

## POLITICAL RELIGION: OUTCOME AND CONTINUITY OF RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM

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### ABSTRACT

In the modern age without fundamentalism as a middle stage, reaching the level of political religion is not possible even in religious and traditional society. Without making a space or field by fundamentalists and against modernity, the forming of theocratic state and using the political function of religion by religio-political groups is difficult. Maybe the relationship between religious fundamentalism and political religion is so obvious that it triggers questions as; is political religion possible without fundamentalist reaction in this modern era of traditional society? Does every fundamentalist movement lead to theocratic state? How is the relationship between religious fundamentalism and political religion? Or in the other words, what is the requirement or main factor of emergence of political religion? This article tries to answer these questions and clarify the priority of fundamentalism, as a requirement for political religion in modern age. However, it is possible for a traditional society to remain with a secular state. We can relatively witness the separation between religion and state but not separation of religion from politics. So, a traditional society in itself will not suffice in attaining a full-fledged political religion and religious government; and hence the need of fundamentalism becomes the crux of the hour.

**KEYWORDS:** Religious Fundamentalism, Religious Movement, Political Religion, Theocracy

### INTRODUCTION

The terms political religion and religious fundamentalism are related to the political function of religion as a vaster domain. Fundamentalists also use political function of religion. The existence of traditional society and subsequently fundamentalism often pave a way to emergence of political religion. Challenging the status quo, some religious groups try to dominate political power, to form theocratic government and eventually to implement religious commandments and to make new politico-social order. Some examples during the recent century show priority of fundamentalism, although not all fundamentalist movements lead to political religion.

With awareness of the existence of a traditional society and fundamentalist mind, religious leaders and politicians launch the activities to use this political potential, either based on their beliefs and faith or just for political motives. Religious fundamentalism paved a way to make the Islamic country of Pakistan. It provided a ground to dominance of religious forces on Iranian revolution, 1979, and eventually forming theocratic government. It led to the re-emergence of Islamist forces in political arena of some Muslim countries in recent years. So, the remaining religion which comprises of a larger mass of population in the social front challenged the dominant hypothesis of secularism based on reducing the effect of religion in political arena. This phenomenon led to the emergence of political religion and outcasted certain political motives, though there sudden revolutionary was ephemeral out of lack in power and smart governance, finally resulting to continuity of secularism.

The important of this phenomenon and re-emergence of religion in political arena, encouraged the writer to review the two related terms, fundamentalism and political religion. We try to show the relationship between these two terms since the existence of former probably leads to second one in any traditional society. And this makes it interesting and challenging to have a pertinent discussion of their relativity.

## RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM

Fundamentalism, for Holt et al (1958), is “a powerful doctrinal conservatism.” According to them, fundamentalists try to maintain ‘a relatively high degree of doctrinal and behavioral purity. Unlike the modernists, they want to go back to the purer standards of bygone days’ (p: 85- 86). They are interested in a national or global political system that is culturally connected to a religion. Fundamentalists cover a vast spectrum. Some of them are too religiously confident, take religion seriously and want greater role of religion in public life. The others participate in any kind of action out of religious belief too. Thus, they include from the Christian religious right in the United States and Muslim al Qaeda Organization to local parent groups who want the limitations of Internet access for school students (Emerson and Hartman, 2006). We can totally mention the history, causes, characteristics and an example of this movement as following:

- **A Historical Glance**

In Islam and Christianity world, religious rule has had a long history. By reducing the political dominance of religion and going beyond the conventions of modernity and surpassing secularism, the new fundamentalists and political religions had emerged in the new age. As Marsden in 1980 noted, “fundamentalism was a loose, diverse, and changing federation of cobelligerents united by their fierce opposition to modernist attempts to bring Christianity into line with modern thought”(Emerson and Hartman, Op.cit). So, the term fundamentalism, first time, was used to describe a conservative attempt of Protestantism in the United States almost between 1870 and 1925, although, historically, fundamentalist movements are not new, as Messianic movements have come and gone for several millennia (ibid.). Fundamentalists of this era ‘were not so much a battle with the secular state. They were militantly opposed to modernizing the Christian faith, and militantly opposed to cultural changes endorsed by modernism’ in Gill’s (2001) words.

From the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the advent of the fundamentalist movements in East was alarming and noticeable. An example of this movement was the Islamic movement in Indian subcontinent especially Jamaat-e-Islami movement after 1940 started by Abul Ala Maududi. In the next stages, especially in the 1970s, fundamentalism appeared in world level. Some movements such as the Jewish Gush Emunim (the Bloc of the Faithful) in 1974 and the Islamic movement in Iran during the Revolution 1979 emerged. Indeed, the Iranian Revolution and the political system come out from it was the remarkable indicator of the fundamentalism phenomenon. In the United States, also, it resurged as a much more politically active effort (Emerson and Hartman, op.cit).

However, religious fundamentalist movements emerged in various religions including Judaism, Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism, neo-Confucianism, Christianity, and Buddhism on most of the countries around the globe. Such movements with political influence are found in Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, North America, and Asia. In this regard, Almond et al (2003, as cited in ibid) write: ‘Since the Iranian Revolution, purported fundamentalist movements have risen to the highest levels of power in five countries in Iran in 1979, in the Sudan in 1993, in Turkey, Afghanistan, and India in 1996, and in India again in 1998 and 1999. There have been even more frequent penetrations by fundamentalist movements into

the parliaments, assemblies, and political parties of such countries as Jordan, Israel, Egypt, Morocco, Pakistan, and the United States.’ The recent changes in some Muslim countries like Egypt, Tunisia, Syria, Turkey, and so on show this growth of fundamentalism, although under special condition and maybe temporary.

- **The Main Cause of Emergence**

From a theological view, ‘modernism’ is the opposite of fundamentalism, since it tries to reinterpret the religious doctrines based on current conditions. The extreme theological modernists believe that the new conditions teach new duties and they typically reject traditional dogma, even the inerrancy of religious literature and prophets. This contrast arises in areas where the inhabitants are exposed to some changes such as higher secular education, sophisticated and materialistic urbanism, industrialism, and the spirit of scientific inquiry (Holt et al, op.cit: 86).

The various definitions of scholars such as Bruce Lawrence (1989), Riesebrodt (1990), Bruce (2000), Antoun (2001), and so on shows that without modernization and secularization there would be no fundamentalism. For example, Almond et al (2003) defined fundamentalism as “A discernible pattern of religious militancy by which self-styled ‘true believers’ attempt to arrest the erosion of religious identity, fortify the borders of the religious community, and create viable alternatives to secular institutions and behaviors” (see: Emerson and Hartman, op.cit).

Modernization is the primary driving force behind identity crisis. According to Marty & Appleby (1991, as cited in Gill, 2001), ‘Fundamentalisms arise or come to prominence in times of crisis, actual or perceived. The sense of danger may be keyed to oppressive and threatening social, economic, or political conditions, but the ensuing crisis is perceived as a crisis of identity by those who fear extinction as a people or absorption into an overarching syncretistic culture to such a degree that their distinctiveness is undermined in the rush to homogeneity’. So, as Berger (1999, as cited in *ibid*) mentions, “Modernity tends to undermine the taken-for-granted certainties by which people lived through most of history. This is an uncomfortable state of affairs, for many an intolerable one, and religious movements that claim to give certainty have great appeal.” However, apart from material conditions and economic progress, modernization project contains important ideological and cultural ingredients. Democracy, pluralism, human rights, and mutual tolerance are basic products of cultural modernity. ‘Religious fundamentalists are challenging these assumptions. Modernity has fostered the idea of man/woman as an individual; fundamentalism is returning the individuals to the collectivity.... Thus, the organic bonding to a civilization, not the free will to be a participating member of a democratic body politic, is the alternative view of man presented by fundamentalism’ (Gill, op.cit).

The radical religious fundamentalists are not compatible with democratic rule, since they believe in divine order and absolute truths. To carry out the religious orders, in the name of religion, they enter politics and gain the political power that probably breaks the principles of democracy and secularism. So, they attempt to political change, dominate over the power and form religious government. The researches on extremist fundamentalist groups, according to Emerson and Hartman (2006), show that ‘In the confrontation between religion and the secular state the end goal is to see religion restored to its position at the center of public consciousness, which it leads to politics becomes increasingly “religionized” and religion becomes increasingly politicized. In this relation, some religious groups sometimes use violence.’ Some of the fundamental movements have succeeded for instance in Iran after 1979 revolution and Taliban in Afghanistan for short period. And others have been based in the capital of political discussions and controversies like al-Qaeda and extremist religious groups.

- **Characteristics of Religious Fundamentalism**

This worldview based on belief to an omnipotent being absolutely determine a framework for life especially in relation to moral; do's and don'ts, what is and what should be, what is good and evil. Religious fundamentalists, almost, in various communities have three common beliefs: '(a) They must return to the basics of their faith, (b) there is an absolute standard of truth (e.g., the Bible, the Torah, or the Quran) that is contested by evil, and (c) they have a special relationship to their deity and are assisting their deity in the fulfillment of God's purpose for humanity' (Gribbins & Vandenberg, 2011).

Madan following Barr (1978), and by adding four characteristics states that the key ideas of fundamentalists are:

(1) Affirmation of the inspiration, final authority, inerrancy, and transparency of scripture as the source of belief, knowledge, morals, and manners; (2) recognition of the reactive character of fundamentalism: it is not an original impulse as, for example, orthodoxy is, but a reaction to a perceived threat or crisis; and (3) intolerance of dissent, implying monopoly over truth. (4) cultural critique, that is the idea that all is not well with social or community life as lived at a particular time; (5) appeal to tradition, but in a selective manner that establishes a meaningful relationship between the past and the present, redefining or even inventing tradition in the process; (6) capture of political power and remodeling of the state for the achievement of the stated objectives; and (7) charismatic leadership (Madan, 2011: 27-28).

Emerson and Hartman (2006) based on the findings of Almond et al mention Nine characteristics of fundamentalist groups in two categories, five ideological and four organizational. The ideological characteristics include: Reactivity to the marginalization of religion; selectivity (it selects and reshapes aspects of the tradition); dualistic worldview (good and evil, light and darkness, and so on); absolutism and inerrancy of the sacred text of the tradition; millennialism and messianism (a miraculous and holy end of History by the entry or return of the hoped-for one like the messiah, the hidden Imam, etc. The organizational ones include: Elect, chosen membership; sharp boundaries (either People are in the fundamentalist group or not); authoritarian organization (around charismatic leaders); behavioral requirements (behavioral requirements are both elaborate and specific).

- **Islamic Fundamentalism**

In this age, Islamic fundamentalism is the greatest and the most important than other religions. According to Sadowski, the mission of Islamic Fundamentalist groups can be both revolutionary and reactionary. By using the Qur'an, the words of Prophet Mohammad (Hadith) and his companions, interpreted by only carefully trained clergies, they try to purge Islam of local or non-Muslim practices that during centuries may have crept and to return it to the pure practice of the faith that prevailed during the life of the Prophet in the first Islamic state. They often have plans for an Islamic state and have had a great contribution in political Islam (Sadowski, 2006). Therefore, in the contrary of democracies, in Gill's (2001) words, 'Islamic fundamentalists have presented the idea of the "Government of God," as a divine order, as a global alternative to the secular state.'

The rise of Islamic fundamentalism has seen as the response to Western cultural, economic and political influence, and subsequently the socioeconomic crisis and arbitrary rule that led to engulf most of Islamic countries. In one side, secularists, on the other, Islamic fundamentalists, those for them the secular states are antagonistic to Islam.

It was sometimes because of the monolithic secular order, imposed from above by the state such as Turkey and Iran, which provided a ground for the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. Although, in post-revolutionary Iran because of a monolithic religious discourse imposed from above, some movements appeared against the governmental fundamentalism for secularization of religion again (Moaddel, 2002). However, it can be said that Islamic fundamentalism often is the start point of political religion, as Islam itself is a political religion, what is less common in other religions in modern age.

## POLITICAL RELIGION

Political religion has tied with religious fundamentalism. In respect to the term, many religious fundamentalists can be cited, as above-mentioned examples. This relatively new concept is respected to relationship between state and religion. Political religion means complete intervention of religious actors in the sphere of social-political issues. In this regard, D.E. Smith (2010) states that, “the closer the connection between the state and a particular religion, the greater the danger that (1) religious qualifications will distort the principle of democratic citizenship, and that (2) the state will interfere with freedom of religion, both individual and corporate” (p: 180). However, it should be noted that this term, in practice, has historical origin. Weber under ‘Ancient Political Religion’ mentions that:

The ancient local god of politics, even where he was an ethical and universally powerful god, existed merely for the protection of the political interests of his bands. Even the Christian God is still invoked as a god of war and as a god of our fathers, in much the same way that local gods were invoked in the ancient city-state. [...] Even for the ancient religion of Yahweh, political victory and especially vengeance against the enemy constituted the real reward granted by god. [...] The more the priesthood attempted to organize itself as an independent authority from the political power and the more rationalized its ethic became, the more the original position was shifted (Weber, 1965).

In addition, he also mentions Islam as a ‘political religion’ since from the inception of its political power, it was ‘the religion of rulers’ in his words (ibid). Apparently, religion before the beginning of secularization in west and east have had power by church’s rule and Islamic empire, but in the later stage political religion in the new term arose against the modernity and secularism, especially in east and Islamic countries. The predominant tendency of the contemporary Islamic movements has largely oriented toward the formation of both Islamic states and transnational Islamic order. ‘The ideological objectives of these movements are less to do with the safety of the commonwealth and more with the communion of the soul with God and eternal salvation’ (Moaddel, op.cit). The resurgence of political religion in the 1970s, affected the academic positions so that Casanova, 1994, asked, “Who still believes in the myth of secularization?” (Quoted by: Cannell, 2010).

In countries where religiosity and religious communalism are weak, secular state has been dominant. While with the growing religious movements in the Third World, it has been challenged by political actors with a religious vision of state as an alternative. According to Keddie (1998, as cited in Gill, op.cit), the various manifestations of modernity in a society with a strong religious tradition shared by a widespread part of the population lead to the creation of religious movements. Indeed, in these traditional societies the divine is still important in the collective soul, against modern society with parliament as sacred place and collective representation. ‘Collective political claims are immanent in the divine, in a society’s imagination of supra-human powers and the practices that relate to them’ (Gill, op.cit).

However, political religion is related to the domain of theocracy. Johnstone outlines two kinds of theocracy; pure theocracy and Modified theocracy. In the first one, there is no distance between religious organization and state so that the religious rulers act as both political and religious leaders under God's name and according to their wishes. In the second case, there is a separate entity of state but it is subordinate to the religious institution and its leaders. 'The state is the enforcement agency of religion to prevent of deviating people from societal norms but dependent on religion for its authority' (Johnstone, op.cit: 176- 177). Indeed, the first one is belonged to pre-modern age while the second is only kind of theocratic state in modern age that current Iran is the obvious example.

As already mentioned, Islam, as a political religion, is remarkable. For example, the Qur'an, apart from the relationship between individual and God, emphasizes on the *umma*, a politically organized community of believers. 'The Qur'an spells out a political religion' (Friedland, 2001). Qur'an summarizes all the religions only in Islam such as 'the religion for God is Islam' (Al-Imran, 2: 19 & 64). Accordingly, religion has various indices that are only and completely seen in Islam. Hence, as excepted from other religions, it provides the interference field in all matters (political, social and...) and drive the adherent to do these activities (Mofidi, 2005).

According to Moaddel there are two different concepts of Islam related to the Islamic political movement. The first one is 'a consensus-based or subjectivist conception of Islam as a set of beliefs about society and government.' Islam as a complete way of life including both religion and politics, as mentioned for Islamic fundamentalism, offers an alternative to the secular ideologies that lead to create a potent sociopolitical force. The psychological function of Islam creates an internal unity and solidity of the Islamic movement. The second conception is related to 'considering Islam as a discourse, a set of shared conceptual frameworks, rituals, and symbols.' Islam by an objective presence in the Islamic movements especially through ritualistic practices and figurative behaviors provide a ground in which political Islam become a potent revolutionary force against the ideology of the secular state (Moaddel, op.cit).

In relation to political religion and theocracy, the works of Abul Ala Maududi, a twentieth century Islamic thinker and the father of modern political Islam or Islamic state, are significant. According to Rana, three fundamental principles of Maududi's ideas are: sovereignty of Allah (Tawhid); the supremacy of the Shariat, or the words of Qur'an and the Sunnat as the manner and behaviour of Prophet Muhammad (Risalah); the vicegerency of man (Khilafat). Maududi writes that Islam as a "revolutionary ideology and program seeks to alter the social order of the whole world conforming it to its own tenets and ideals" while Muslims are the "revolutionary party" responsible for carrying out the revolution. For him, Muslims had no choice but to "capture State Authority" since "a pious cultural order can never be established until the authority of Government is wrested from the wicked." His writings influenced Islamist thinkers like Sayyid Qutb and, apart from Jamaat-e-Islami, his ideas and recommendations on 'Jihad for God in Islam' inspired the ideology of some other Islamic organizations such as Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) to call for establishing an Islamic political order from 1939 onward, Indian mujahedeen and Al Qaeda and its affiliates (Rana, 2012).

However, the dominant feature of most contemporary religio-political movements and consequently political religion has been their confrontational and conservative stance against secular states as outcome of modernity. As Islamic revolutionary groups overthrew the secular rulers appeared in Muslim countries such as Iran, Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia and so on (Gill, op.cit). Besides, a Hindu nationalist party, Bharatiya Janata Party, came out from the National Volunteer Organization or Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) as Hindu fundamentalist

organizations in India reacted to the perceived excesses of pluralist democracy and aimed at formation of Hindu state (Gill, op.cit). It was a move from religious fundamentalism to political religion in Hinduism although it has various causes and unlike Muslim countries didn't succeed.

## CONCLUSION

In regard to what was mentioned, a religio-cultural and mental field is the requirement for emerging the political religion. A traditional society or religious community faced with the effects of modernity has the potential for religious fundamentalism that provides the field. Although not all fundamentalist movements lead to political religion but without it, political religion is impossible. Almost all examples of political religion have come out from religious fundamentalism so that some religio-political groups in commence don't have the political claim or catch the government but by change in situation their claims also is changed. Without the existence of fundamentalism against modernity and secular state, the emergence of the idea of Islamic state in Indian subcontinent and religious government in Iran, attempts to form a Hindu state in India and so on were not possible. So, in modern age, only the existence of religion traditionally cannot lead to political religion till the fundamentalist movement takes place. The political religion emanates from fundamentalism and it is the continuity of it. In other words, it is the advanced stage of religious fundamentalism in which the use of the political function of religion reaches a peak and sometime leads to theocratic state. Although the debates of political function of religion is vast (general) and all of politicians (including religious and non-religious) and political actors use this function but in the domain of political religion the use of this function and religious emotions is more remarkable.

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