

**Religious Violence:
The Strong, the Weak, and the Pathological**

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ABSTRACT

The literature on religious violence is contested to such a degree that one is uncertain what to call the field of study. This essay argues that there is such a thing as religion and that under certain circumstances religions incite or legitimate deadly violence. Yet the relationship between religions, religious actors, and violence is much more complex than that. This essay surveys the main trends of a vast literature on that relationship, sorting it into three categories and several sub-categories, each of which explicates a different conceptualization and evaluation of religion and religious agency. In the concluding section I suggest that sufficient work of high quality exists and that we can now begin to integrate the seminal insights of these literatures into a coherent theory of religion and violence.

How do we begin to account for the human act of violating another person? What are we to make of the brutalities of rape, torture, and the slaughter of innocents? How do the advocates and perpetrators of violence justify unspeakable deeds? What of violence that falls short of “atrocious” but nonetheless seeks to harm, debase, and possibly kill?

And then we come to the question of agency. Are those who enact deadly violence to be considered pathological and beyond the pale, or can violence be considered legitimate, just, and indeed valorous under certain circumstances? And who is to decide? Does the modern nation-state have the legitimate monopoly on violence, as Weber famously asserted? Or may protest movements, rebellions, and revolutions displace the state and do so with compelling ethical and legal justification?

Such fundamental and enduring questions, typically the province of lawyers, constitutionalists, political philosophers and ethicists, become ever more complicated when religion and religious actors are implicated in deadly violence. And lately they have been. Indeed, the last three decades have witnessed a thematically and methodologically incoherent outpouring of books, articles and multi-media documentaries on “religious violence.” Triggered by the rise of virulent religious movements in the 1970s, this avalanche of reportage, analysis, and commentary ranges in subject matter from lone assassins, apocalyptic cults, and religiously ambiguous terrorists to networks of Hindu militants crisscrossing India, Jewish irredentist movements in Israel and the Sikh extremists of Punjab.¹ Everyone, it seems, has a pet theory as to the who and why of religious violence, including those who see it as a reified construct distracting attention from the structural and supposedly “legitimate” physical violence of the modern nation-state.² Meanwhile, the westernized global media has helped to open a profitable market for books with titles featuring the words “sacred terror” and “holy war.”³ The relative lack of sophistication regarding religion, not least in policy circles, combined with the advent of a skeptical secularism as the default mode of public discourse in North America and Europe, has abetted both the exoticizing of religion and the conflation of public religion with fundamentalism and fundamentalism with terrorism.⁴ That “religion and violence” has “arrived” as an academic sub-field is evident in the recent or imminent appearance of “readers,” “companions” and “handbooks” for use by teachers, students and researchers.⁵ In short, it has been a seller’s market for scholars, public intellectuals and pundits trafficking in expertise in religious extremism.

The plethora of scholarly publications alone suggests the need to identify broad interpretive categories and review a few representative titles for each. Accordingly, in this survey of “the state of the field,” I use the term **Strong Religion** to cluster works that see religion itself as the source of, or justification for, deadly violence, or that emphasize distinctive religious practices, beliefs, and ideologies as the decisive ingredients in violent movements that may also draw on nationalist, ethnic, or other motivations.⁶ My second category, **Weak Religion**, refers to works that present religion as a dependent variable in deadly violence, the primary source of which is secular in origin (e.g., enacted by the state or by nationalist or ethnic extremists). Finally, a network of scholars

explores what might be termed **Pathological Religion**, namely, religious actors whose embrace of fundamentalist or extremist religious modes of behavior reflect symptoms of psycho-social deviance. The meaning and content of “religion” itself fluctuates within and across these interpretive modes, as I indicate below.

Strong Religion

Authors writing in the ““strong religion”” camp focus on the phenomenology and history of religion itself as sufficient to inspire and authorize deadly violence, which may be enacted by the self-styled ““true believers”” themselves or by their religiously less literate or committed surrogates.

The most influential author in this category is the sociologist of religion Mark Juergensmeyer, who spices his selections of scriptures and traditions of divine warfare with observations and insights derived from field interviews, gleanings from websites, and evocative quotations from extremist treatises and apocalyptic “novels” such as *The Turner Diaries*.⁷ In his role as a synthesizer, Juergensmeyer has been criticized for skimming the surface and conflating different types of religious (and nonreligious) actors, but his conceptual contributions to the field are undeniable. His best-known work, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, tapped into the intense anxiety provoked by the events of 9/11. Written in accessible prose, its cover adorned with menacing close-ups of three then-prominent—and strikingly disparate, not to say incomparable— ““religious terrorists”” (Timothy McVeigh, Osama Bin Laden, and Shoko Asahara of Aum Shinrikyo), the book reinforced the impression that religious violence is an ubiquitous and particularly lethal threat to world order and security. It also provided a showcase for key concepts that Juergensmeyer had been developing as his signal contribution to the field.

The most cited of these concepts is the notion of cosmic war. Religious extremists—reveling in myths of a martial past, believing themselves to be enacting God’s will, and viewing the current military campaign as but a chapter in a glorious and protracted battle between good and evil—adopt a calculus of warfare that is radically different, and less strictly rational, than that governing the tactics of secular combatants. The true believers, Juergensmeyer argues, see themselves engaged in a metaphysical struggle, the ultimate stakes of which dwarf mere territorial or political ambitions and justify endless, self-renewing, ultra-violent enactments of divine wrath. ““What makes religious violence particularly savage and relentless is that its perpetrators have placed such religious images of divine struggle—cosmic war—in the service of worldly political battles,”” he writes.⁸

Religious narratives of martyrdom, sacrifice and conquest inform the notion of cosmic war, which in turn provides the script that is played out in the performative as well as the tactical violence of Al Qaeda, Aum Shinrikyo, the Christian Identity militias, and many more. Performative

violence—extremist acts which are primarily symbolic in nature—gestures toward an infinite horizon of meaning beyond the immediate strategic or practical considerations of the present battle. (Such acts may also carry “demonstration effect,” which can deliver quite practical propaganda and recruiting results, as in: see what a few true believers/suicide plane hijackers, empowered by faith and equipped only with courage, zeal and a few box-cutters, can do—bring the mighty, pagan America to its knees in terror!) Cosmic war, Juergensmeyer contends, is central to a religious worldview, and it thereby valorizes religious commitment as a path of honor and virtue, endows individuals as well as societies with nobility and meaning, justifies otherwise despicable acts, and provides political legitimization to its warriors.⁹

But is “cosmic war” *central* to a religious worldview, or is it derived mainly from the extremist wing of contemporary religious movements? And is it accurate to apply this notion broadly, that is, to religious movements in general? Juergensmeyer’s published work oscillates between holding religion itself accountable for violence authorized or enacted by religious actors (“strong religion”) and laying the blame on nationalist or ethnic actors who manipulate religious sensibilities, symbols and actors toward decidedly non-religious ends (“weak religion”). But he nonetheless applies cosmic war as a theoretical canopy overarching secular as well as religious actors. ““The Palestinian conflict,”” he writes in a typical passage, ““is conceived as something larger than a contest between Arabs and Jews: it is a cosmic struggle of Manichaeic proportions.””¹⁰

An elastic definition of religion and who counts as religious creates certain analytical challenges for the theorist and comparativist of religious violence. So, too, do the substantive and organizational differences between the religious groups engaged in deadly violence. These include fundamentalist movements that emerge within multi-generational global religions such as Islam and Christianity and draw on their ideological and organizational resources; less organizationally robust; and pervasive sects and “new religious movements,” including cults such as the Branch Davidians and Aum Shinrikyo, which depend heavily on a charismatic leader; and loosely affiliated networks such as the Christian Identity militias.¹¹ In addition, there are significant variations within these clusters, and one must consider how the variations might affect the use or frequency of various forms of violence. “Structurally, the radical right is a confusing, seemingly anarchic world,” writes Michael Barkun, an expert on Christian extremism and apocalyptic violence.¹²

Other scholars of religious violence writing in the “strong religion” mode have also struggled with the challenges of differentiating religious from other motivations, isolating distinctively religious dynamics, and accounting for the ways religion is embedded in specific historical and cultural contexts. They are aware that some of their colleagues in the study of religion argue that what we call religion, in addition to being a category of analysis developed in the modern period and complicit in western colonial and imperial efforts to conquer and control non-western populations, is so fluid, contingent, and adaptive that it cannot responsibly be posited as stable source of identity and behavior. The most radical expression of this view holds that the concept of “religion” is “manufactured, constructed, invented, or imagined, but does not correspond to an objective real-

ity ‘out there’ in the world.” The term should therefore be dropped altogether.¹³

In her essay on religious peacebuilding in this issue, Atalia Omer offers a generous and sympathetic rendering of my own work in the “strong religion” mode, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation*. Without repeating her lucid summary of that book’s main themes and argument, I can say simply that I am certainly not in the “there is no such thing as religion” camp. Rather, I accept the “reality” of the human experience of the numinous, which cannot be reduced to the totality of its psychological, social, economic, cultural, etc. dimensions. It is undeniable that this cross-cultural and cross-generational experience, or set of experiences, finds expression in historically contingent practices, beliefs, and institutions, and is already always “reduced” semiotically as well as linguistically—that is, contained and truncated within connotative and allusive as well as denotative (and thus “naïve”) discursive modes. The challenge, however, is to determine, as far as is possible, how these different cultural, social, and psychological “placements” of religious experiences condition the concrete working-out of a behavioral response within the range of violent and nonviolent options available to the devout. To acknowledge that religion is a modern construct, differentiated from the state in order to be constrained by secular power, does not absolve the interpreter from the task of scrutinizing its present configurations.

One thread of historical continuity is precisely the ongoing construction of the sacred. Deadly violence against the impure, the heretic, and the infidel, I have argued, is an authentic, if not necessarily legitimate, response to the encounter with the sacred, the power of which is rendered, variously, as awesome, imposing, creative, destructive, fascinating, liberating, and commanding. When people believe themselves to be acting in response to the sacred, the timing, nature, duration, targets, audience(s), and understood purpose of their acts draws heavily on the sensibilities, symbols, rituals, precepts, and doctrines available within the discursive community. Such action is always “militant,” according to the terminology I employ; that is, it is driven by “a passion for the infinite” and a corresponding spirit of self-denial, sacrifice, and zeal for doing “God’s will.” It is “extremist” (in my usage) when the dynamics of “othering” and demonizing kick in, to a degree that the annihilation of the enemy is considered a religious obligation.

In underscoring the distinctively religious character of some expressions of religious violence, my approach accords with the “strong religion” explanatory framework. As Omer notes, however, I find in “the ambivalence of the sacred”—that is, in the pre-moral, pre-interpreted, “raw” (if always mediated) experience of the radical mystery of the numinous—a powerful source of nonviolent peacebuilding, compassion and love of enemy. In accounting for religious violence as well as religious peacebuilding, hermeneutics is everything, contestation is inevitable, and struggle within and outside the enclave is the norm.¹⁴

The corollaries of both the cosmic war thesis and the ambivalence thesis hold explanatory power. Martial themes and symbols abound in the religious imagination, as one would expect from peoples convinced that human existence is a never-ending face-off between the elect and the reprobate, the pure and impure.¹⁵ Religious “militance”—absolute and unconditional devotion to the

sacred cause—makes compromise unlikely; this helps to explain why religious actors are among the major rejectionists of peace processes and agents of spoiler violence.¹⁶ Related motifs of divine wrath and judgment, rituals of purification, and contestations over sacred space also inhabit the religious imaginary and provide evidence for the “strong religion” interpretation of religious violence. Indeed, an array of scholars, spanning the disciplines of ritual studies, history, semiotics, cultural anthropology, theology, ethics, and peace and conflict studies, has explored the potential for inciting violence in behaviors and practices typically seen as constitutive of religion.

Desire, Mimesis, Ritual

“In many rituals the sacrificial act assumes two opposing aspects, appearing at times as a sacred obligation to be neglected at grave peril, at other times as a sort of criminal activity entailing perils of equal gravity.” Thus begins *Violence and the Sacred*, the influential text of the French literary critic René Girard, who sets forth his theory of mimetic desire, ritual sacrifice, and the dual function of religion to authorize and contain violence. By “mimetic desire” Girard refers to the tendency of a tribe to emulate the desirable traits of an other who is perceived as strong, noble, and “ideal,” but whose perceived superior status and power ultimately becomes the source of envy, jealousy, resentment, and often bitter competition and loathing. Such visceral impulses must be channeled and managed, lest they destroy the host community. Through the sacrifice of a scapegoat, the collective anger and aggression, which builds up in a community and can threaten to turn its members against one another, is transferred to a “safe” victim. In Girard’s view, “the function of ritual is to ‘purify’ violence; that is, to ‘trick’ violence into spending itself on victims whose death will provoke no reprisals.”¹⁷ In this sense, Girard comments, “ritual is nothing more than the regular exercise of ‘good violence.’”¹⁸ When sacrificial rituals break down, religious symbols, and myths can be turned to justify aggression against outsiders, often in the form of a “holy war.” In short, as Charles Selengut comments, “religion, by sacralizing and legitimating violence against enemies or promoting ritual enactments of mythic violence, rids a society of its own intragroup violence.”¹⁹

Girard’s influence is far-ranging. The Christian writer Gil Bailie sees Girard’s focus on the “redemptive victim” as a “breakthrough” that relieves society of the need for religious or ethnic war. The logic of sacred violence, Bailie argues, “is nowhere expressed more succinctly nor repudiated more completely than in the New Testament, where the high priest solemnly announces its benefits and the crucifixion straightaway reveals its arbitrariness and horror.”²⁰ Many other scholars find Girardian theory a useful analytical lens. While acknowledging that mimetic desire and the crisis of ritual sacrifice does not comprehend the entire range of motivations for religious violence, Selengut points out that Girard’s theory “is particularly helpful because it incorporates myth, ritual and the unconscious and refuses to explain violence as [merely] the result of logical goals or political strategy.” While religious violence may not make military or political sense, in other words, it

may make religious and psychological sense by “resolving” certain internal problems for a society. Intriguingly, Selengut uses scapegoating and mimetic desire as a lens for analyzing intragroup Israeli dynamics in the context of the struggle against the religious and ethnic Palestinian other.²¹

Taking a page from Girard (while drawing explicitly on other theorists of religion such as Wayne Proudfoot), Hugh Nicholson argues that religious and theological discourse, driven by rivalry, is inherently polemical—and thereby all the more creative and adaptive. The need to distinguish oneself from one’s intra- and/or inter-religious adversaries, he suggests, inspires “a process of abstraction and sublimation” even as it compels religious communities into oppositional political modes.²²

Along similar lines, Regina Schwartz’s elegant analysis of the “the violent legacy of monotheism,” *The Curse of Cain*, traces the origin of violence to identity formation, specifically to “imagining identity as an act of distinguishing and separating from others, of boundary marking and line drawing.” The Bible, she argues, narrates and instantiates the “sibling rivalry” born of competition for scarce resources. Along the way Schwartz engages the notion of substitutive sacrifice, noting that “Girard . . . stresses that for identification in sacrificial ritual to work, the original object of violence must not be lost sight of in the substitution.” Yet too often in Biblical narratives, she observes, the symbolic enactment is eschewed and violence is “literalized.”²³

A related subject of inquiry is the role of ritual and symbol in sacralizing mass violence. Natalie Zemon Davis, a historian of the early modern period, studied religious riots in sixteenth century France.²⁴ The goal of the rioters was “ridding the community of dreaded pollution . . . [which] would surely provoke the wrath of God.” While Catholics and Protestants timed and framed their acts of violence differently, they shared a goal “reminiscent of the insistence of revolutionary millenarian movements that the wicked be exterminated that the godly may rule.” “Is there any way we can order the terrible, concrete details of filth, shame, and torture reported from both Protestant and Catholic riots?” Davis ponders. “I would suggest that they can be reduced to a repertory of actions from the Bible, from the liturgy, from the action of political authority, or from the traditions of popular folk justice, intended to purify the religious community and humiliate the enemy and thus make him less harmful.”²⁵

Similar patterns of religious violence recur in more contemporary clashes between religious activists. What Davis argues for sixteenth century France—namely, that “the occasion for most religious violence was during the time of religious worship or ritual and in the space which one or both groups were using for sacred purposes”²⁶—applies equally to the bloody confrontations between Jews and Muslims worshipping at Temple Mount/Haram-al-Sharif in Jerusalem; Muslim and Hindu riots in India triggered by Hindu nationalists who destroyed the Babri Mosque of Ayodhya to build the temple of the Lord Ram on that site in 1992; the storming of the Golden Temple of Amritsar, where Sikh extremists had taken refuge, and the retaliatory violence, including the assassination of Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards; and the “rites of violence” among religious and ethnic groups of South Asia examined by anthropologist Stanley Tambiah.²⁷

Fundamentalisms and Violence

A formidable subset of modern movements, groups, and organizations vying for cultural influence, social capital, and political power display a pronounced religious dimension. The vast and “incoherent” literature on religious violence fails to cohere, inter alia, on the question of whether religious movements of this power-seeking sort are more prone to violence than their secular counterparts. Much of the analysis of political Islam moves in this direction, for example.²⁸ A related question, dealt with effectively in Atalia Omer’s essay, is whether so-called “civilizational blocs,” à la Huntington, replicate the contestation over sacred space and resources.

Another sprawling body of scholarship, dissecting “the radical right,” includes authors who place at least part of the phenomenon—especially its millenarian wing—in the category of politicized religious violence. The Christian Identity Movement is the most prominent and analyzed exemplar of what Michael Barkun calls the “racist right.” These anti-government movements do not fall neatly into the categories of ecclesial polity; they tend to be less structured and less explicitly religious than cults or sects, for example, though some branches feature one or more of the following religious elements: a charismatic leader claiming direct divine authority or access to special revelation; religious or quasi-religious rituals and practices; a polemical claim to be the sacred remnant or true inheritor of the religious tradition; Biblical proof-texts; and a social imaginary drenched in apocalyptic discourse.²⁹ The scholars of violence David Rapoport and Jeffrey Kaplan have toiled, with considerable success, to map the shadowy world of international terrorism, including its recent stage of inward-turning localism, what Kaplan calls “the new tribalism.” Religious actors and themes inhabit corners of this world but do not define it.³⁰

Less ambiguously, religious dynamics are at the core of the “power-seeking” movements and organizations labeled “fundamentalist.” Do fundamentalisms “tend toward” violence? Are they *inherently* violent? Or, on the contrary, is it erroneous to posit a necessary connection between fundamentalism and violence? If the ambivalence thesis is correct, then to acknowledge fundamentalist movements as religious at their core does not necessarily imply that they are automatically violent as well. Yet fundamentalisms are viewed in some quarters as interpretations of religion that amplify its destructive power to such a degree as to mute its counterbalancing trajectory toward empathy and embrace. Thus the question becomes: if *religions* have the capacity to sublimate or spiritualize militancy, and even to channel energies toward nonviolent peacebuilding, do *fundamentalisms* have that capacity as well?

Scholars, as one might expect, disagree on this pivotal matter. One’s response to the question depends on how one defines and assesses fundamentalism. (As one Baptist from Chicago complained: “How dare they compare us to the Ayatollah Khomeini? We do *not* store guns in the basement of Moody Bible School!”) In 1988 the American Academy of Arts and Sciences launched a multi-year, interdisciplinary project on “global fundamentalisms,” which ultimately involved more than seventy scholars and produced essays on dozens of movements around the world, pub-

lished in five encyclopedia-sized volumes, followed by a co-authored capstone volume.³¹ Even this massive project accounts for only a fraction of the books and articles on fundamentalisms, both tradition-specific and comparative, published since the term crept into the international lexicon in the late 1970s.³² Among the more stimulating works are those that deconstruct the term, mount a critique of the naïve or politically charged use of it, or offer theoretically interesting “explanations” of the phenomena to which it points, however inadequately.³³

With respect to the responsible use of the term as a comparative construct, a degree of definitional consensus emerged among the fifteen or so core contributors to The Fundamentalism Project; they see “fundamentalism” as a modern religious logic and a mode of politicized religion available to conservative, orthodox, and traditional, as well as “disembedded” practitioners (e.g., cyberspace jihadists, religiously illiterate youth). In this modest consensus view, “fundamentalism” functions in roughly the same way that “modernism,” “liberalism,” and other modern interpretive/behavioral schools represent their own distinctive reactions to the complex set of material and structural conditions and accompanying philosophies and worldviews which together constitute modernity/modernities.³⁴

Ideologically, fundamentalist movements are both reactive and selective. They react primarily to the marginalization of religion—that is, to the displacement of “true religion” by nationalist political leaders, rival religious or ethnic groups, and scientific and cultural elites (feminists being a particular *bête noir*). And they select elements of both the religious tradition and techno-scientific modernity; once “updated” and instrumentalized, these retrieved practices, precepts, and doctrines constitute the foundation for an alternative worldview and set of institutions capable of challenging the hegemony of secularism. To this end fundamentalists also embrace *absolutism* and *dualism* as tactics of resistance. In an attempt to protect the holy book or hallowed tradition from the depredations of historical, literary, and scientific criticism—that is, from criteria of validity and ways of knowing that deny the transcendence of the sacred—fundamentalist leaders claim inerrancy and infallibility for their religious knowledge. The truth revealed in scriptures and traditions is neither contingent nor variable, but absolute. Each movement selects from its host religion certain scandalous doctrines (i.e., beliefs not easily reconcilable to scientific rationality, such as the imminent return of the Hidden Imam, the virgin birth of Christ, the divinity of the Lord Ram, the coming of the Messiah to restore and rule “the Whole Land of Israel”). They embellish, reify, and politicize these “supernatural dicta.” The confession of literal belief in these hard-to-swallow “fundamentals” sets the self-described true believers apart from the “Westoxicated” masses. Moreover, it marks them as members of a sacred remnant, an elect tribe commissioned to defend the sacred against an array of “reprobate,” “fallen,” and “polluted” co-religionists—and against the forces of evil that have corrupted the religious community.³⁵

Already one recognizes the religious core of fundamentalisms, and evidence mounts of a propensity toward aggression, at the very least, as one considers which elements of the historic religious repertoire are chosen and how they are adapted. That is, the vulnerability of some religious

actors to the seductions of an absolute truth and unambiguous moral clarity shapes *identity formation* over against a demonized other (Schwartz). Desire to manipulate the *awesome power of the numinous* (Rudolph Otto³⁶) seems to serve an (often awkward) emulation of the idealized (secular) other—reflecting a grudging admiration which quickly curdles into resentment and will to power (Girard).

That the dominative power perceived within the sacred holds a perhaps irresistible appeal to the fundamentalist becomes ever more evident in the final ideological trait, namely, the retrieval and embellishment of the *millennial* or *apocalyptic* dimension of the religious imagination. By these two terms I mean to include the array of combustible eschatological doctrines, myths, and precepts embedded in the history and religious imagination of the major religious traditions of the world. Islam, Christianity, and Judaism all anticipate a dramatic moment in time, or beyond time, in which God will bring history to a just (and often bloody) culmination. In certain religious communities, such as Shi'ite Islam or evangelical Protestant Christianity, this expectation is highly pronounced and developed. (Indeed, the term “millennialism” refers to the prophesied 1,000-year reign of the Christ, following his return in glory to defeat the Anti-Christ.) What is striking, however, is the recent retrieval of apocalyptic themes, images, and myths by fundamentalists from religious communities with a muted or underdeveloped strain of “end times” thought.³⁷

How does this retrieval and embellishment of apocalyptic or millennial themes function within fundamentalist movements that seek recruits from among their orthodox co-religionists? Leaders seeking to form cadres for jihad, crusade, or anti-Muslim (or anti-Jewish, etc.) riots must convince the believer that violence is justified in religious terms. Luckily for them, most scriptures and traditions contain ambiguities and exceptions—including what might be called “emergency clauses.” Thus the Granth Sahib, the holy book and living guru of the Sikhs, repeatedly enjoins forgiveness, compassion, and love toward enemies. It does, however, also contain an injunction calling believers to arms, if necessary, if the Sikh religion itself is threatened with extinction—a passage put to use by Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, the Sikh militant who cut a swath of terror through the Punjab in the early 1980s.³⁸ Such “emergency clauses” can be found in the Qur'an, the Hebrew Bible, and the New Testament as well. And what better “emergency” than the advent of the predicted “dark age” or reign of evil that precedes the coming of the Messiah, the return of the Mahdi, the vindication of the righteous at God's hands? The fundamentalist invocation of “millennialism,” in short, strives to convince believers that they are engaged not merely in a mundane struggle for territory or political power or financial gain, but in a cosmic war (Juergensmeyer), a battle for the soul and for the future of humanity. In such a context, violence is not only permissible; it is obligatory.

Case studies illustrating these dynamics proliferated after the Islamic revolution in Iran and, again, after 9/11.³⁹ While fundamentalists are not portrayed uniformly as irrational, much less pathological, most authors of the scholarly literature are not themselves fundamentalists (and many are not religious in any sense), and they leave little doubt that movements with a strong religious or “fundamentalist” element are indeed prone to pursue power through the barrel of a gun.

Bruce Lawrence, an American scholar of Islam who authored a seminal analysis of comparative fundamentalisms that helped launch that sub-field of study, provides a more nuanced treatment.⁴⁰ *Shattering the Myth: Islam Beyond Violence* successfully steers a middle course between apologetics and polemics by demonstrating how the variability of Islam—the book considers and compares Islamist leaders and movements in Tunisia, Egypt and Syria, Indonesia and Malaysia—fosters a spectrum of Muslim attitudes toward violence, including strategies for averting the cyclical violence that feeds on patterns of revenge and retaliation.⁴¹

Weak Religion

“Strong religion” as an interpretive approach, as we have seen, encompasses works that underscore the capacity of religions themselves to enjoin or legitimate deadly violence, as well as studies of movements, group, networks, and organizations driven primarily by religious goals and dynamics. Yet few movements that foment violence are wholly or “purely” religious—including “strong religious” networks such as Al-Qaeda, Hizbullah or Gush Emunim. Most collectives are “mixed” in membership—composed, that is, of “true believers” as well as bureaucratic functionaries, armed militias, ideological fellow travelers, displaced youth, and bandwagon-jumpers.

Even more to the point is the fact that contemporary and recent reformist, revolutionary, fundamentalist, and other politicized social movements have emerged in the context of “hyper-modernity,” an era characterized by unprecedented globalizing trends, ideologies of nationalism, and the omnipresent “totalizing” nation-state.⁴² In this milieu, religion is seldom the sole player, and religious actors themselves are susceptible to worldviews and habits of mind embedded in structures and processes derived not from religious but from “worldly” (i.e. secular) trajectories. Accordingly, innumerable books and articles published over the last few decades modify the category “religious violence” by embedding religious agency within encompassing nationalist and ethnic narratives. I call these works examples of a “weak religion” interpretive approach because many of these accounts subordinate the religious motivations and dynamics of violence-prone actors (inaccurately, in some cases) and also because a recurrent explanation for the “dependent” role of religious actors within a “mixed” movement, or for the mixed motives of religious actors themselves, is the vulnerability of religious leaders and institutions to the manipulations of state, nationalist, and ethnic forces in their societies. In short, the religious element is relatively “weak.”

Two clarifications are in order. First, rather than construe “strong” and “weak” religious presences as two wholly separate, isolated realities—as if some movements are always or essentially “purely” religious and others always or essentially diluted—it is more accurate to use these terms as indicators of points on a continuum of configurations across which religious actors move over time (in different directions). The interesting question is not (only): Which movements are strong or weak at a given time? Rather, it is: under what conditions are religious actors (leaders, individuals, movements, institutions) more and less vulnerable to non-religious forces?

Second, the field of religious violence studies is evolving (perhaps an optimistic choice of words) on this interpretive issue. Accordingly, several key authors have written both in the “strong religion” and the “weak religion” mode. Juergensmeyer’s *Terror in the Mind of God* falls more squarely in the former, for example, while his other major work on religious violence, *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State* (1993)—updated and reissued in 2008 under the title *Global Rebellion: Religious Challenges to the Secular State, from Christian Militias to Al Qaeda*—is premised on the claim that militant religious actors of the twentieth century have adopted the modern ideology of nationalism from their secular counterparts as their political vehicle of choice. While Juergensmeyer does not call these religious actors “weak,” exactly, three factors suggest their continuing vulnerability to being defined by their putative adversaries: their reliance on a historically secular (i.e. alien) model of political and social order; their serial failures to transform it into an effective religious model (with the debatable case of Iran being the major possible exception); and the “mixed” (religious and vaguely religious or even irreligious) character of these political movements.

Juergensmeyer’s approach, while persuasive in some respects, attempts to squeeze all major violent religious actors into one procrustean category, “religious nationalism,” thereby eliminating from view the important and numerous militant religious actors who decry “the idolatry of the state” into which their co-religionists have fallen, and/or who offer a different political model (e.g., the restored caliphate) around which to rally the troops.⁴³ The term “fundamentalism” has its own deficiencies, but it does encompass a broader range of “militantly antiseccularist and antimodernist” political options. In *Shattering the Myth*, Lawrence attempts to settle this debate by presenting “religious nationalism” as a subset or species of the genus “fundamentalisms.”⁴⁴

Religion, Nationalism and Violence

One of the themes of the vast theoretical literature on nationalism is the exclusionary nature of the process of national formation, which is linked to the sacralization of the nation itself.⁴⁵ Befitting an interpretive approach to religious violence that emphasizes the susceptibility of religious militants to manipulation by nationalists, several recent studies focus on the pattern whereby, as the political scientist Scott Hibbard puts it, “ostensibly secular state actors sought to co-opt the ideas and activists associated with religious fundamentalisms.”⁴⁶ A small mountain of literature, much of it by social scientists, explores how politicians recruited religious actors in Sudan, Sri Lanka, Iran, Israel, and elsewhere to do their “dirty work,” including the violent persecution of religious and ethnic minorities.⁴⁷ Hibbard’s own recent book, *Religious Politics and Secular States: Egypt, India and the United States*, adds a new wrinkle to this interpretive camp by focusing on state actors and on the partly unintended consequences of their machinations. “The invocation of illiberal renderings of religious tradition provided state actors with a cultural basis for their claims to rule and an effective means of mobilizing popular sentiment behind traditional patterns of social

and political hierarchy,” he writes. As a result, “secular norms were displaced by exclusive forms of religious politics.”⁴⁸ “Weak” religion gains a boost of power, welcome or not, in this transition.

A subtle and provocative variation on the “religious versus secular” theme places aggressive religious and secular actors in the same interpretive frame. For example, Joyce Dalsheim’s analysis of right-wing religious settlers in Gaza and their leftist and secular antagonists situates these opposing camps within a broader account of the social and cultural work they inadvertently collude to accomplish. Their antagonism “reinscribes existing categories, setting the boundaries of ways of being, and the limits of public debate,” she writes. “The appearance of incommensurable discourses in conflict conceals continuities and commonalities among these Israelis who are all part of the settler project in Palestine and who are all subject to the disciplining processes of state rationality.”⁴⁹

Further down the road to crediting religious agency in nationalist campaigns are studies in which the term “religious nationalism” appears prominently. The subcontinent of India is the locus of many such organizations and movements.⁵⁰ The anthropologist and professor of comparative religion Peter van der Veer calls attention to the nationalist appropriation of widespread religious practices such as the ritual performance of pilgrimage, as well as traditional discourse on the body and the family, for the purpose of nation building in India and Sri Lanka. While van der Veer acknowledges the complicity of religious actors in this appropriation, he emphasizes the priority granted by them to nationalist discourse:

Nationalism reinterprets religious discourse on gender, on the dialectics of masculinity and femininity, to convey a sense of belonging to the nation. It appropriates the disciplinary practices, connected to the theme of the management of desire, in the service of its own political project. Nationalism also grafts its notion of territory onto religious notions of sacred space. It develops a ritual repertoire, based on early rituals of pilgrimage, to sanctify the continuity of the territory.⁵¹

Indeed, a major theme in the literature argues that the manipulation of South Asian communities of practice by colonial and imperial powers left them in a “weakened” religious condition— weakened, in no small part, by their reduction to the status of a “religion” differentiated from the political authority and from other local or regional communities of practice. Harjot Oberoi traces this disintegrative process in Sikhism, which ultimately led to the rupture of the Sikh community, the construction of religious boundaries, the (re)valorization of a warrior caste, and vicious intra- as well as inter-religious conflict.⁵²

Ethnoreligious Violence

The relationship between ethnicity and religion can become a vicious circle. On the one hand, religions yield their independence and autonomy when they sacralize ethnic identity. On the other, as David Little observes, “religiously shaded ‘ethnic tension’ appears to be latent in the very pro-

cess of ethnic classification.” Whenever supposedly “primordial” ties of blood, land, and birth assume a transcendent dimension, whenever religious authorities invoke the idea of a ‘chosen people,’ they thereby sanctify the quest for ethnic hegemony and appear to provide justification for engaging in deadly violence against rival ethnic groups. Folk religion—“the religion of the people”—therefore claims a special relationship to, or authority over, national consciousness.

The reverse is also true: ethnonationalist leaders can and do exploit a religion’s identification with “the people,” especially at times when a heightened perception of threat destabilizes society. According to Michael Sells, the Bosnian War of 1992-1995 featured the perpetration of religiously justified violence elicited by ethnonationalist extremism. In his riveting account, *The Bridge Betrayed*, Sells demonstrates how the Serbian politician Slobodan Milosevic manipulated the folk and nationalist elements of the Serbian Orthodox Church, turning potential critics into allies, or silent bystanders, as he launched a campaign of ethnic cleansing. Milosevic orchestrated the events of June 28, 1989, for example, when the Serb Orthodox patriarch led a procession of priests in scarlet robes marking the death of Prince Lazar, the hero of Serb nationalist mythology, at the battle of Kosovo. Nearby, on the plain of Gazimestan, where the battle had taken place, a vast crowd gathered. Milosevic mounted a stage with a backdrop depicting peonies, the flower that symbolized the blood of Lazar, and an Orthodox cross at each of its four corners. (The symbol stands for the slogan “Only Unity Saves the Serb.”) The crowd chanted “Kosovo is Serb” and “We love you, Slobodan, because you hate the Muslims.” The former communist “had adroitly transformed himself into an ethnoreligious nationalist,” Sells comments, and within three years, those who had directed the ““festivities”” at Gazimestan were organizing unspeakable depravities against Bosnian civilians.⁵³

Analysts who downplay the presence of religious elements in the Bosnian war point to the secular orientation of the generals or to the manipulation of naive or weak religious officials. One misreads the religious sensibilities of a people, however, by judging from the behavior of their military or government leaders. “The genocide in Bosnia... was religiously motivated and religiously justified,” Sells argues. “Religious symbols... myths of origin (pure Serb race), symbols of passion (Lazar’s death), and eschatological longings (the resurrection of Lazar) were used by religious nationalists to create a reduplicating Milos Obilic [the assassin of Sultan Murat], avenging himself on the Christ killer, the race traitor, the alien, and, ironically, the falsely accused ‘fundamentalist’ next door.” When the Serb and Croat armies systematically targeted libraries, museums, mosques, and churches, they were destroying the evidence of 500 years of interreligious life in Bosnia. To evaluate such acts as being religious in motivation and character is not to deny the explanatory power of political and economic analyses. Neither is it to equate “genuine” religious behavior with moral atrocities. Still less is it to valorize the acts in question as “holy” by calling them religious. Unfortunately, the numinous power of the sacred—accessible to human beings through multivalent symbols, elastic myths, and ambiguous rituals and conveyed through the imperfect channels of intellect, will, and emotion—does not come accompanied by a moral compass. The seeds

of Serbian, Croatian, and Bosnian religiosity were not stamped out under communist rule, even among the so-called secularized masses; but neither were they nurtured. Scattered and left untended, they were eventually planted in the crude soil of ethnonationalism. “The human capacity for acknowledging religiously based evil,” Sells concludes, “is particularly tenuous.”⁵⁴

In some prominent accounts of deadly conflict, religion is *rendered* “weak” by methods and analyses that artificially subordinate religious motivations to economic, political, and other factors. Such reductionist accounts distort the role of religion by failing to perceive or “measure” religious agency and give an accurate account of its subtle power. Religious dimensions of violence, in short, should not be evaluated as “weak” simply because they escape certain kinds of social scientific methods of inquiry.⁵⁵

Pathological Religion

Prior to 9/11, Charles B. Strozier, a practicing psychoanalyst and currently a professor of history and the director of the Center on Terrorism at the John Jay College, CUNY, was not exactly a voice crying in the wilderness; from the publication of Freud’s *The Future of an Illusion* (1927), religion has been pathologized by a long and distinguished line of psychoanalysts, social psychologists, and social scientists, more generally. Freud himself saw “clinging to religion” as a neurotic regression to satisfy infantile desires and needs. Developing insights of Freud and his successors, social philosophers and critical theorists such as Michel Foucault and Judith Butler have presented ideas associated with the religious imagination as formative of a subject who emerges through “passionate attachment” to his or her own subordination.⁵⁶ But Strozier, working at times with the psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton, went a step further. While working with fundamentalist Christians imprisoned at Riker’s Island and preparing his 1994 book, *Apocalypse: On the Psychology of Fundamentalism in America*, Strozier read the growing literatures on fundamentalism and modern apocalyptic movements through the lens of psychoanalytic theory.⁵⁷

Around that time, a group of social psychologists, clinical psychologists, psychoanalysts, and cultural historians began to explore what they call *The Fundamentalist Mindset*.⁵⁸ While the editors of the volume claim they do not intend to present fundamentalism within a deviant frame, they nonetheless draw a straight line between the mindset and a psychological disposition toward violence—and terrorism. In fact, the book details the profile not of a religious logic, but a patho-logic. The true believers, in short, suffer from the symptoms of a mental disorder, an identifiable disease. Strozier and co-author Katharine Boyd contend that “the fundamentalist mindset, wherever it occurs, is composed of distinct characteristics, including dualistic thinking; paranoia and rage in a group context; an apocalyptic orientation that incorporates distinct perspectives on time, death, and violence; a relationship to charismatic leadership; and a totalized conversion experience.”⁵⁹ In her essay, “The Unsettling of the Fundamentalist Mindset,” Lee Quinby develops the notion of an “apocalyptic subjectivity” to which fundamentalists are prone—“a psychology subjected to

the teachings and the values found in the Book of Revelation.” Foundational to that psychology, Quinby asserts, are “gender dualism, messianic rescue, and obedience to authority.”⁶⁰

This interpretive approach turns both the strong and weak religion camps on their heads, in that it sees militant religion (many varieties of which are included in their analyses) as the distilled essence of a mindset discoverable in secular as well as strictly religious actors. Thus, the authors committed to the “pathological religion” thesis attempt to make a case for the recurrent manifestation of a paranoid habit of mind, shaped by the alienating experience of humiliation (or close identification with the humiliated), that can be perceived not only in individuals but in bloodthirsty movements, groups, and parties ranging from the Jacobins of 1789 to the genocidaires of twentieth century Nazi Germany, Rwanda and Cambodia. They cite theorists and theories of violence such as Jerrold Post’s typology of terrorist movements, Vamik Volkan’s conceptualization of ethnic violence around concepts of a “chosen trauma” and a “chosen glory,” and the work of Melanie Klein, Otto Kernberg, and Wilfrid Bion on what might be called the pathology of ideology. In Strozier and company’s rendering, fundamentalism is not only religious but also secular, not only modern but also primordial, ancient, and medieval—and it is exceedingly violent in its trajectory and telos. This conceptual slipperiness is justified by reference to the supposed “benefits of ambiguity, which makes for a larger conceptual umbrella . . .”⁶¹

Yet such ambiguity invites chaos as well as creativity. Not least, it erodes the theoretical foundations supporting an empirically accurate portrait of fundamentalists as unmistakably modern and selective retrievers of the elements of religious traditions, including apocalyptic and dualist habits of mind, for the purpose of constructing religiously nuanced alternatives to an overweening, hostile, secular political and cultural milieu. *One* of the alternatives is the creation of a theocratic state or transnational community by means of extremist violence, including terrorism. But there are literally hundreds of millions of “true believers” within global religious communities who have adopted the fundamentalist mode of religiosity while rejecting any form of terrorism or violent apocalypticism. Confident in their use of synecdoche, however, the “pathological religion” camp chooses the extreme point on the spectrum as the representative of the whole. They fail to explain why the vast majority of the world’s fundamentalists *do not* take up the sword. In sum, the phenomenon under scrutiny in this volume might more coherently be called *The Extremist Mindset*, toward which a subset of religious fundamentalists arguably is drawn.

An interpretive approach informed by a psychological perspective need not be reductive or unhelpfully destabilizing of even elastic definitions of religion, as the psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakar demonstrates in his nuanced study of communal conflict in India, *The Colors of Violence*.⁶² An extended case study of the Hindu-Muslim riots in Hyderabad in 1990, triggered by the Babri Masjid conflict, the argument unfolds through consideration of information collected from interpretive interviews with both Hindu and Muslim leaders of violent mobs as well as with the victims of violence. The psychological mechanism that Kakar most often uncovers is Freudian “projection,” whereby one ethnoreligious group, employing a kind of reverse mimetic desire, projects its own

insecurities and self-doubt upon the reified other (e.g., Hindus characterize Muslims as “sexual animals,” “polluted,” “dirty,” etc.) The displacement and feelings of alienation that invariably accompany rapid but haphazard modernization and urbanization, Kakar suggests, increase the appeal of membership in groups with absolute value systems and with little tolerance for deviation from their norms. Yet Kakar, observing with a critical empathy, restrains from equating membership in such communities with a psychological disorder.

Conclusion: The Promise of Coherence

My abbreviated and inevitably selective review of the field raises the question of what the field should be called. I have used the term “religious violence” to underscore my conviction that religion is indeed “something apart” from other modes of belief, behavior, practice, and social organization, and that it can generate violence through (always internally contested) self-understandings excavated from the depths of an identifiably religious logic and religious dynamics. Yet I also resist—and the evidence does not support—the automatic identification of a fundamentalist or militant religious orientation, much less any intense religious sensibility whatsoever, with an inclination toward deadly violence, or with a deviant or pathological mindset (apart from the argument that *any* act of violation of another person might justifiably be considered “deviant.”) The paired words “religious violence,” however, might create the unfortunate (to my mind) impression of a natural connection between the two.

And so we study “religion and violence,” and therefore ponder the question: When does religion become violent? The “strong religion” line of analysis reviewed above, granting decisive agency to the religious actors themselves, points to the calculations of religious leaders and their reading of the external environment. Is the struggle perceived as a defense of basic identity and dignity? Is the religious community threatened with extinction if it does not take up arms? Are there certain religious values that take priority over life itself (e.g., witness to the truth, the protection of innocents, etc.), and are these values at risk in the conflict? Is this, then, the time to retrieve elements of the religious imagination, scriptures, and traditions that might transform worshippers into warriors?⁶³

The “weak religion” line of analysis points, instead, to exogenous triggers, especially the encroachments of secular actors and the compelling identification of blood, land, and birth with “sacred priorities.” Yet it does not ignore the contributions of structural or psychological aspects of the religious community itself. An ecclesiology that holds church and nation to be ontologically united, divinely twinned, and thus inseparable; a lack of moral formation and religious instruction (catechetical training, preaching, practices, etc.) that cultivates a prophetic voice and fosters a measure of independence from external influences; a failure of religious leadership—such conditions, owing to internal dynamics, increase the vulnerability of the religious group or community

to intervention by unsympathetic outsiders.

Insights from the still-evolving “pathology” camp, if not yet developed into a coherent and satisfying master narrative of religion and violence, lend depth and nuance to our understanding of the strong-to-weak spectrum.

In the opening of this essay I described the “avalanche” of publications that have issued forth over the last three or four decades as “incoherent.” Yet there is much to be admired in the sheer volume of data collected and concepts developed to order it. In addition, one can perceive distinct lines of analysis and interpretive “schools” taking shape. This amounts, one might become convinced, to a mighty groaning toward coherence. Can a first sustained attempt at a comprehensive general theory of religious violence be far off?⁶⁴

(Endnotes)

1 *Israeli Assassins: Yigal Amir* (General Books LLC, 2010); Jayne Seminare Docherty, *Learning Lessons from Waco: When the Parties Bring Their Gods to the Negotiation Table* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2001); Lou Michel and Dan Herbeck, *American Terrorist Timothy McVeigh and the Tragedy at Oklahoma City* (New York: Avon Books, 2002); Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India* (New York: Columbia Press, 1993); Ian S. Lustick, *For the Land and the Lord: Jewish Fundamentalism in Israel* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1988); Cynthia Keppley Mahmood, *Fighting for Faith and Nation: Dialogues with Sikh Militants* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996).

2 See, for example, William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 9. Substantive definitions of religion, Cavanaugh claims, posit a transhistorical and transcultural essence of religion and foster the notion that a special kind of violence exists in the world, one that is exceptionally deadly, dangerous, and immune in its virulence from the limits imposed by ordinary strategic, economic, and political considerations. This notion is false, however, Cavanaugh argues, and the distinction it underwrites between secular and religious violence is “unhelpful, misleading and mystifying” and “should be avoided altogether.” Public-private, religion-politics, and church-state dichotomies, rather than describing reality as it is, justify a certain configuration of power. In the early modern period, for example, they provided the rationale for the state’s colonial expansion and claim to a monopoly over internal violence. “To construe Christianity as a religion, therefore, helps to separate loyalty to God from one’s public loyalty to the nation-state,” Cavanaugh writes. “The idea that religion has a tendency to cause violence—and is therefore to be removed from public power—is one type of this essentialist construction of religion.”

3 To take merely a handful of the dozens of examples: Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon, *The Age of Sacred Terror: Radical Islam’s War Against America* (New York: Random House, 2003); John K. Cooley, *Unholy Wars: Afghanistan, America and International Terrorism* (London: Pluto Press, 2000); Ron E. Hassner, *War on Sacred Grounds* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009); Karen Armstrong, *The Battle for God* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000); John

L. Esposito, *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Lloyd Steffen, *The Demonic Turn: The Power of Religion to Inspire or Restrain Violence* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2003).

4 Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); R. Scott Appleby, “What’s in a Name? ‘Fundamentalism’ and the Discourse about Religion,” in “*How Should We Talk about Religion?*” *Perspectives, Contexts, Particularities*, ed. James Boyd White (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 87-103.

5 Andrew R. Murphy, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Religion and Violence* in Blackwell Companions to Religion series (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011); Mark Juergensmeyer and Margo Kitts, eds., *Princeton Readings in Religion and Violence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); Atalia Omer, R. Scott Appleby, and David Little, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Religion, Conflict and Peacebuilding* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2013).

6 In the current essay, I use the term “strong religion” more broadly than my co-authors and I did in a book of the same name, where it referred only to the form of “strong religion” known as “fundamentalism.” See Gabriel A. Almond, R. Scott Appleby and Emmanuel Sivan, *Strong Religion: The Rise of Fundamentalisms Around the World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

7 Andrew McDonald [William Pierce], *The Turner Diaries* (New York: Barricade Books, 1996) (originally published Arlington, VA: National Alliance Vanguard Books, 1978). *The Turner Diaries* is written in the form of an ideological tract posing as a novel. Through its story of a heroic band of freedom fighters enduring an against-all-odds war against a dictatorial government, Pierce incited the apocalyptic and excessively violent imaginations of a cadre of activists who established clandestine networks and militias dedicated to opposing a hegemonic secularism imposed on America by a conspiracy of Jews and liberals bent on undermining the nation’s Christian foundation. Sound familiar?

8 Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 146.

9 “To live in a state of war is to live in a world in which individuals know who they are, why they have suffered, by whose hand they have been humiliated, and at what expense they have persevered. The concept of war provides cosmology, history, and eschatology and offers the reins of political control. Perhaps most important, it holds out the hope of victory and the means to achieve it. In the images of cosmic war this victorious triumph is a grand moment of social and personal transformation, transcending all worldly limitations. One does not easily abandon such expectations.” *Ibid.*, 155.

10 *Ibid.*, 150. Doubts about religious motivations of some of his central subjects do not deter Juergensmeyer from including them in the pantheon of “religious extremists.” Oklahoma City bomber McVeigh, one of the exemplars of *Terror in the Mind of God*, acknowledged that he was an agnostic, for example: “In his letter, McVeigh said he was an agnostic but that he would ‘improvise, adapt and overcome,’ if it turned out there was an afterlife. ‘If I’m

going to hell,' he wrote, 'I'm gonna have a lot of company.' His body is to be cremated and his ashes scattered in a secret location." See Julian Borger, "McVeigh Faces Day of Reckoning," *The Guardian* (June 11, 2001); "McVeigh is agnostic. He doesn't believe in God, but he won't rule out the possibility," noted McVeigh biographer Lou Michel. "I asked him, 'What if there is a heaven and hell?' He said that once he crosses over the line from life to death, if there is something on the other side, he will—and this is using his military jargon— 'adapt, improvise, and overcome.' Death to him is all part of the adventure. " See Lou Michel, CNN interview, transcript available at <http://www.cnn.com/COMMUNITY/transcripts/2001/04/04/michelherbeck/>.

11 See David G. Bromley and J. Gordon Melton, eds., *Cults, Religion and Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

12 Michael Barkun, "Militias, Christian Identity and the Radical Right," *The Christian Century*, August 2-9, 1995, 738-740. "Survivalists, militias, Klans, neo-Nazis, Christian Identity churches, skinheads and Christian constitutionalists do not inhabit neatly defined segments. Their styles of rhetoric, dress, and symbolism are not mutually exclusive, and often interpenetrate and overlap. A person may be a survivalist Christian Identity believer who likes skinhead music, has a fondness for Nazi symbols, and is sympathetic to Christian constitutional arguments. Another participant in the movement might accept some parts of this world but not others. The memberships of right-wing organizations often overlap, and the groups themselves (like those on the far left) are often riven by factionalism and internal conflicts," Barkun explains (739). "It is not surprising, therefore, that months after the Oklahoma City bombing journalists still have difficulty describing suspect Timothy McVeigh's relationship to the Michigan Militia and to Christian Identity groups. Within the subculture, individuals migrate easily from group to group, sometimes appropriating one set of ideas and symbols, sometimes another, sometimes several simultaneously. It is not clear whether Timothy McVeigh had Christian Identity associations . . ."

13 Kevin Schilbrack, "Religions: Are There Any?" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 78, no.4 (December 2010): 1112-1138.

14 R. Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence and Reconciliation* (City: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000).

15 For examples, see *Ibid.*, 11-12; Michael K. Jerryson and Mark Juergensmeyer, eds., *Buddhist Warfare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Oliver McTernan, *Violence in God's Name: Religion in an Age of Conflict* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2003), 45-76; J. Harold Ellens, ed, *The Destructive Power of Religion: Violence in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, Volume 1: Sacred Scriptures, Ideology and Violence* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004).

16 John Darby, *The Effects of Violence on Peace Processes* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2001), 54-57; Steven J. Stedman, "Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes, *International Security* 22, no. 2:5-53.

17 René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 36.

18 Ibid., 37.

19 Charles Selengut, *Sacred Fury: Understanding Religious Violence* (Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press, 2003), 54. On Girard and religion as a “stupendous collective deception,” see also David Rapoport, “Some General Observations on Religion and Violence,” in *Violence and the Sacred in the Modern World*, ed. Mark Juergensmeyer, *World* (London: Frank Cass, 1991), 118-140.

20 Gil Bailie, *Violence Unveiled: Humanity at the Crossroads* (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 7.

21 Selengut, *Sacred Fury*, 54; for his discussion of Meir Kahane’s exploitation of Israeli Jewish secular and religious extremism, see 55-69.

22 Hugh Nicholson, *Comparative Theology and the Problem of Religious Rivalry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

23 Regina M. Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 23.

24 Natalie Zemon Davis, “The Rites of Violence,” *Past and Present* 59 (1973): 51-91.

25 Ibid., 75.

26 Ibid., 56.

27 Stanley J. Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds: Ethnonationalist Conflicts and Collective Violence in South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

28 Michael Mazarr, *Unmodern Men in the Modern World: Radical Islam, Terrorism and the War on Terror* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Gilles Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt: The Prophet and the Pharaoh* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Emmanuel Sivan, *Radical Islam: Medieval Theology and Modern*

Politics (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1985); Daniel Pipes, *In the Path of God: Islam and Political Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1983); Bassam Tibi, *The Crisis of Modern Islam* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1988).

29 Michael Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right: The Origins of the Christian Identity Movement*, rev. ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); see also, Jeffrey Kaplan, *Radical Religion in America: Millenarian Movements from the Far Right to the Children of Noah (Religion and Politics)* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997).

30 Jeffrey Kaplan, *Terrorist Groups and the New Tribalism: Terrorism's Fifth Wave (Political Violence)*, reprint ed. (New York: Routledge, 2012); David C. Rapoport, "Four Waves of Modern Terrorism," and idem., "The Four Waves of Rebel Terror and September 11," *Anthropoetics* 8, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2002): <http://www.anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap0801/terror.htm>.

31 Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, eds. *Fundamentalisms Observed* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); *Fundamentalisms and the State: Remaking Politics, Economies and Militance* (1993); *Fundamentalisms and Society: Remaking the Family, the Sciences and the Media* (1993); *Accounting for Fundamentalisms: The Dynamic Character of Movements* (1994); and *Fundamentalisms Comprehended* (1995); Almond, Appleby and Sivan, *Strong Religion*.

32 Representative titles include: R. Hrair Dekmejian, *Islam in Revolution: Fundamentalism in the Arab World* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1985); George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth Century Evangelicalism, 1870–1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); Niels C. Nielsen, Jr., *Fundamentalism, Mythos, and World Religions* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993); Martin Riesebrodt, *Pious Passion: The Emergence of Modern Fundamentalism in the United States and Iran*, trans. Don Reneau (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism 1800–1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); Tariq Ali, *The Clash of Fundamentalisms: Crusades, Jihad and Modernity* (London: Verso, 2002).

33 See, for example, Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War and the Roots of Terrorism* (New York: Doubleday, 2004); Olivier Roy, *Holy Ignorance: When Religion and Culture Part Ways* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); Bruce Lincoln, *Holy Terrors: Thinking About Religion after September 11* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

34 R. Scott Appleby, "Rethinking Fundamentalism in a Secular Age," in *Rethinking Secularism*, eds. Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer and Craig Calhoun (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 225-247.

35 *Ibid.*, 230-233.

36 Rudolph Otto, *Das Heilige* (1914); trans. *The Idea of the Holy* (1921).

37 Barbara Freyer Stowasser, "A Time to Reap: Thoughts on Calendars and Millennialism," *Center for Contemporary Arab Studies Occasional Paper Series* (2000): 1-25.

38 T. N. Madan, "The Double-Edged Sword: Fundamentalism and the Sikh Religious Tradition," in *Fundamentalisms Observed*, eds. Marty and Appleby, 598.

39 For examples, see Emmanuel Sivan and Menachem Friedman, eds., *Religious Radicalism and Politics in the Middle East* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990); Laurence J. Silberstein, ed., *Jewish Fundamentalism in Comparative Perspective: Religion, Ideology, and the Crisis of Modernity* (New York: New York University Press, 1993); Samuel Heilman, *Defenders of the Faith: Inside Ultra-Orthodox Jewry* (New York: Schocken Books, 1992); Olivier Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000); Mansoor Moaddel and Kamran Talattof, eds., *Modernist and Fundamentalist Debates in Islam: A Reader* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002); Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006).

40 Bruce B. Lawrence, *Defenders of God: The Fundamentalist Revolt against the Modern Age* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989).

41 Bruce B. Lawrence, *Shattering the Myth: Islam Beyond Violence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).

42 On "late modernity," see Anthony Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 1985); idem., *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991); and, idem., *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 1990.)

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44 Lawrence, *Shattering the Myth*, 51-106.

45 See, for example, Anthony Smith, "The Sacred Dimension of Nationalism," *Millennium Journal of International Studies* 29, no. 3 (2000): 791-814; Anthony Marx, *Faith in Nation: Exclusionary Origins of Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 197.

46 Scott W. Hibbard, *Religious Politics and Secular States: Egypt, India and the United States* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 4.

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