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# **RELIGION, POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

## **Selected essays**

*Jeffrey Haynes*

 **Routledge**  
Taylor & Francis Group  
LONDON AND NEW YORK

## 2

RELIGION, SECULARIZATION  
AND POLITICS

## A postmodern conspectus

A critical question concerns the political role of religion. There is evidence of the following: (a) the postmodern condition stimulates a turning to religion under certain circumstances; (b) secularization continues in the industrialized West but not in many parts of the Third World; and (c) in the Third World, secular political ideologies – such as socialism and liberal democracy – are not necessarily regarded as the most useful for the pursuance of group goals; instead, religion, often allied with nationalism, ethnicity or communalism functions as a highly significant mobilizing oppositional ideology.

Some assert that we are witnessing a global resurgence of religion of great political significance (Hadden 1987; Shupe 1990; Thomas 1995). Others contend, however, that secularization is generally continuing, except under certain limited circumstances and conditions (Wallis and Bruce 1992; Wilson 1992; Bruce 1993). The continuing debate about the political importance of religion suggests that there is a lack of clarity concerning just *how* religious values, norms, and beliefs stimulate and affect socio-political developments and vice versa.

This chapter aims to be a contribution to the debate. Its main arguments are: (a) the postmodern condition stimulates a turning to religion under certain circumstances; (b) secularization continues in the industrialized West but not in many parts of the Third World; and (c) in the Third World, secular political ideologies – such as socialism and liberal democracy – are not necessarily regarded as the most useful for the pursuance of group goals; instead, religion, perhaps allied with nationalism, ethnicity or communalism often functions as a mobilizing oppositional ideology.

The chapter is in four parts. The first assesses interactions of religion and politics; in the second, I examine the claim that the current era is one of global religious resurgence. The third focuses on postmodernism, arguing that

it is a condition conducive to the growth of popular religion. The fourth part describes two types of popular religion used as oppositional ideologies: 'fundamentalist' and 'cultural'.

## Religion and politics

Belief is at the core of religion. Bellah noted more than thirty years ago that it is extremely difficult to come up with a 'brief handy definition of religion'; nothing has changed since then to make the task any easier. He defines religion as 'a set of symbolic forms and acts which relate man [*sic*] to the ultimate conditions of his existence' (Bellah 1964: 359). I use the term in the chapter in two distinct, yet related, ways. First, in a material sense it refers to religious establishments (i.e. institutions and officials), as well as to social groups and movements whose *raison d'être* are religious concerns. Examples include the conservative Roman Catholic organization, Opus Dei, the reformist Islamic Salvation Front of Algeria (FIS), and the Hindu-chauvinist Bharatiya Jana Party of India. Second, in a spiritual sense, religion pertains to models of social and individual behaviour that help believers to organize their everyday lives. Religion is to do with the idea of transcendence, that is it relates to supernatural realities; with sacredness, that is as a system of language and practice that organizes the world in terms of what is deemed holy; and with ultimacy, that is it relates people to the ultimate conditions of existence. In sum, for purposes of social analysis, religion may be approached (a) from the perspective of a body of ideas and outlooks (i.e. as theology and ethical code), (b) as a type of formal organization (e.g. the ecclesiastical Church) and (c) as a social group (e.g. religious movements).

Therborn argues that there are two basic ways 'in which religions can affect this world': (a) by what they say, and (b) by what they do (Therborn 1994: 104). The former is the doctrine or theology. The latter refers to religion as a social phenomenon working through variable modes of institutionalization, including political parties and church-state relations, and functioning as a mark of identity. In other words, religion does not simply have meaning at the individual level. It is also, like politics, a matter of group solidarities and often of inter-group tension and conflict, focusing either on shared or disagreed images of the scared, or on cultural and class issues. To complicate matters, '[t]hese ... influences ... tend to operate differently and with different temporalities for the same theologically defined religion in different parts of the world' (Moyser 1991: 11). In addition, 'assessing the political impact of religion depends greatly on what facet of religion is being considered and which specific political arena is under investigation' (Wald 1991: 251). In sum, it is very difficult to isolate religion's influence alone, because it will almost invariably be part of a combination of causal forms.

It is, however, possible to assess the political importance of religion in the area of church-state relations. Therborn argues that, 'the more close the relationship

[of the church]<sup>1</sup> to the state, the less resistance to adaptation [to modernity]' (Therborn 1994: 105). Over time, especially in the industrialized West, mainstream churches, that is mainstream religious organizations, generally develop an empathetic relation with political power, even when they oppose it.

Most typologies of church–state relations underscore their mutual synergy. More than eighty years ago, for example, Weber identified three types of relations between secular and ecclesiastical power hierocratic, where secular power is dominant but cloaked in a religious legitimacy; theocratic, where ecclesiastical authority is pre-eminent over secular power; and caesaro–papist, where secular power holds sway over religion itself (Weber 1978: 1159–60). Recent typologies take into account the growing separation between church and state, a function of Western-style modernization, leading to increasing secularization. Parsons (1960), reflecting the creation of anti-religion states in the USSR, Albania and elsewhere, notes that a church may have a symbiotic relationship with the state at one extreme or be totally separate from it at the other; the latter position is not in Weber's typology.

Medhurst (1981) extends the range of types of state–church relationship from three to four, proposing 'The Integrated "Religio-Political System"' (IRS), 'The Confessional Polity (or State)', 'The Religiously Neutral Polity (or State)', and 'The Anti-Religious Polity (or State)'. The IRS, a type of theocracy, virtually extinct, with Saudi Arabia Medhurst's only extant example, pertains to pre-modern political systems where religious and spiritual power converge in one figure. Historical examples include pre-1945 Japan and ancient Mesopotamia. The IRS is rare because one of the most consistent effects of modernization is to separate religious and secular power. With the demise of the Marxist states of Eastern Europe, the 'Anti-Religious Polity', where religion is 'throttled', is also very uncommon.

The remaining two categories of church–state relationship highlighted by Medhurst are, in contrast, frequently encountered. The 'Confessional Polity' emerges when the 'traditional "religio-political system" begins to crumble and gives way to a new situation of religious or ideological pluralism' (Medhurst 1981: 120). In other words, this is a situation characterized by a (more or less) formal separation of state and (dominant) religion, although in practice close links between the two endure. Examples include Ireland, Colombia and post-revolutionary Iran. The 'Religiously Neutral Polity', on the other hand, includes constitutionally secular states such as India, the USA and the Netherlands. No religion is given official predominance.

Reflecting the demise of the Eastern European communist bloc, Mitra offers four different categories of church–state relations: (a) hegemonic, where one religion dominates, but other religions are tolerated, as in Britain, corresponding closely to Medhurst's 'Confessional Polity'; (b) theocratic, e.g. Iran, Israel where, unlike Medhurst's IRS category, state power is dependent upon a close relationship with the dominant religion; (c) secular, e.g. France, USSR, USA, corresponding to Medhurst's 'Religiously Neutral Polity'; and

(d) neutral, e.g. India, where government is even-handed in its approach to all religions, including the dominant (Mitra 1991: 758–9).

For Mitra, religion provides the moral basis of the state's authority, as well as an institutional and metaphysical structure for social transactions. Yet, religion is affected by the dispositions of temporal power and by changing social norms and attitudes, especially secularization. In the context of church–state relations, according to Mitra, the 'specific role attributed to religion at a given time and place depends primarily upon the status of religion in the constitutional framework and the social meaning attached to it' (Mitra 1991: 758). The constitutional position of religion is reflected in his typology. The social meaning, on the other hand, may alter, perhaps radically, a result of changing circumstances.

It has traditionally been assumed that the connection between politics and religion is only a problem among nations that are not religiously homogeneous. Most political thinkers since Aristotle have taken it for granted that religious homogeneity is a condition of political stability within a polity. When, however, opposing beliefs about 'ultimate values enter the political arena, they exacerbate struggles by preventing compromise' (Alford 1969: 321). Such is clear in relation to the country upon which Mitra focuses, India, where communal strife between Hindus and Muslims is common, and has been for decades. While the relationship between state and church within a country may well be of importance politically, the socio-political position of a religion cannot only be dependent on the constitutional position.

Mitra views the relationship between state, society and religion as triadic, as Figure 2.1 shows. The role of religion in politics in a national setting, he believes, is 'influenced by the specific kind of state and society relation that obtains in a given historical conjuncture .... A particular historical conjuncture may be conducive towards the growth of a particular form of religious movement' (Mitra 1991: 757).

In India, modernization was expected by the post-colonial political elite to lead eventually to the secularization of the country; hence, the constitution is neutral towards it. Things turned out differently, however, democratization and secularization worked at cross-purposes; increasing participation in the political arena drew in new social forces demanding greater formal recognition of particular religions – especially Hinduism and Sikhism. This was responsible for making religion the central issue, not only in Indian politics, but also in many other Third World countries.

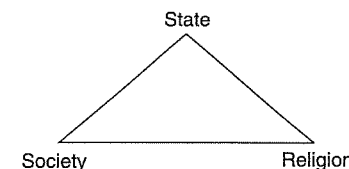


FIGURE 2.1 The triadic relationship of state, society and religion (source: Mitra 1991: 757).

### Religious resurgence or continuing secularization?

Anybody who had prophesied 30 years ago that the 20th century would end with a resurgence of religion, with great new cathedrals, mosques, and temples rising up, with the symbols and songs of faith everywhere apparent, would, in most circles, have been derided

(Woollacott 1995)

It is beyond dispute that, during the last thirty years, religion played an important political role in quite a few countries: the overthrow of the Shah of Iran; civil conflict in many African countries, including Sudan, Nigeria and South Africa; the demise of the Eastern European communist bloc; demands for political change in the Islamic world; the reworking of politics in the USA; the wars of former Yugoslavia; the troubles of South Asia; and in the dilemmas of a divided Israel.

The question of what is the nature of this largely unexpected interposition of religion in politics is a troubling one. Does it necessitate a rethinking of the secularization paradigm? This is a puzzle and a problem; yet, all who assess the situation bring their perceptions and prejudices. Basically, however, views can be dichotomized: thus, those who do not believe assign every cause but the divine to religious movements and effects; those who have faith perceive the hand of God in what appears to many a widespread religious efflorescence. I have sympathy for both positions.

The decline in the social and political importance of religion in the West is solidly grounded in mainstream social science. As Shupe notes, '[t]he demystification of religion inherent in the classic secularization paradigm posit[s] a gradual, persistent, unbroken erosion of religious influence in urban industrial societies' (Shupe 1990: 19). Secularization implies a unidirectional process, whereby societies move from a sacred condition to successively areligious states; the sacred becomes increasingly social and politically marginal. The commanding figures of nineteenth century social science – Durkheim, Weber, Marx – argued that secularization is an integral facet of modernization, a global trend. Everywhere, so the argument goes, religion would become privatized, losing its grip on culture, becoming a purely personal matter, no longer a collective force with mobilizing potential for social change.

In short, secularization is 'the most fundamental structural and ideological change in the process of political development' (Smith 1970: 6). It is a trend whereby societies gradually move away from being focused around the sacred and a concern with the divine, leading to a diminution of religious power and authority. A consequence is a gradual transformation in the traditional relationship between religion and politics.

Five components of the secularization process are of importance in the relationship between church and state: (1) *constitutional secularization* – religious institutions cease to be given special constitutional recognition and support;

(2) *policy secularization* – the state expands its policy domains and service provisions into areas previously reserved for the religious sphere; (3) *institutional secularization* – religious structures lose their political saliency and influence as pressure groups, parties and movements; (4) *agenda secularization* – issues, needs and problems deemed relevant to the political process no longer have an overtly religious content; (5) *ideological secularization* – 'the basic values and belief-systems used to evaluate the political realm and to give it meaning cease to be couched in religious terms' (Moyser 1991: 14).

Secularization is clearest in the industrialized West, where falling income levels for mainline churches, declining numbers and quality of religious professionals, and diminishing church attendance collectively point to 'a process of decline in the social significance of religion' (Wilson 1992: 198). Religion in the West has by and large lost many of the functions it once fulfilled for other social institutions, in particular providing 'legitimacy for secular authority'; endorsing, even sanctioning public policy; sustaining with 'a battery of threats and blandishments the agencies of social control'; claiming to be the font of 'true' learning; socializing the young; and 'sponsoring a range of recreative activities' (Wilson 1992: 200).

In the Third World, in contrast, religion has by and large retained a much higher level of social importance, even in many swiftly modernizing societies. I want to argue that secularization, involving social differentiation, societalization and rationalization, occurs *except when religion finds or retains work to do other than relating people to the supernatural*. As Bruce puts it, '[o]nly when religion does something other than mediate between man and God does it retain a high place in people's attentions and in their politics' (Bruce 1993: 51).

Generally, religion shrinks in social significance except in two broad contexts. First, as a component of *cultural defence*, that is 'when culture, identity, and a sense of worth are challenged by a source promoting either an alien religion or rampant secularism and that source is negatively valued'; second, in the context of *cultural transition*, i.e. where 'identity is threatened in the course of major cultural transitions' (Wallis and Bruce 1992: 17–18). In both cases, religion may furnish the resources either for dealing with such transitions or for asserting a group's claim to a sense of worth.

Opponents of the secularization thesis assert that the current era is characterized by a widespread – even global – religious resurgence, that the secularization trajectory is in reverse (Shupe 1990; Sahliyah 1990a, 1990b; Thomas 1995; Woollacott 1995). Thomas argues that 'the global resurgence of religious ideas and social movements is one of the most unexpected events at the end of the twentieth century ... taking place at the same time among diverse cultures, in different countries, and in states at different levels of economic development' (Thomas 1995: 1). Sahliyah claims that over the last two decades or so, 'a number of highly politicized religious groups, institutions and movements, surfaced in different parts of the world. Although of different faiths and sects, these groups shared a common desire to change their societies and even to change

the international order'. Some confine their activities to the realm of political protest, reform or change through the ballot box, others resort to violence in pursuit of their objectives (Sahliyah 1990a: vi).

Sahliyah argues that there are three 'broad categories' of reasons explaining the alleged global resurgence of political religion. First there is the destabilizing impact of modernization. Rather than leading to secularization, the social upheaval and economic dislocation associated with modernization lead to a renewal of traditional religions (Sahliyah 1990b: 15). Second, he perceives religious resurgence as a response to a generalized 'crisis atmosphere', stemming from a range of factors, including

the inconclusive modernizing efforts of secular elites in the Third World, growing disillusionment with secular nationalism, problems of legitimacy and political oppression in many developing countries, problems of national identity, widespread socio-economic grievances, and the erosion of traditional morality and values both in the West and in the Third World. The coterminous existence of several or all of these crises in much of the contemporary world provides a fertile milieu for the return to religion.

(Sahliyah 1990b: 6)

Sahliyah's final factor is that the political activism of contemporary religious groups and movements is partially accountable by allusion to a 'resource mobilization model'. Three elements are important: (1) religious groups must have the opportunity to form politically oriented groups; (2) the political vitality of a religious group depends upon adequate financial resources, political leadership, organizational structures, communications networks, manpower and a mobilizing ideology; (3) religious groups need 'incentives, reasons, and motives' before they can organize (Sahliyah 1990b: 10–11). In short, to be politically active, religious groups must have a political *raison d'être*, leaders, cadres, resources and ideology.

An alternative viewpoint is that, rather than religious resurgence, what is happening is that political religion is now more visible due principally to the global communications revolution – political religion is persistent not resurgent. Shupe argues that, throughout the world, 'organized religion is a stubbornly persistent and ... integral factor in ... politics' (Shupe 1990: 18). Smith claims that '[w]hat has changed in the present situation ... is mainly the growing awareness of [manifestations of political religion in the Third World] by the Western world, and the perception that they might be related to our interests' (Smith 1990: 34). This is also a view broadly endorsed by Huntington (1991, 1993).

What is happening in the Third World, it is claimed, is merely the latest manifestation of a cyclical religious resurgence highlighted by enhanced global communications. Smith points to Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Catholicism experiencing periods of intense political activity followed by periods of quiescence over the last six or seven decades (Smith 1990: 34; Haynes 1993, 1996b).

Traditionally, religion in the Third World is the ideology of opposition par excellence; thus, in the contemporary era, there is no religious resurgence – instead, it never went away.

Between the world wars, religion was frequently used in the service of anti-colonial nationalism in the Third World, a major facet of national identity vis-à-vis colonial rule (Haynes 1996a: 55–6). During the 1920s and 1930s, for example, in Algeria, Egypt and Indonesia, Islamic consciousness was the chief ideology of nationalist movements. Immediately after the Second World War, in 1947, Pakistan was founded as a Muslim state, religiously and culturally distinct from India, 80 per cent Hindu. A decade later, political Buddhism was of importance in Burma, Sri Lanka and South Vietnam, while in Latin America in the 1960s both Christian democracy and liberation theology were politically consequential. Ten years later, in both Iran and Nicaragua religion also assumed an important role in politics. During the 1980s, religion was active in a number of contexts, including the demise of communism in Eastern Europe, neo-Buddhist movements in Southeast Asia, Hindu-chauvinist parties in India and the FIS in Algeria. In sum, opposition is the traditional forte of political religious groups, and has been since the early years of the twentieth century. The current manifestations of political religion should be seen in this historical context, exemplifying continuity rather than change.

### *Postmodernism and political religion*

At first glance, the interconnections between the varieties of extant political religions, such as the 'new political activism of American clergymen; the radicalism of Catholic priests and liberation theology in Latin America; the growth of Islamic fundamentalism ...; [and] Sikh separatism in India' are either 'weak or nonexistent. Liberation theologians and revolutionary ayatollahs may be aware of each other's existence but have not influenced each other very much' (Smith 1990: 33). What, if anything, do these manifestations of political religion have in common, other than they have all occurred over the last thirty years?

As noted above, secularization makes sustained progress except when religion finds or retains work to do other than relating individuals to the supernatural. Those who argue that there is conclusive evidence of a *global* resurgence of political religion, many of whom are religious people, are, in my opinion, indulging in wishful thinking. On the other hand, it cannot be gainsaid that examples of political religion abound; Smith's argument that we are just more aware of them than previously certainly has merit. I doubt, however, that this is the whole story. Sahliyah's allusion to 'social crisis', the importance of communications networks, and social upheaval and economic dislocation are all characteristic of the postmodern condition.

Examples of political religion noted above relate emphatically to the mundane; they are rooted in perceptions of a group feeling that the status quo is

not conducive to long-term well-being. In the case of Sikh separatism, cultural defence is the mobilizing issue, catalysed by the re-emergence of Hindu chauvinism. In the other three examples – American clergymen, radical Latin American Catholic priests and Islamic fundamentalism – the rigours of cultural transition, where identity is threatened, underpin and galvanize the religious reaction.

The term postmodernism, apparently coined by J.-F. Lyotard (1979), is defined by him as incredulity towards meta-narratives, that is rejection of absolute ways of speaking truth. Postmodernism is an enigmatic concept, whose very ambiguity reflects the confusion and uncertainty inherent in contemporary life. The term is applied in and to many diverse spheres of human life and activity. It is important for politics as it decisively reflects the end of belief in the Enlightenment project, the assumption of universal Progress based on Reason, and in the 'modern Promethean myth of humanity's mastery of its destiny and capacity for resolution of all its problems' (Watson 1994: 150). Socially, postmodernism refers to 'changes in the everyday practices and experiences of different groups, who ... develop new means of orientation and identity structures .... Postmodernism ... directs our attention to changes taking place in contemporary culture' (Featherstone 1988: 208).

The emergence of the postmodern era, I want to argue, is of major significance for political religion. (For a discussion of postmodernism and Christianity, see Simpson 1992; and in relation to Islam, see Ahmed 1992.) Ahmed argues that postmodernism 'encourages the rejection of centres and systems, engenders the growth of local identity, makes available information and thus teaches people to demand their rights, ... fosters ideas of freedom and eclecticism, [and] challenges the state' (Ahmed 1992: 129). Rosenau stresses the fragmentation and voluntarism inherent in postmodernism.

Consistent with the decentralizing tendencies that have disrupted authority relations at all levels is the diminishing hold that all-encompassing systems of thought exercise over their adherents. This decay can be discerned in the pockets of disaffection with the scientific rationalism of Western thought – with what is considered to be the end of 'progress' as defined by the 'modernity project' – represented by postmodernist formulations ...

(Rosenau 1990: 414)

Like Ahmed and Rosenau, De Gruchy stresses that both the opportunities and the destabilization that postmodernism represents is 'turbulent, traumatic and dislocating, yet it is also one which is potentially creative' (De Gruchy 1995: 5). According to Simpson, 'the postmodern factor is defined by a sociopolitical dimension, a cultural/interpretive dimension, and a human rights dimension' (Simpson 1992: 13).

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, followed by the sudden, unexpected demise of communist systems in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in

1990–91, exemplified the socio-political and human rights dimensions of the postmodern era. They marked a fundamental historical change from one epoch to another, helping to fuel widespread, albeit transitory, optimism that a benign 'New World Order' would follow the ideological divisiveness and malignity of the Cold War. Optimism was premised particularly upon the spread of liberal democracy, pluralism and human rights to non-democratic countries. After the Cold War, liberal democracy – with its implicit acceptance of religious pluralism – 'found itself without enemies or viable alternatives' (Hyden 1992: 4; also see Fukuyama 1992).

It is sometimes argued that religious fundamentalism is the chief manifestation of the cultural/interpretive dimension of postmodernism (Cox 1984; Simpson 1992;). While religious fundamentalism is undeniably politically and theologically important, it is nonetheless necessary to bear in mind that it is but one religious interpretation with contemporary resonance; moreover, it is the realm of opposition.

Throughout history, the world religions have functioned as 'terrains of meaning', subject to radically different interpretations and conflicts, often with profound social and political implications. Islam, Christianity and Buddhism have long traditions of reformers, populists and 'protestants', seeking to give the religion contemporary meaning and social salience. The postmodern era, rather than being dominated by fundamentalism alone, is a period of wider religious reinterpretation, where popular religion challenges mainline religious organizations.

#### (a) Religious fundamentalism

Attempts to salvage the secularization model have interpreted evidence of burgeoning religiosity in many contemporary political events to mean that we are witnessing merely a fundamentalist, antimodernist backlash against science, industrialization, and liberal Western values.

(Shupe 1990: 19)

The political lines have increasingly been drawn between those in all major religious communities who remain deeply enmeshed in religious cultures and persons who wear their religious loyalty rather more lightly. The former inhabit subcultures that stress moral traditionalism and encourage its application to public policy while the latter, freed of exposure to traditional rules of conduct, are more disposed to accept a libertarian ethic in what is called "lifestyle choice". By virtue of their encapsulation in organizations which transmit political norms, the strongly religious exhibit greater political cohesion than the unchurched who divide according to other criteria.

(Wald 1991: 279–80)



As the quotations suggest, religious fundamentalists, feeling their way of life under threat, aim to reform society in accordance with religious tenets to change the laws, morality, social norms and, sometimes, the political configurations of their country. In short, they seek to create a tradition-oriented, less modern(ized) society. Fundamentalists tend to live in population centres – or at least are often closely linked by electronic media. They fight government because its jurisdiction normally encompasses areas, including education, employment policy and the nature of society's moral climate, which they believe are integral to the building of a religiously appropriate society. Fundamentalists also struggle against both 'nominal' co-religionists, perceived as lax in their religious duties, as well as against members of opposing religions. Examples of fundamentalist groups are to be found among followers of the Abrahamic 'religions of the book' – Christianity, Islam<sup>2</sup> and Judaism – and among Hindus and Buddhists, too.

Islamists, like Jewish and Christian fundamentalists, take as their defining dogma what are believed to be God's words written in their Holy Book. In other words, singular scriptural revelations are central to fundamentalist dogma. Neither Hindus nor Buddhists have central tenets of political, social and moral import conveniently accessible; yet each has their fundamentalist groups, characterized by a desire to recapture a national identity, seriously diminished, they believe, by dint of cultural dilution or poor, corrupt government (Ram-Prasad 1993: 288).

Religious fundamentalism is always socially but not necessarily politically conservative. Islamist groups seek an overthrow of the current socio-economic and political order by the use of violence, incremental reform or electoral victory. Christian fundamentalists in the United States and Ulster, like Jewish fundamentalists in Israel, on the other hand, are closely linked to conservative political forces seeking to reverse what they perceive as excessive liberalization and relaxation of social and moral mores.

I am not suggesting that religious fundamentalism was necessarily unimportant in the past; the growth of Christian fundamentalism in the USA over the last ninety years, or the emergence of successive waves of Islamic reformists over the last two centuries in West Africa, would belie that argument. What I am proposing is that the overtly politicized goals of contemporary fundamentalist movements should be understood in relation to the insecurities of the postmodernist era and the accretion of power sought by the state as a function of the secularization process.

For many people, especially in the Third World, postmodernism is synonymous with poverty, leading the poor especially to be receptive to fundamentalist arguments that supply a mobilizing ideology. Widespread shanty towns testify to the vast numbers of people who cling to the margins of the modern economy in a tenuous fashion in the Third World. Poverty is exacerbated by a withering of community ties. Yet, while traditional communal ties are sundered, new and religion-oriented ones may be created. In the United

States, on the other hand, Christian fundamentalists are predominantly found among the most affluent, successful members of the society (Wald 1991: 271). Clearly, it would be absurd to argue that alienation explains the existence of such people in the USA.

Christian fundamentalism, after achieving social and political prominence in the early decades of the twentieth century, re-emerged as a legitimate vehicle for political ideas in the USA from the mid 1960s,<sup>3</sup> a period of political, social and economic upheaval. Twenty years ago, there were an estimated 60 million followers of fundamentalist Christianity in the USA, nearly one-quarter of the total population of 250 million (Hertzke 1989: 298–9). Fundamentalists provided the core support for Pat Robertson's unsuccessful 1988 presidential campaign, and for Pat Buchanan's in 1992 and 1996; many are concerned with allegedly high levels of amorality in the United States.

The third 'religion of the book', Judaism, also has its religious fundamentalists; one of them, Yigal Amir, assassinated Yitzhak Rabin, the Israeli prime minister, in November 1995. Rabin's 'crime' was negotiating with Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) leader, Yassar Arafat, to allow Palestinians a measure of self-government, premised upon a reduction in the physical size of Israel.

Jewish fundamentalist groups, such as Gush Emunim (Bloc of the Faithful), are characterized by an extreme unwillingness to negotiate with Palestinians over land. Gush was founded after the 1978 Camp David agreement between Israel and Egypt, resulting in the handing back of the Sinai desert to the latter. Other fundamentalist groups, such as the late Rabbi Meir Kahane's organization, Kach, also argue against the return of territory to Egypt. The biblical entity, Eretz Israel, they argue, was significantly larger than the contemporary state of Israel. To hand back any territory to Arabs, nearly all non-Jews, is tantamount, it is argued, to going against God's will as revealed in the Bible. Simmering religious opposition to the peace plan with the PLO, involving giving autonomy to the Gaza Strip and to an area around Jericho, reached tragic levels in February 1994 when a religious zealot, Baruch Goldstein, linked with militants of both Kach (Thus) and Kahane Chai (Kahane Lives), murdered about thirty people during a dawn attack on a mosque in the occupied West Bank town of Hebron. After the massacre both Kach and Kahane Chai were banned by the Israeli government, a sign of its commitment to crush religious extremist groups that systematically used violence to gain their ends.

Hindu and Buddhist fundamentalisms are either rooted in cultural chauvinism or in perceptions of poor, corrupt government. Contemporary Hindu fundamentalism is by no means *sui generis*. Mahatma Gandhi, the Indian nationalist, a committed Hindu, was assassinated by a Hindu extremist in 1948 for the 'crime' of appearing to condone the creation of a bifurcated homeland for India's Muslims, East and West Pakistan. More recently, simmering Hindu fundamentalist suspicion of India's largest religious minority – Muslims, comprising about 11 per cent of the population – was strengthened by the

destruction of the mosque at Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh in 1992, built, according to some Hindus, on the birthplace of the god of war, Rama. As long ago as 1950, the mosque was closed down by the Indian government, as militant Hindus long sought to build a Hindu temple in place of the mosque.

In a further example of the fanning of communal flames, the late prime minister, Indira Gandhi, paid with her life in 1984 by appealing to Hindu chauvinism to take on Sikh militancy in the Punjab. Her son, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was probably assassinated by a Tamil Hindu in 1991 because of his sending Indian troops to try to resolve the civil conflict in Sri Lanka between Hindu Tamils and Buddhist Sinhalese.

In Thailand, a neo-Buddhist movement, Santi Asoke, made a unilateral declaration of independence from the orthodox Thai *sangha* (body of monks) in 1975. One of its most prominent followers, a former governor of Bangkok, Major-General Chamlong Srimaung, formed a political party in the late 1980s, called Palang Tham Party; *tham* means both 'moral' and 'dhamma' in the teachings of Buddhism. Some perceive Palang Tham's ultimate goal as the creation of a radical Buddhist state in Thailand (McCargo 1992). What this would entail, it appears, is a corruption-free political environment with the role of the military downplayed and with the state ideology relating to the ideals of the Buddha. Despite some political successes, involving the winning of fourteen parliamentary seats in the 1988 elections, Palang Tham's Buddhist fundamentalist message failed to excite many voters.

In conclusion, religious fundamentalism may be divided into two broad categories: one pertains to the 'religions of the book', where scriptural revelations relating to political, moral and social issues form the corpus of fundamentalist demands, often acting as programme of political action. The second comprises Hindu and Buddhist fundamentalisms, where the absence of definitive scriptural norms allows religious dogma to adopt nationalist and chauvinist dimensions. Nonetheless, despite intermittent political importance, religious fundamentalist groups usually – India is an exception – remain relatively marginal to national politics – as in the USA.

### (b) Cultural groups

The aggregate trend in the West seems to be that, under conditions of democratic pluralism, secular materialism turns attention away from traditional forms of religiosity. Institutionalized political competition gives at least partial vent to nationalist aspirations, funnelling communal conflict from 'potentially virulent combinations of God and nation' (Johnston 1992: 237).

In the Third World, in contrast, democratic pluralism is often either non-existent or bogus, whereas both ethnicity and religion are often of social and political salience (Haynes 1996b). Interaction of ethnicity and religion sometimes leads to 'cultural' opposition ideologies and religio-ethnic conflict because 'the basic political issues of national sovereignty and the alignment

of ethnic and national boundaries have not been settled' (Bruce 1993: 65). 'Where different religious persuasions serve as badges of identity for distinct ethnic constituencies there can be no "market situations" for religions and no effective free choice' (Wilson 1992: 206).

Political culture is an important variable in analysis of cultural groups, as it suggests underlying beliefs, values and opinions that a people holds dear. It is often easy to discern close links between religion and ethnicity. Sometimes, indeed, it is practically impossible to separate out defining characteristics of a group's cultural composition when religious belief is an integral part of ethnicity. Both are highly important components of a people's self-identity. For example, it would be very difficult indeed to isolate the different cultural components – religious and non-religious – of what it means to be a Sikh, a Jew, a Tibetan, a Somali, an East Timorese, a 'loyalist' (i.e. Protestant) or a 'nationalist' (i.e. Roman Catholic) Ulsterman/woman.

It is important to note, however, that not all ethnic groups are also collectively followers of one particular religion. For example, the Yoruba of south-west Nigeria are divided roughly equally between followers of Islam and adherents of various Christianities. Yoruba group self-identity is tied closely to identification with certain geographically specific areas; religious differentiation is a more recent accretion, traceable in part to the impact of colonialism. It does not define 'Yoruba-ness' in relation to other ethnic groups. The Ibo of eastern Nigeria, on the other hand, are predominantly Christian; very few are Muslim. While this singular religious orientation is largely a result of the effects of European colonialism, Christianity became an integral facet of Ibo identity in relation to predominantly Muslim groups, predominant in the north of the country. Many Ibos came into contact (and conflict) with northern Muslims as a result of the former's migration to the north in pursuit of economic rewards. In a subsequent civil war (1967–70), the Ibo secessionists used hatred of Islam as part of their rallying propaganda. They sought to depict the north of the country as exclusively Muslim, when the true proportion was in the region of 60–70 per cent of the population. In the civil war, Christian peoples – notably Tiv, Idoma, Igalla and Southern Zaria – from the country's so-called geographical 'middle belt' formed the bulk of the federal infantry; Yorubas (both Muslim and Christian) took many posts in the federal technical services (Haynes 1995).

The Nigerian Civil War is but one example of a wider trend – over the last thirty years there have been many examples of religio-ethnic civil conflict in many Third World countries. Until the early 1970s, scholars often argued that ethnic conflict would wither away as societies modernized. When this manifestly failed to occur, academic theories were turned on their head to posit a radically different interpretation of ethnicity in national politics. Such 'conflictual' modernization ideas suggest that growing inter-ethnic social and economic activity, rather than increasing the likelihood of cooperation between ethnic groups, will make conflict more likely (Newman 1991). In



other words, modernization is a sufficient condition for the emergence of ethnic political conflict. Ethno-regional parties, such as the Parti Québécois, the Scottish National Party, Plaid Cymru in Wales and various Belgian and Spanish manifestations, indicate the continuing political salience of cultural issues in industrialized countries. The existence of political conflicts between cultural groups in Eastern Europe, especially the erstwhile Soviet Union and former Yugoslavia, further underline the potentials for conflict in multi-ethnic states. Ethnic strife in Christian Armenia and Muslim Azerbaijan and the three-way struggle between (Christian) Serbs, (Christian) Croats and Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina all involve religio-ethnic issues. Each constituency has its international support – the Muslims, Middle Eastern Muslim states and Islamist groups, the Christian Armenians, Serbs and Croats, Russia, Germany and Greece.

It is not only religious conflicts between actual or putative states that focus international attention. The assassination of India's prime minister, Indira Gandhi, in October 1984, followed an assault – 'Operation Bluestar' – by Indian security agents and the army to end the occupation of the Golden Temple, Amritsar, by the Sikh extremist, Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and a large number of his followers. More than 2,000 people were killed in the attack. This catastrophic event focused attention on Sikh designs for an independent state, Khalistan. Over time, however, Sikh unity fractured, with competing groups and ideologies ranging along a spectrum from the 'zealous' at one extremity, using terrorism in pursuit of political aims, to the 'moderate', using negotiation as a chief tactic, at the other. Although Sikhs failed in the short term to gain a state, their exemplary opposition to what they perceived as India's creeping 'Hinduization' helped stimulate other religio-ethnic separatist movements in India. Muslim radicals in the state of Jammu-Kashmir also used appeals to cultural solidarity to focus opposition to the central government.

The defensive nature of the Jammu and Kashmiri Muslim and Sikh mobilizing ideologies is a common feature of cultural groups who perceive themselves under threat from hostile forces. In this respect, the emergence of putative unitary states in the Third World as a result of decolonization after the Second World War is closely linked to the process of modernization which implies, among other things, the development of strongly centralized government, often along the lines bequeathed by former colonial administrations. The development of a centralized government, often dominated by ethnic, cultural, religious or other particularistic groups, frequently exacerbates previously latent tensions into overt conflict.

For example, in Sudan, southern Sudanese Christian peoples, including the Dinka and the Nuer, are fighting a long-running civil war against northern Sudanese Muslims, aided by Iran, wishing to found an Islamic state throughout the country. Even though northern Sudanese leaders claimed that Islamic (i.e. Sharia) law would not be introduced in non-Muslim areas of the country, it is clear that their aim, involving forced conversion of Christians and pagans to

Islam, is eventually to 'arabize' and Islamize the entire country. Not surprisingly, culturally and religiously distinct southern Sudanese regard the objective as tantamount to an assault upon their way of life, perhaps their very survival.

It is not only the case that religious and cultural conflict arise as a result of decolonization; modernization as a series of processes of economic, social and cultural change affects all communities in the current era to a quantifiable degree. China was of course never formally colonized by European powers. Nevertheless, the development of a Chinese unitary state was by no means well advanced by the time of the triumph of the communists in the civil war against nationalist forces in 1949. One of the foremost aims of the new Chinese government was to extend its writ throughout all the lands claimed to be integral parts of the country – including those with distinctive cultural and religious attributes.

In Tibet, the westernmost outpost of the Chinese state, a Buddhist theocracy developed over centuries while central control from China sundered. Tibet was ruled by a religio-political figure – the Dalai Lama, endlessly reincarnated to ensure continuity of rule – until the Chinese invasion in 1952. After a period of relative equanimity, Vajrayana Buddhist monks led increasingly stiff resistance to enforced cultural change at the hands of the dominant Han Chinese. The latter sought to turn Tibet into a province of China, a process of enforced modernization that resulted in a serious diminution of Tibetan culture involving an influx of settlers from outside the area. Serious outbreaks of anti-Chinese resistance occurred during the 1980s and early 1990s, and intermittent opposition thereafter. Tibet, home to less than 10 million people, contributes more political prisoners than the rest of China's provinces combined. More than 100 Tibetans were arrested and detained in 1993 for political reasons relating to cultural autonomy. Political unrest also increased in other 'national minority' areas of the country. What the authorities referred to as 'gang fighting' (almost certainly with a religious and cultural component) also broke out in 1993 in the largely Muslim, Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region (Asia Watch 1994).

Attempts forcibly to engineer mass cultural and/or religious change also characterize Indonesian aggression in East Timor. Again the aim is to dominate a newly acquired portion of territory, to diminish the cultural and religious distinctiveness of an area in the pursuit of a unitary state. The territory was invaded in 1975, following the desultory end of Portuguese colonialism and a short-lived civil war won by the main liberation movement, Fretilin (Frente Revolucionario de Timor Leste Independente). Indonesia spent the next twenty years trying to crush a low-profile resistance movement in order to change East Timor from a culturally distinct nation into a province of Indonesia conforming to that country's religious (Islamic) and linguistic (Indonesian) norms. Rather than engendering mass conversion to Islam, however, military efforts resulted in the East Timorese moving en masse to Roman Catholicism; in 1975 there were 250,000 Catholics in the country, by 1994 there were

nearly 700,000, that is almost three times as many, with Portuguese ironically the language of revolt.

It should not be assumed from the previous examples that it is only in the Third World that religio-ethnic solidarity takes a cultural form. Apart from the tragic example of Bosnia-Herzegovina, where religio-ethnic conflict engendered the chill euphemism, 'ethnic cleansing', there were also radical cultural groups among disadvantaged black Americans and within Britain's culturally distinct Muslim communities. In Britain, the endemic racism of British society led to the growth of such organizations as the Young Muslims, Al Muntada al Islami, Muslim Welfare House, and Hizb ut Tahrir (Liberation Party), whose activists preached separation from British (and Western) society and hatred of Jews. Founded in the 1930s by Elijah Muhammad, the Nation of Islam, based in Chicago and led by Louis Farrakhan, is an important focal point for alienated African Americans. Preaching a virulent mixture of anti-semitism, anti-corruption, pro-community, self-help and black separatism, Farrakhan seeks to mobilize frustrated African Americans. Estimates of numbers of members of the Nation of Islam range from 10,000 to 30,000, with up to 500,000 additional 'sympathizers' (Fletcher 1994). Farrakhan's main idea is for African Americans to work together in common pursuit of group self-interest and solidarity. The Nation of Islam organizes welfare agencies and a number of successful businesses in pursuit of the goal of emancipation.

The relationship of Islam as a set of religious precepts to the rationale of the Nation of Islam is perhaps rather tenuous. The group's ideology reflects a dissatisfaction with mainstream American culture rather than reflecting adherence to the idea of building an Islamic state. The choice of a name redolent of religious symbolism – the Nation of Islam – reflects the emergence of fundamentalist Islam in the Third World as a potent symbol of anti-Westernism and anti-Americanism.

To summarize, cultural groups may, under certain circumstances, rise up against groups perceived as their oppressors. Such a development is very often driven by the apparent dominance of the machinery of state by one specific group – in India, by Hindus, in Sudan, by northern Arab Muslims, in Tibet, by Han Chinese, in East Timor, by Indonesians, and so on. They are common in the Third World, where the process of building unitary states is continuing, a development given impetus by the end of the Cold War and the accompanying explosion of nationalist demands. Yet, as events in former Yugoslavia and Soviet Union make plain, it is not the, as it were, 'third-worldness' of states that is the chief cause of cultural friction, but rather incomplete state formation and abortive attempts at modernization. In centralized states – such as Britain and the United States – groups that perceive themselves as ignored or threatened by the state may seek to highlight cultural and religious singularities in order to increase solidarity and to press political claims against the centre.

In conclusion, popular religion offers community solidarity, especially welcome in the postmodern period of widespread social upheaval and perceived

crisis, while also helping fulfill people's spiritual needs. Popular religion is a means of attempting to come to terms with multifaceted change, offering hope of spiritual well-being through community effort. What is the connection between popular religion and political protest? Moyser discovered that in Britain, a country characterized by both secularization and popular adherence to mainline religion for the most part, 'religious adherence generally reduced the propensity for protest' (Moyser 1991: 8). Elsewhere, however, religion, especially in the guise of fundamentalism, and not only in the Third World, often serves to encourage very active rejection of and alienation from government policies.

## Conclusion

Popular religion is not new; there have always been opponents of mainline interpretations. What is novel, however, is that in the past manifestations of popular religion were normally bundled up within strong frameworks that held them together, serving to police the most extreme tendencies, as in the Christian churches, or were at least nominally under the control of the mainline religion – as with popular sects in Islam and Buddhism. In the contemporary era, however, it is no longer possible to keep all religious tendencies within traditional organizing frameworks. This is a consequence of two developments: (a) widespread, destabilizing change – summarized as postmodernism – which causes many people to question what were once their most unshakable convictions; (b) religion and morality, especially in the secular West, are increasingly pushed out of the public arena into the private domain, despite the efforts of campaigners such as morality activist Mary Whitehouse in Britain or Pat Buchanan, political spokesman of the USA's Christian Coalition and presidential candidate.

In the past, popular religious groups functioned in isolation. This is no longer the case. Paralleling, and in some ways reinforcing, the impact of postmodernism, is that of globalization. In the context of the spread of ideas, especially religious views, globalization – particularly the impact of the spread of communications to all parts of the world – means that groups are no longer isolated. In the past, when breaks in religious traditions came, the breakaways were either recaptured or, if they stayed independent, came in time to reflect again the diversity from which they wished to escape. Today, in contrast, such divisions are less easily contained, as the erosion of Catholicism in Latin America, for instance, where it is giving way to Protestant charismatic religions, seems to indicate.

Generally, it is clear that – under certain circumstances of cultural defence and transition – religion may have considerable impact upon politics, especially in the Third World. Confidence that the growth and spread of urbanization, education, economic development, scientific rationality and social mobility would combine to diminish significantly the socio-political power of religion

was not well founded, with fundamentalist and cultural groups emerging as vehicles of popular opposition. Threats emanating either from powerful, outsider groups or from unwelcome symptoms of modernization (breakdown of moral behaviour, perceived over-liberalization in education and social habits) galvanize such religion-based reactions.

Religious fundamentalism can be divided into two categories – the ‘religions of the book’ and nationalist-oriented Hinduism and Buddhism. Scriptural revelations relating to political, moral and social issues form the corpus of fundamentalist demands. Sometimes these are deeply conservative (American Christian fundamentalists), sometimes they are reformist or revolutionary (some Islamist and Buddhist groups), and sometimes they are xenophobic, racist and reactionary (some Jewish groups, such as Kach and Kahane Chai). Hindu and Buddhist fundamentalisms, on the other hand, assume nationalist dimensions when religious revivalism pertains to the re-birth of national identity and vigour denied in the past, zealots consider, by unwelcome cultural dilution or poor, corrupt government.

While secularization is the ‘normal’ – and continuing – state of affairs in Western societies, fundamentalist and cultural groups examined in this chapter have in common a disaffection and dissatisfaction with established, hierarchical, institutionalized religious bodies; a desire to find God through personal searching rather than through the mediation of institutions; and a belief in communities’ ability to make beneficial changes to their lives through the application of group effort. This desire to ‘go it alone’, not to be beholden to ‘superior’ bodies characterizes popular religious groups. For some, religion offers a rational alternative to those to whom modernization has either failed or is in some way unattractive. Its interaction with political issues over the medium term is likely to be of especial importance, carrying a serious and seminal message of societal resurgence and regeneration in relation to both political leaders and economic elites.

# 3

## RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM AND POLITICS

Contemporary manifestations of religious fundamentalism are an aspect of a more general religious resurgence in most but not all parts of the world, with Western Europe an exception to the general trend (Hadden 1987; Shupe 1990; Bruce 2003; Norris and Inglehart 2004). It is useful to think of the various manifestations of contemporary religious fundamentalism as a counter-movement often militantly opposed to what followers perceive as the inexorable onwards march of secularization, leading to political and public marginalization and privatization of religion. To many observers and ‘ordinary’ people, a further defining characteristic of any form of religious fundamentalism is its social and political conservatism. Socially, religious fundamentalism is regarded as backward looking, anti-modern, inherently opposed to change. Note, however, that if this was actually the case it would be very difficult satisfactorily to explain sometimes *revolutionary political demands and programmes* of some religious fundamentalist thinkers and activists. Some aim, particularly Islamists in the Middle East and elsewhere in the Muslim world, to overthrow regimes that they regard as un- or anti-Islamic and replace them with more authentically Islamic governments? On the other hand, some Christian fundamentalists in the United States – people who believe in the inerrancy of the Bible and subscribe to a modern form of millenarianism (that is, the teaching in Christianity that Jesus will rule for 1,000 years on earth) may seem to fit more closely conventional wisdom. This is because they are often linked to conservative political forces, for example in the USA, whose aim is to seek to undo what they judge to be symptoms of unwelcome liberalization and the relaxation of traditional social and moral mores characteristic, they believe, of secularization (*Religion and Ethics News Weekly* 2004).