed that he had been chosen as a prophet 'to bring a divine message to humankind about the existence of a unique, all-powerful God, a warning of an impending doomsday and judgement, and an encouragement to live a virtuous life' (Elias 1999: 33). When the citizens of Mecca became concerned about his increasing influence, he and his followers moved to Yathrib (later renamed Medina). There Muhammad rose to become the social, religious and political leader of an entire community. Three times the Meccans attacked Medina. With each battle Muhammad became stronger and in 630 AD Mecca surrendered to the Prophet.

Under the title of Caliph, the leaders of Islam after Muhammad combined the roles of high priest and king. Over the next twenty-four years, as Islam grew and spread outside the Arab world, there were three such leaders. However, the lack of an agreed method for selecting the Caliph guaranteed trouble and it came when the fourth Caliph – Ali, son-in-law of the

Prophet – was assassinated. His son Hassan made an ineffectual claim to succeed and then retired from politics. Nineteen years later, Hassan's brother Hussayn tried to succeed to the Caliphate but gained little support. With a small band of followers, mostly members of the Prophet's family, he was killed at Kerbala.

The majority of Muslims, the Sunnis, accept the legitimacy of the Umayyad dynasty that succeeded the Prophet. The minority Shi'ite strand insists that the proper succession should be traced through Ali, Hassan and the martyr Hussayn. The Shi'ites are further divided according to which of the subsequent Imams (or leaders) they accept. The Zaydis, named after the first serious challenger to the Umayyads (who died in the effort) are now strong only in Yemen. The Isma'ilis take their name from Isma'il, who they believe should have been the rightful seventh Imam. They became extremely powerful in north Africa in the tenth century, but are now fragmented into disparate sects. The best known in the West is that led by the Aga Khan. The major Shi'ite line is known as 'Twelver Shi'ism' because it believes that the twelfth Imam, Muhammad al-Mahdi, did not die in 874, but went into some form of supernatural hiding from which he will return as the Messiah at the end of the world.

There are two features of Islam that are particularly important for understanding fundamentalism. The first feature is the lack of a clear division between spiritual and religious power. Unlike Christianity, Islam achieved political power in the lifetime of its founder, and the original charismatic community did not have to develop an image of itself isolated from, or set against, the secular powers. There was thus no theoretical division between church and state.

The second feature is the centrality of the law. The revelations of the Prophet, codified in the Qur'an and in collections of sacred stories about him – the Hadith – combine both faith and morals; they are both doctrine and law. Strictly speaking, Islam does not have a clergy. Rather it is led by jurists who specialize in the law or Shari'a. In common with the more radical branches of Protestant Christianity, no distinct sacramental status separates those who preach or who lead in religious rituals from the laity. Preachers may be expected to be more learned and more competent than most of their

audience, but, at least in theory, they are not set apart by having a clearly different spiritual status.

Alongside the various sectarian divisions is the split between what Gellner has called high and low Islam. High Islam is carried by urban scholars, recruited mainly from the trading classes, and it reflects the tastes of the middle classes: order, rule observance, sobriety, learning and an aversion to hysteria and excess. It stresses the uniqueness of God, is suspicious of saint cults that create mediators between humankind and God, and is generally puritanical and legalistic. Low Islam (like popular Catholicism) is very different (Berkey 2003: 248–57). It stresses magic rather than learning, and religious ecstasy rather than rule observance. Its characteristic institution is the local saint cult (Gellner 1992: 11).

To return to the history, the Caliphate gradually declined in importance as the military commanders nominally under the authority of the Caliph grew in power, became kings and eventually created three great empires: the Persian, the Mogul, and the Ottoman. Given that some radical Muslims now present Islam as being essentially anti-imperialist, it is worth remembering that these great Muslim empires controlled large areas of the then known world. If one has to choose a single starting date, the relative decline of Islam can be traced to 1498, when Vasco Da Gama opened up trade to India via the Cape of Good Hope. The West's primacy in maritime trade laid the foundations for colonization as small bodies of troops were sent to protect distant trading posts and gradually became a permanent presence that spread inland.

In 1550 the Ottoman empire stretched as far as Hungary, and Muslim troops threatened Vienna, a city now seen as the heart of 'middle Europe'. But increasing Western wealth and the superior military power provided by its advances in science and technology pushed the Muslims back. By the end of the eighteenth century the Ottomans were well aware of their inferiority, and within the ruling classes there was a clear desire for reform.

> Things changed towards the end of the nineteenth century as more of the products of Western technology and industry became available. The rulers wanted to 'modernise' their countries; first it was armies and modern weapons of war, then

> railways, then the amenities of domestic life such as electricity and running water, then automobiles and factory equipment, and finally all the new inventions of the twentieth century. (Watt 1988: 46)

In all these developments, the religious institutions, wedded to an insistence that the revelations given to the Prophet represented the final word and the unchanging truth, got left behind. To give one powerful example, the Jews and Christians of the Ottoman Empire had printing presses from the early sixteenth century, but the Muslim leaders prevented printing in Turkish or Arabic until 1784.

Contact with the West led to the creation of new institutions in parallel to the existing religious ones. In the European parts of the Ottoman Empire there was pressure for new legal structures to supplement the Shari'a courts, because non-Muslims were not permitted to be heard as witnesses in those courts. New activities created new needs; commercial courts were established. In a process that parallels the structural differentiation described in the previous chapter, the Islamic jurists lost power, not so much because they were deliberately confronted by secularists (that came later) but because they did not adapt to the new circumstances and hence left social space that was filled by new and specialized secular institutions. In Turkey and Egypt the religious courts were left to deal with matters of personal relationships and sexual morality; again, a shrinking of the reach of religion that parallels what happened in Europe.

In a similar manner most Islamic countries developed secular education systems. The first innovations were in military training and diplomacy. The Ottomans established modern secular training colleges for their soldiers. In 1868, an Imperial Ottoman Lycée was established in Galatasaray to train government officials and diplomats. The language of instruction was French. Gradually secular provision was expanded to provide the full range of primary, secondary and university-level education, and the madrasas (or religious colleges) were sidelined.

This modernization was not forced on Islamic rulers by Western exploiters (though there was much exploitation). Rather it was positively solicited by the rulers of the countries