

**THE AMBIVALENCE  
OF THE SACRED**  
**Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation**

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## Violence as a Sacred Duty: Patterns of Religious Extremism

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To Rabbi Moshe Levinger, a leader of the extremist wing of Israel's religious Zionists, the return of the Labor government to power under Yitzhak Rabin in 1992 was an unmitigated disaster. Rabin's government had no Orthodox Jews in its cabinet and no religious parties in its coalition, and it was headed by a man with little sympathy for Orthodox Judaism or Jewry. The Oslo Peace Accords confirmed Levinger's fears and alarmed his fellow rabbis in the religious Zionist camp, including those who had rejected violence as a tactic in the struggle to regain *Eretz Israel*, "the Whole Land of Israel." The Labor government's agreement with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) meant that Jewish sovereignty would be removed from the lands that God had promised his people in the Torah. The agreement would turn over bases in the territories to the control of the Palestinian Authority and its police force, and it would allow weapons legally to be put in the hands of Arabs.<sup>1</sup>

To hardcore members of Gush Emunim (the Bloc of the Faithful)—the militant Jewish movement that came to prominence after the October 1973 war and spearheaded the controversial Israeli settlements in the occupied territories—this turn of events seemed to contradict the prophecies of their greatest sage, Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (1865–1935). A *posek* (a rabbi who gives rulings on halakah, Jewish law) and a mystic, Kook had imparted to his disciples a mystical-messianic worldview that his son, Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook (1891–1982), developed and institutionalized in the Merkaz HaRav Yeshiva in Jerusalem. Merkaz HaRav graduates became prominent religious Zionist rabbis and advisers to the settler movement.<sup>2</sup> The Kookist mythology held that the advent of Zionism, the return of Jews to the Holy Land, the founding of the state of Israel, and the state's dramatic victories in wars against its Arab and Muslim adversaries all portended the dawn of the messianic era. The central messianic event would be the return of Eretz Israel to the faithful and

long-suffering Jewish people. Settling the territories that Israel had occupied after the 1967 Six-Day War, which the Gush refers to as Judaea and Samaria, their biblical names, was a critical requirement in fulfilling the divine plan. To assist God in this plan, in 1983 extremist elements of the Gush joined other members of the Jewish underground in a failed plot to blow up the sacred Islamic shrine and mosque on Jerusalem's Temple Mount/Haram-al Sharif. In a separate incident Levinger himself was convicted of manslaughter for firing into a crowd of Palestinian Arabs and killing a shopkeeper.<sup>3</sup>

The peace process, sealed by the famous handshake between Rabin and Yassir Arafat in 1993, called into question a central Kookist doctrine: the secular Zionists whom God had put in power in Israel would never violate God's will by abandoning the land. Even nonobservant Jews remained Jews in their inner being, Kook had taught, by virtue of a hidden core, or "sacred spark," of authentic Judaism they retained.

Shortly after the announcement of the Oslo Accords shattered this confidence, a group of religious Zionist rabbis formed a new organization to respond to the unexpected "betrayal" by the secular government: the Ichud Rabbanim L'Ma'an Am Yisrael V'Eretz Yisrael (Union of Rabbis for the People and Land of Israel). Its presidium consisted of elders who were former disciples of Rabbi Abraham Kook. The Union quickly issued a declaration asserting the basic principles of religious Zionism and denouncing the accords. "According to Torah law, it is a positive commandment to move to the Land of Israel, to settle there, to conquer it and to take possession of it," the rabbis declared. "And since it is a positive commandment to do so, the Jewish position is that to act contrary to this would be not only a sin, but [also] has no chance of succeeding . . . ultimately, it is bad counsel." Fighting for the territories, they ruled, is required by "*pikuach nefesh*," a situation threatening Jewish existence itself.

According to halakah, nearly all laws may be suspended and all actions taken when *pikuach nefesh* exists. This "emergency" rationale, as we will see, is not unique to Jewish extremism; Muslim, Christian, Hindu, and Buddhist leaders have exploited, and sometimes created, crises to justify their suspension or abrogation of the law (as have fascist and other secular authoritarian leaders). "Jews! Wake up," the Union rabbis demanded. "Show your opposition to this unfortunate agreement as forcefully as you are able! It is a matter of life for every Jew!" Thus, Samuel Heilman concludes, the Zionist rabbis "wrapped their political stand in the mantle of religion and a rabbinic *da'at Torah* (Torah wisdom)."<sup>4</sup>

The argument that the government was endangering Jewish survival was calculated to undermine a contrary interpretation of *pikuach nefesh* being put forward by the relatively few dovish rabbis, including the haredi (or ultra-Orthodox) rabbis Menachem Schach and Ovadia Yosef, who held that the Jewish law commended territorial withdrawal if it could save even one Jewish life.

In a 1994 address a prominent elder of the Union, Rabbi Abraham Shapira, attacked their position and elaborated the case for resistance to Oslo. Drawing on rabbinic literature and Judeo-legal decisions, he contended that the Jewish obligation to conquer and settle the land incurs an obligation to put one's life at risk if necessary. The proper interpretation of *pikuach nefesh* in the current situation, he maintained, rests on the fact that the greater danger to Jewish life came from withdrawal. "Any withdrawal of our security forces from parts of Eretz Yisrael and giving autonomy to our Arab enemies, who have suckled their hatred from their youngest infancy, increases the danger," he insisted. "All their declarations and signatures are utterly worthless."<sup>5</sup>

Shapira and the other Union rabbis had crossed a threshold, Heilman notes. By discarding the Kookist belief that the secular leaders of Zionism were acting on behalf of God, they opened the way for the religious as well as political delegitimation—and demonization—of the government. Jews within their circle of influence began thereafter to refer to government officials as "Arabs," "goyim," "criminals," and "communists that never recognized our right to Eretz Yisrael." By contrast, the rabbis and their disciples were "observant God fearing Jews that keep the whole Torah, oral and written, from beginning to end. We are willing to sacrifice our lives for every single Jewish custom. Thus, we cannot agree to forgo even one square inch of our holy land."

Although Shapira did not call for violence, it was not difficult for his hearers to draw their own conclusions. Before taking action, however, the truly observant would need to seek approval or at least guidance of a rabbi whom they considered to be their personal religious authority. Most rabbis refused to condone violence; the extremists were a small but prominent minority.<sup>6</sup> "Whether the [Union] rabbis, including Levinger, truly acted to initiate violence or only to ratify it among the faithful is not clear, just as it was not clear in the case of the Underground," Heilman writes. "In general the abiding question is whether the fundamentalist rabbis are leaders or simply collective representations, symbolic reflections and religious expressions of those who have trust in them. What is most likely is that these rabbis synergistically reacted to and directed the activities of their followers. Even Levinger needed the support and encouragement of his followers, his faithful."<sup>7</sup>

In November 1993 the Union issued a rabbinic *psak*, a binding judgment based on halakah, which declared the Oslo Accords null and void, without legal or moral force. According to the laws of the Torah, they judged, "it is forbidden to relinquish the political rights of sovereignty and national ownership over any part of historic Eretz Yisrael to another authority or people." The rabbis warned of assimilation, a loss of Jewish identity, as a result of the government's policies: "We are extremely concerned over the present trend that aims to create a secular culture here which is to blend into 'a new Middle East'—a trend which will lead to assimilation. We have a sacred obligation to strengthen and deepen our people's connection to the Torah and to Jewish

tradition as passed down through the generations. . . . We support the continuation of protests, demonstrations, and strikes within the framework of the law. In addition, we encourage educating and informing the masses in order that they may realize the falseness of this 'peace.'" <sup>8</sup>

The Rabin government saw in these declarations a disturbing radicalization of the ongoing culture war between Israel's religious minority and its secular majority; some officials feared that the rabbinic call amounted to a justification for insurrection. As the peace accords moved closer to fruition and Israel withdrew from Jericho and Gaza, the situation worsened. In May 1994 the Ichud Rabbanim warned that the "false peace process" was "creating deep spiritual and social divisions . . . [and] an atmosphere of civil war." In July 1995 another ruling declared that the Torah should be interpreted as prohibiting the evacuation of Israeli army camps in the territories. Many of the soldiers in the camps, including officers in charge of evacuating them, had studied in yeshivas under these rabbis. They now faced a crisis of authority, with their spiritual guides on one side and the secular government and the army on the other. For twenty years the yeshiva-educated soldiers had been included among the army's elite; now their religious obedience was seen as a threat to the nation. Israel's President Ezer Weitzman, echoing the outrage of the general public, warned that the ruling "undermines the basic principles on which the Israeli Defense Force is based and could invalidate the democratic foundation of the state." Rabin called on the attorney general to determine whether the rabbis had breached the law and were fomenting sedition. Even the National Religious Party, the rabbis' natural political ally, was divided by a ruling that seemed designed to foment civil war; its parliament members rejected the ruling, as did the head of a prominent yeshiva that educated and formed Jewish soldiers.<sup>9</sup>

Exacerbating the tension was an idea being discussed among some rejectionist rabbis and their students: if the withdrawals from the territories were truly endangering life, any Jew who authorized or implemented them might be defined as a *rodef* or a *moyser*. According to Jewish law, a *rodef* (pursuer) is one who threatens the life of a Jew or through his action puts the life of a Jew in danger, while a *moyser* is one who hands Jews over to their enemies. The law asserts that one must or at least may kill the *rodef* and punish the *moyser*. In December 1993 the chief rabbi of Ramat Gan, Ya'akov Ariel, had even reflected in public on the question of whether Prime Minister Rabin might be classified halakhically as a *rodef*.<sup>10</sup> During meetings of B'nai Akiva, the religious Zionist youth movement, participants discussed the prospect of shooting at Israeli soldiers attempting to take Jews out of settlements. In the fall of 1995, at Ramat Gan's Orthodox Bar Ilan University, some students debated the question of whether Rabin deserved "to die for his deeds."<sup>11</sup>

On November 4, 1995, Yigal Amir, a Bar Ilan student, army veteran, and former "yeshiva boy," assassinated Rabin. "My whole life, I learned Jewish

law," Amir commented later. His studies convinced him, he said, that killing the enemy—in this case, the prime minister—was permitted under the law. "We had to stop the [peace] process," explained Dror Adani, a B'nai Akiva member and one of the suspects in the conspiracy to murder Rabin. "Inside of me, I feared that our actions may bring about a civil war . . . [but] both Rabin and Peres were classified as *rodefim* and therefore had to be killed."<sup>12</sup>

How are we to understand this episode of Jewish extremism? Certainly, it is difficult to categorize. Is it an expression of Jewish "fundamentalism," that is, a fight to preserve religious integrity, orthodoxy, and "purity" against compromises and corruptions introduced by weak-willed, misguided, or malevolent religious or secular actors? Does "fundamentalism" necessarily lead to extremism? Within this paradigm, that is, was the move to extremist violence the result of the Union rabbis' "fundamentalist" interpretation of what they called "our sacred obligation to strengthen and deepen our people's connection to the Torah and to Jewish tradition as passed down through the generations"?

Theirs was a contested interpretation, repudiated by many other rabbis, including those who shared a militant outlook but rejected extremism. Israel is a young state, but one with democratic traditions and a strong civil society. Judaism enjoys the freedom and public space to explore and give voice to its "internal pluralism" and to pursue a vigorous argument over what constitutes an authentic Jewish response to developments in state and society. Yet a strong civil society, the case of Israel also reminds us, may diminish the prospect of religious violence but certainly does not eliminate it.

Is this, then, a case of "religious nationalism," given the rabbis' claim to represent "true Zionism" and thus to be the arbiters of the legal and moral warrants for government policy? Should we speak of irredentism, the equation of a people's sovereign identity with territory, in this case, the biblical "Land of Israel"?

Each of these interpretive lenses—and others—has a place in a discussion of Jewish extremism in Israel. Reality on the ground is too complex for analysts to discard any tool that might be useful in understanding religious violence. "Fundamentalism," "religious nationalism," and other such terms must be employed carefully and presented as constructs that facilitate comparison among broadly similar movements, however, rather than as precise labels for any particular movement. In this chapter, I employ such terms with these cautions in mind in an attempt to identify recurrent patterns of religious extremism.

### "Fundamentalism" as a Source of Religious Extremism

#### General Definition, Ideological and Organizational Characteristics

Scholarly and media discourse about the Middle East, the Bosnian war, communal violence in India and Pakistan, and other conflicts generated or exacerbated by religious extremism does indeed make liberal use of broad an-

alytical categories such as "fundamentalism," "religious nationalism," and "liberation theology." As one who employs such categories for comparative purposes, I am keenly aware of their limitations. Some commentators automatically equate "fundamentalism" with extremism and use the term as a broad brush with which to tar every religiously orthodox, literate, and committed believer. In that wrongheaded view, every believer is a militant, every militant a fundamentalist, every fundamentalist an extremist. Thus the enormous distance between ordinary, pious Muslims and bomb-throwing "Islamic terrorists" is all but erased, not to mention the finer distinction I am drawing between nonviolent militants and extremists. Some nonfundamentalist Muslims, Christians, and Jews object to "fundamentalism" for a different reason: it implies that their extremist coreligionists, who are a minority in every religious tradition, are actually upholding or defending the basic "fundamentals" of the faith; the majority of believers do not see it that way. Finally, historians rightly object when the extravagant use of the term induces nonspecialists to overlook or conflate the details of individual movements and their contexts and thus to downplay the vast differences between these movements, which are far greater than their similarities. When describing particular movements, then, the term "fundamentalism" is best applied only to those Protestant Christians of North America who coined the term in the early twentieth century and their contemporary ideological heirs; Muslim "fundamentalists" are best described as "Islamists," Jewish "fundamentalists" by specific Jewish designations, and so on.

Carefully defined, however, such comparative constructs as "fundamentalism" do help us differentiate broader patterns of religious militance in the real world. They establish reliable criteria by which to interrogate the generalizable findings of case studies and generate a cross-cultural vocabulary by which to make specific comparisons of movements and groups. "Fundamentalism," in this usage, refers to a specifiable pattern of religious militance 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 structures and processes. Nothing in this definition suggests that fundamentalism necessarily promotes extremist violence and intolerance. The shared goal of fundamentalists in their separate traditions—to protect and enhance religious identity by competing with secular institutions and philosophies for resources and allegiances—does not violate the basic tenets of pluralist or inclusivist societies.

The exclusivist orientation of fundamentalisms becomes clear, however, when we examine the pattern of religious militance they share—their comparable means, that is, of creating and sustaining alternatives to secularism. The fundamentalist pattern is best understood as expressing a particular and contingent configuration of ideology and organizational resources—not, that is, an "essence" or constitutive trait of any one or all of the host religious tra-

ditions. As noted, most adherents of Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Sikhism, and Hinduism consider the "fundamentalists" in their midst to be an irresponsible minority whose claim to represent the "essence" or "fundamentals" of the religion is bankrupt.

The fundamentalist pattern of militance begins as a reaction to the penetration of the religious community by secular or religious outsiders. In this situation the seeker of religious purity is tempted to build an enclave, a social and cultural system dedicated to the fortification of communal boundaries.<sup>13</sup> Exile is an apt metaphor for describing the marginalization of religion in the industrialized and developing societies. A sense of being in exile in one's own land is the primary impulse (at least at leadership level) that lies behind the rise of groups that seek to reshape the tradition so as to forestall the danger of constantly losing members and ultimately dying an ignoble death.

Fundamentalists define "outsiders" to include lukewarm, compromising, or liberal coreligionists as well as people or institutions of another or no religious faith. Foreign troops stationed on sacred ground, missionaries, Western businesspeople, their own government officials, sectarian preachers, educational and social service volunteers, relief workers, and professional peacekeepers—any or all of these might qualify at one time or another. Fundamentalists perceive this range of actors to be intentional or inadvertent agents of secularization, seen as a ruthless but by no means inevitable process by which traditional religions and religious concerns are gradually relegated to the remote margins of society where they can die a harmless death—eliminated by what the Iranian intellectual Jalal Al-e Ahmad called the "sweet, lethal poison" of "Westoxication."

The reaction takes the form of a selective retrieval of the sacred past—lines or passages from the holy book, traditional teachings of a guru or prophet, or heroic deeds or episodes from a mythologized golden age (or moment of tragedy)—for the purpose of legitimating an innovative ideology and program of action designed to protect and bolster the besieged "fundamentals" of the religion and to fend off or conquer the outsider.<sup>14</sup> With success (or with failure for lack of clout) comes an expansion of the agenda to include the attainment of greater political power, the transformation of the surrounding political culture, the moral purification of society, and, in some cases, secession from the secular state and/or the creation of a "pure" religious homeland.

Organizationally, fundamentalist movements form around male *charismatic* or authoritarian leaders.<sup>15</sup> The movements begin as local religious enclaves but are increasingly capable of rapid functional and structural differentiation and of international networking with like-minded groups from the same religious tradition. They recruit rank-and-file members from professional and working classes and both genders but draw new members disproportionately from among young, educated, unemployed, or underemployed males (and, in some settings, from the universities and the military); and they

impose strict codes of personal discipline, dress, diet, and other markers that serve subtly or otherwise to set group members apart from others.<sup>16</sup>

Ideologically, fundamentalists are both reactive against and interactive with secular modernity; and they tend to be absolutist, inerrantist, dualist, and apocalyptic in cognitive orientation. That is, fundamentalists see sacred truths as the foundation of all genuine knowledge and religious values as the base and summit of morality. This in itself does not differentiate fundamentalists from traditional believers. But because fundamentalists themselves have been formed by secular modernity or in reaction against it, they are in self-conscious competition with their peers in the secular sciences. Yet they also set the terms of the competition by presenting their sacred texts and traditions—their intellectual resources, so to speak—as inherently free from error and invulnerable to the searching critical methods of secular science, history, cultural studies, and literary theory. Having subordinated secular to sacred epistemology, fundamentalists feel free to engage and even develop new forms of computer and communications technology, scientific research, political organizations, and the like.

No matter how expertly or awkwardly they imitate secular moderns, however, fundamentalists remain dualists at heart; they imagine the world divided into unambiguous realms of light and darkness peopled by the elect and reprobate, the pure and impure, the orthodox and the infidel. Many if not all fundamentalists further dramatize this Manichaeic worldview by setting it within an apocalyptic framework: the world is in spiritual crisis, perhaps near its end, when God will bring terrible judgment on the children of darkness. When the children of light are depicted in such millenarian imaginings as the agents of this divine wrath, violent intolerance toward outsiders appears justified on theological grounds.

"Apocalyptic," "millennialist," or "millenarian" are technical and tradition-specific terms; a more inclusive way of describing this ideological trait is to say that fundamentalists tend to be "exceptionalists." Whatever specific theological resources the host religious tradition may (or may not) have for legitimating a departure from normal operating procedures, that is, fundamentalists believe themselves to be living in a special dispensation—an unusual, extraordinary time of crisis, danger, or apocalyptic doom: the advent of the Messiah, the Second Coming of Christ, or the return of the Hidden Imam; and so on. This "special time" is exceptional not only in the sense of being unusual; its urgency requires true believers to make exceptions, to depart from the general rule of the tradition.

This provides one answer to the question, How does a religious tradition that normally preaches nothing but peace, compassion, forgiveness, and tolerance adopt the discourse of intolerance and violence? The answer is that these are not "normal times." Thus the religious Zionist elders of the Ichud Rabbanim invoked the halakic norm of *pikuach nefesh* in ruling that the Oslo

Accords threatened the very existence of Israel—and Judaism itself. This "fail-safe" option had the effect of subordinating all other laws to the requirements of survival. Similarly, Ayatollah Khomeini, in the last year of his life, made the extraordinary ruling that the survival of the Islamic Republic of Iran demanded that parts of the Islamic law putatively governing it were to be suspended in deference to the supreme jurist's (i.e., Khomeini's) own ad hoc rulings. The Sikh extremist Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, likewise claiming that the Sikh faith was under mortal threat, added the motorcycle and revolver to the traditional Sikh symbols and recruited a ferocious minority of his fellow Sikhs into an updated version of the seventeenth-century order of baptized Sikhs, the Khalsa Singh (the "purified" or "chosen" lion race).

The traditional Sikh teaching on outsiders is summarized in the legend attributed to Guru Nanak: "Take up arms that will harm no one; let your coat of mail be understanding; convert your enemies into friends; fight with valor, but with no weapon but the word of God." How did the charismatic Bhindranwale legitimate the violation of this precept? In mobilizing his band of followers, the core of which have been described as ruffians who are ill-tutored in the Sikh tradition, Bhindranwale argued, in effect, that exceptional times require extreme measures. "The Hindu imperialist rulers of New Delhi" seek to annihilate the Sikh people, he warned; their intention is evident in their open support of "apostates," such as the Nirankari sect, and in their economic exploitation of rural and urban Sikhs. Thus Bhindranwale retrieved Guru Hargobind's doctrine of temporal power wedded to spiritual authority (*miri-piri*) and Guru Gobind's concept of righteous war (*dharma yuddha*). He defended this move by citing Gobind's maxim that "when all else fails, it is righteous to lift the sword in one's hand and fight." In effect, Bhindranwale announced a new dispensation:

For every village you should keep one motorcycle, three young baptized Sikhs and three revolvers. These are not meant for killing innocent people. For a Sikh to have arms and kill an innocent person is a serious sin. But Kahlsaji [O, baptized Sikh], to have arms and not to get your legitimate rights is an even bigger sin.<sup>17</sup>

### Neither Orthodox nor Traditional, Cult nor Revival

Fundamentalist militance borrows animus and attitudes from age-old religious orthodoxies. As a social movement fundamentalism is born and thrives within the context of the more widespread and diffuse social phenomenon known as a religious revival. And, like a cult or new religion, a fundamentalist movement may depend heavily on charismatic leadership and innovative religious practices. Drawing from all these religious streams, fundamentalism is identical to none of them. Rather, it is a distinctive religious phenomenon, shaped profoundly by the conservative religious encounter with secular

modernity—and by the fateful decision, taken by those “angry conservatives” who became fundamentalists, to battle secular modernity on its own turf. Practically, that decision meant that the weapons of the fundamentalists would include radio, television, audiocassettes, faxes, the Internet, Stinger missiles, black markets, think tanks, paleontological “evidence” for the young-earth theory, identity politics, modern marketing techniques, and terrorist tactics—all turned to militant or extremist religious ends. Although history has seen militant religious movements mount sustained countercultural campaigns, fundamentalisms are unique among them because secular modernity is a unique social context. In the formula of Bruce Lawrence, the author of a groundbreaking comparative study of the phenomena, fundamentalisms have premodern antecedents but no direct precedents.<sup>18</sup>

“Innovative traditionalism” is the result of fundamentalism’s symbiotic relationship to secular modernity.<sup>19</sup> Fundamentalists treat the religious tradition as a resource to be retrieved selectively, and applied situationally, in the competition with secularism. They channel the spiritual and moral intensity accompanying a religious revival into a quest for political power to enforce religious and cultural “purity.” Yet fundamentalist leaders are not cult figures who claim authority to supersede the tradition by virtue of a new revelation. Their organizational and ideological power is rooted in the host religious tradition, and they operate within its constraints.

Fundamentalisms emerge from orthodox and conservative religious environments. Orthodox and conservative religious institutions (seminaries, madrasas, yeshivot, and monasteries) and extensive educational networks provide cradle-to-grave formation.<sup>20</sup> Trained to see the world in light of his religious conversion, the novice is enjoined to “put on Christ” or follow the straight path of Islam or disciple himself to a rebbe possessed of *da’at Torah* (Torah wisdom). This spiritual discipline is neither “fundamentalism” nor religious extremism; it is merely the standard practice of orthodox believers. Graduates of such institutions, inflamed by the perception of injustice and the zeal of righteousness, often give their lives to the struggle for justice and the works of mercy. This in itself, as I have argued, is a form of militance.

The way of intolerance and extremism opens among such people if and when they come to believe that spiritual militance entails an obligation to trounce the unrighteous by whatever means necessary. The young person who joins a “fundamentalist” movement often feels, or is persuaded to believe, that the religious establishment has responded inadequately to an increasingly aggressive, secular, religiously plural, materialist, amoral (“Westoxicated”), feminist, antiorthodox milieu. Shunning what they see as the passivity of the orthodox, fundamentalist leaders and followers transform a militant religious attitude (absolute devotion to the will of God and the demands of divine law) into an extremist tactic (naming the infidel, demonizing the other, expelling the lukewarm).

The scrupulous observance of the divine law can become an ideological and operational resource for extremists. They select one aspect of the law, elevate it above others, and equate its observance to the achievement of concrete political objectives. Thus the religious Zionists of the *Ichud Rabbanim* and their counterparts in *Gush Emunim* emphasize one of the 613 Torah mitzvot and subordinate the remaining 612 religious duties to its observance—“the commandment to settle the land is tantamount to all other commandments.”<sup>21</sup> This is classic “fundamentalism”: the selection and reinterpretation of politically charged doctrines or precepts, around which an extremist movement is built.

Similarly, the traditional rituals and devotions that sacralize personal self-sacrifice become in extremist hands a means of preparing the devout cadres for physical warfare. The self-flagellation of Iranian or Lebanese Shi’ites during the Ashura ritual commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Husayn is a form of militant religiosity, as are the fasts, prayers, rosaries, and candlelight vigils of Christians who mount militant campaigns to protect the unborn fetus threatened by abortion. Neither of these rituals is inherently extremist, but they become sources of extremism for the Ashura penitent who exacts vengeance on Husayn’s contemporary persecutors or the “pro-lifer” who guns down an abortionist. Such prescribed prayers and rituals, interpreted by an extremist preacher, locate the believer in a sacred cosmos that rewards martyrdom or imprisonment endured in a divine cause. The ritual burial and glorious resurrection of the young Hamas recruit described in chapter 1 is an essential part of the preparation for his suicide attack on an Israeli checkpoint. By redirecting the youth’s gaze from the daunting objective facts of his immediate environment to the transcendent kingdom of divine justice, the extremist empowers the new “Lion of Hamas” to confront the seemingly insurmountable obstacles to religious heroism represented by, say, the state security force policing the area, the scorn of neighbors, or the fear of impending loss of life, limb, or loved ones. This ability of religion to inspire ecstasy—literally, to lift the believer psychologically out of a mundane environment—stands behind the distinctive logic of religious violence. As unpredictable and illogical as this violence may seem to outsiders, it falls within a pattern of asceticism leading to the ecstasy of self-sacrifice that runs as a continuous thread through most religions.<sup>22</sup>

### Sayyid Qutb and the Fundamentalist Pattern of Activism

The teachings of Sayyid Qutb (1906–65), a catalyst in the rise of Sunni Muslim extremism, exemplify the fundamentalist ideological pattern. A schoolteacher, essayist, and inspector in the Egyptian Ministry of Education, Qutb joined the Muslim Brotherhood in 1951 after returning from three years of study in the United States. The Brotherhood, founded in 1928 in the

Suez Canal City of Ismailia by another schoolteacher, Hassan al-Banna, had grown to become a leading Egyptian opposition movement (in 1950 it numbered 500,000 active members, over one million supporters, and 2,000 offices), with the goal of expelling the British and bringing Egyptian society directly under the rule of Shari'a (Islamic law). Escalating violence between the Brotherhood and the government led to Banna's assassination by the king's police in 1949 and to brutal crackdowns in 1952 and 1954 by the Nasser regime (which the Brotherhood had helped bring to power). While the Brotherhood regrouped and responded to the repression by renouncing violence and pursuing a gradualist political path, Qutb, who had been imprisoned during one of the roundups, kept the revolutionary flame burning with his 1960 treatise *Milestones*, which became the manifesto of Sunni extremism.

In *Milestones*, Qutb developed an interpretation of jihad, Islamic holy war, that would become the core doctrine of extremist groups such as the Islamic Liberation Organization of Egypt and Jordan, the Jihad Organization and Takfir wal-Hijra of Egypt, and similar cells in Egypt, North Africa, Lebanon, Israel, Saudi Arabia, the West Bank, and the Gulf states.<sup>23</sup> Qutb's radical innovation was his application of the concept of Jahiliyya, "the state of ignorance of the guidance from God," to fellow Muslims (including Arab leaders such as Nasser) who had abandoned Islam, he charged, in favor of atheistic philosophies and ideologies. "Our whole environment, people's beliefs and ideas, habits and art, rules and laws is—Jahiliyyah, even to the extent that what we consider to be Islamic culture, Islamic sources, Islamic philosophy and Islamic thought, are also constructs of Jahiliyyah!" As a result, he charged, "the true Islamic values never enter our hearts . . . our minds are never illuminated by Islamic concepts, and no group of people arises among us who are of the calibre of the first generation of Islam."<sup>24</sup>

The influence of Maulana Sayyid Abul Ala Maududi (1903–79) is apparent in Qutb's vision of Islam as an all-encompassing alternative to Jahili society. Maududi, a native of Hyderabad, India, was a brilliant systematic thinker, a prolific writer, a charismatic orator, a shrewd politician, and the organizer of the South Asian Islamist organization Jamaat-i-Islami.<sup>25</sup> He single-handedly created the modern Islamist discourse; his works elaborate the social and legal implications of concepts such as "Islamic politics," "Islamic economics," and "the Islamic constitution." Maududi's core concept, based on the traditional affirmation of Islam as a complete and comprehensive way of life, was *iqamat-i-deen* (literally, "the establishment of religion")—the total subordination of the institutions of civil society and the state to the authority of divine law as revealed in the Qur'an and practiced by the Prophet.<sup>26</sup>

That concept echoes in Qutb's exhortations from prison to his fellow Muslim Brothers. "We must return to that pure source from which those people [the earliest followers of the Prophet Muhammad] derived their guidance—the source which is free from any mixing or pollution," he writes. "We must re-

turn to it to derive from it our concepts of the nature of the universe, the nature of human existence, and the relationship of these two with the Perfect, the Real Being, God Most High. From [Islam] we must also derive our concepts of life, our principles of government, politics, economics and all other aspects of life."<sup>27</sup> On display in Qutb's manifesto are all the elements of the fundamentalist ideological pattern: the alarm over the perceived loss of religious integrity, the refusal to compromise with outsiders, the sense of apocalyptic crisis, the envy and imitation of secular modernity juxtaposed with repulsion at its immoral excesses, and finally the desire to build a comprehensive religious alternative to secularism.

We must also free ourselves from the clutches of jahili society, jahili concepts, jahili traditions and jahili leadership. Our mission is not to compromise with the practices of jahili society, nor can we be loyal to it. . . . Our foremost objective is to change the practices of this society. Our aim is to change the jahili system at its very roots—this system which is fundamentally at variance with Islam and which, with help of force and oppression, is keeping us from living the sort of life which is demanded by our Creator.<sup>28</sup>

Withdrawal from so-called Islamic society, for Qutb, was a prelude to an offensive jihad against infidels and apostates around the world. The Islamist movement would use the weapons and tactics of the secular world against it.

Since this movement comes into conflict with the Jahiliyyah which . . . has a practical system of life and a political and material authority behind it, the Islamic movement had to produce parallel resources to confront this Jahiliyyah. This movement uses the methods of preaching and persuasion for reforming ideas and beliefs; and it uses physical power and Jihaad for abolishing the organisations and authorities of the jahili system.<sup>29</sup>

In his presentation of jihad as a holy war against apostate, or "jahili," Muslims, among other enemies of "true religion," Qutb broke with his contemporary interpreters of Islamic law. He justified his innovations in several ways characteristic of "fundamentalists." First, he invoked the doctrines of a sage who had legitimated extremism, namely, Ibn Taymiyya (1268–1328), the medieval scholar of the Hanbalite school of Islamic jurisprudence who had characterized Mongols as "false Muslims" and blessed those who fought them. Second, Qutb retrieved the practice of *ijtihad*, the use of one's own judgment when no clear text was available from the Qur'an or the Hadith of the Prophet. Finally, he gave an extremist interpretation of a traditional precept—jihad—and justified the interpretation by recourse to "exceptionalism" (the argument that the onset of "Jahiliyyah" required extreme countermeasures). *Milestones* contains lengthy passages denouncing minimalist interpretations of jihad and arguing that the Prophet's prohibition against fighting



was only "a temporary stage in a long journey" during the Meccan period.<sup>30</sup> Jihad is not about the defense of a national homeland, Qutb insists. Rather, it is a command to extend the borders of Islam to the ends of the earth:

Islam is not a "defensive movement" in the narrow sense which is technically today called a defensive war. This narrow meaning is ascribed to it by those who are under pressure of circumstances and are defeated by the wily attacks of the orientalist, who distort the concept of Islamic Jihaad. It was a movement to wipe out tyranny and to introduce true freedom to mankind, using resources according to the actual human situation, and it had definite stages, for each of which it utilized new methods.

If we insist on calling Islamic Jihaad a defensive movement, then we must change the meaning of the word "defense" and mean by it "the defense of man" against all those elements which limit his freedom. These elements take the form of beliefs and concepts, as well as of political systems, based on economic, racial or class distinctions. . . . When we take this broad meaning of the word "defense," we understand the true character of Islam, and that it is a universal proclamation of the freedom of man from servitude to other men, the establishment of God and His Lordship throughout the world, the end of man's arrogance and selfishness, and the implementation of the rule of the Divine Sharia'ah in human affairs.<sup>31</sup>

A hallmark of the discourse of religious extremists is the calculated ambiguity of their leaders' rhetoric about violence. An extremist preacher's standard repertoire—the constant use of metaphor and veiled allusion, apocalyptic imagery, and heated rhetoric not always meant to be taken literally or obeyed as a concrete set of directions—allows the preacher to evade accountability for failed operations. Other activists in the movement, in any event, usually "operationalize" the broad "permissions" voiced by the extremist leader.<sup>32</sup> In *Milestones*, Qutb uses inflammatory language easily construed as legitimating deadly violence against Islam's numerous enemies. (It was construed in this way by Qutb's intellectual disciples, notably, the Jihad group that assassinated Egyptian President Anwar Sadat.<sup>33</sup>) Yet Qutb himself disavowed any intent to harm individuals, claiming that the Islamists attack only institutions, and at least one sympathetic scholar describes him as "essentially a philosopher who shunned violence."<sup>34</sup>

Be that as it may, Qutb's legacy includes the cadres of radical fundamentalist Muslims who created new forms of violent intolerance and religious resistance to the powers-that-be. Today elements of his ideology appear in the manifestos and behaviors of extremist Islamist movements and terrorist cells that grew up outside his original sphere of influence. Among the former are the Taliban of Afghanistan, the Harkat Mujahedeen of Pakistan, and the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) of Algeria, which has waged a terrorist campaign against the "jahili" government of Algeria since 1992.<sup>35</sup> Among the terrorist networks influenced by Qutb's notion of jihad are those sponsored by Osama bin Laden, the wealthy Saudi exile accused of masterminding dozens of ter-

rorist attacks, including the 1998 bombing of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. Bin Laden's network includes al-Qa'ida, an organization he founded in 1988 for the Qutb-like purpose of overthrowing "corrupt" Muslim governments. It was composed mostly of Muslim "freedom fighters" who had helped drive the Soviets from Afghanistan. Al-Qa'ida has supported Muslim fighters in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Chechnya, Tajikistan, Somalia, Yemen, and Kosovo as well as training members of terrorist organizations from such diverse countries as the Philippines, Algeria, and Eritrea.<sup>36</sup> Bin Laden sees these operations as a step toward expelling the Western presence from Islamic lands, abolishing state boundaries, and creating a transnational Islamic society ruled by a restored caliphate. In February 1998 he announced the creation of a new alliance of terrorist organizations and Islamic extremist movements—the International Islamic Front for Jihad Against the Jews and Crusaders—which included the Egyptian al-Gama'at al-Islamiyya, the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, the Harkat Mujahedeen of Pakistan, and other groups.<sup>37</sup>

#### Hizbullah: A Study in Fundamentalist Violence

In fundamentalist movements a charismatic leader provides the vision and religious-moral legitimation for action, while his subordinates develop a specific program of action. The resulting distance between the words and intentions of a charismatic leader and the acts perpetrated by his followers affords a space in which violence may take on a life of its own, deviating from the original purpose and violating the restrictions set by the leader.

Such was the case with Hizbullah—"the Party of God"—the Lebanese Shi'ite movement infamous for its suicide bombings, airliner hijackings, and hostage holdings. Founded in 1982, the movement emerged in a small and vulnerable state inhabited by many sects. Although Hizbullah never commanded the means or manpower necessary to seize power in Lebanon, it made a considerable impact both in Lebanon and around the world because of its ability to legitimate sectarian violence by a direct appeal to Islam. This was perhaps Hizbullah's "most original contribution to modern Islamic fundamentalism."<sup>38</sup>

Why and in what circumstances did the adherents of Hizbullah resort to force? What did they intend to achieve by their acts? What were the effects of their violence?

Hizbullah's extremism drew life from several sources and contexts. Its host religion, Shi'ite Islam, provided a 1,400-year legacy of martyrdom and suffering resting on an ancient grievance: Islam had been plunged into schism following the death of the Prophet Muhammad by those who ignored his specific instruction that his son-in-law, 'Ali, be placed at its helm. Later the usurpers slew 'Ali's grandson, Husayn, rather than recognize his divine right to rule. Ultimately the Shi'ites were forced underground by what they con-

sidered to be a false Islam. The partisans of 'Ali mourned their martyrs and scoffed at the wars waged by Sunni Muslims for the expansion and defense of Islam. At times Shi'ism openly opposed and sought to undermine the existing order in Islam; at other times it withdrew into a quietist mode, awaiting messianic redemption.<sup>39</sup>

The Lebanese setting of Hizbullah was another powerful context of its emergence. After Lebanon became independent in 1943, the state was governed by Maronite Christians and Sunni Muslims. Living along the eastern shore of the Mediterranean and on the plains of the Bekaa Valley, Lebanon's Shi'ite Muslim population tripled between 1956 and 1975, bringing the 750,000 Shi'ites to about 30 percent of the total population.<sup>40</sup> Although they were Lebanon's largest confessional community, the Shi'ites could not close the social and economic gap, and many underemployed youth joined the Palestinian revolutionary movements that swept Lebanon in the 1960s and 1970s. Other Shi'ites created a defense militia known as Amal ("Hope") after the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war in 1975.<sup>41</sup>

Hundreds of thousands of Shi'ites became refugees as a result of the fighting between Christian Maronites and Palestinians in 1976 and after the Israeli invasion of South Lebanon in 1978. During that period a quarter of a million refugees crowded into the squalid southern slums of Beirut. Shi'ite religious scholars called for the creation of an Islamic state, an idea made plausible by the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979.<sup>42</sup>

In 1982 a series of traumatic external events shook the Shi'ite community: Israel occupied the Shi'ite south, Maronite militiamen in league with Israel massacred Palestinian refugees, and American and French troops were deployed near the Shi'ite slums of Beirut. In response to these pressures a faction of Amal, accompanied by several fervent young Shi'ite religious scholars, fled to the Bekaa Valley and joined a contingent of a thousand Iranian Revolutionary Guards who had come to do battle with the "enemies of Islam" and to spread the Ayatollah Khomeini's revolutionary message. In the absence of an effective government in Lebanon, Syria allowed a supply line of support to run from Iran through Syria to Lebanon's Shi'ites. Together the Lebanese and Iranian Shi'ites transformed an army barracks in the Bekaa Valley into a fortress ringed by anti-aircraft weapons. It became the nucleus of an autonomous zone governed by the precepts of Islam. The group took the name of Hizbullah after a verse in the Qur'an (V, 56): "Lo! the Party of God, they are the victorious."<sup>43</sup>

Young Lebanese religious scholars who had been expelled from theological academies in Iraq and spurned by the Shi'ite clerical establishment became Hizbullah's leaders. Prosperous Shi'ite clans of the Bekaa Valley, whose wealth came from illicit drug trafficking, supported the movement, and young Shi'ite militiamen who had worked for Palestinian organizations found "jobs, weapons, and a sense of divine purpose" within its ranks. The commander of

Islamic Jihad, Hizbullah's clandestine military branch, came from this group. Hizbullah also won followers among the Lebanese populace, especially the Shi'ite refugees in the southern suburbs of Beirut. "Iran's emissaries moved quickly to offer food, jobs, loans, medicine, and other services to the teeming masses of impoverished Shi'ites in Beirut's slums," Martin Kramer writes. "In return, they gave Hizbullah their loyalty."<sup>44</sup>

Shaykh Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah, the religious scholar who became the most prominent leader of Hizbullah, personified their grievance. Relocated from his home in southern Lebanon to a Shi'ite slum in East Beirut, Fadlallah lost his first pulpit in the 1976 Maronite-Palestinian fighting and migrated to Beirut's southern suburbs. There he built a mosque and guided Hizbullah's urban cadres. In his spellbinding preaching Fadlallah invoked the literal meaning of jihad—self-sacrifice in defense of Islam—as the appropriate response to the despair and injustice suffered by the refugees. Like his Sunni counterpart Sayyid Qutb, Fadlallah blamed the plight of his followers on the abandonment of Islam by countless people who were now Muslims only in name. Their enemies would continue to prey on their wealth, territory, and lives, Fadlallah predicted, until they returned to the straight path and set Lebanese history on the course intended by God, as the Imam Khomeini had done for the people of Iran.<sup>45</sup>

Fadlallah was not a religious nationalist: Islam transcended the nation-state. The aim was not the establishment of Islam in one country but the creation of an "all-encompassing Islamic state" embodying the *umma* (worldwide Islamic community). An apocalyptic messianism animated Fadlallah's vision of a sweeping global triumph of Islam. "The divine state of justice realized on part of this earth will not remain confined within its geographic borders," one of his disciples predicted. That achievement "will lead to the appearance of the Mahdi, who will create the state of Islam on earth." To Hizbullah, Fadlallah assigned the heroic role of purifying a province of Islam to create "the divine state of justice." The scope of its efforts would be accordingly grandiose. In order to rid Lebanese Shi'ites of their immediate tormentors—the Maronites and the Israelis—Hizbullah's manifesto called for "a battle with vice at its very roots. And the first root of vice is America. . . . We will turn Lebanon into a graveyard for American schemes."<sup>46</sup>

Thus began Hizbullah's campaign of extremism, embraced by thousands of Lebanese Shi'ites as a noble endeavor that transcended the boundaries of family, clan, sect, and state. By joining Hizbullah, Kramer explains, the poor village boy became a true Muslim, a member of a religiopolitical community spanning three continents, and a soldier in a global movement led by the Imam Khomeini for redressing the imbalance between Islam and infidelity. "This was a mission above human history, a task of eschatological significance. A sense of divine purpose accounted for Hizbullah's appeal, and eased its resort to violence, not only in Lebanon, but throughout the world."<sup>47</sup>

The Iranian Revolutionary Guards trained Hizbullah's cadres in military tactics, while Fadlallah formed them spiritually, educating the young slum dwellers in the religious precept of martyrdom. He described the disciplined preparation for martyrdom as a sacred obligation, the fulfilling of which made the oppressed fearsome to their enemies. This transformation from victim to warrior was the subject of *Islam and the Logic of Power*, Fadlallah's systematic defense of religious violence.<sup>48</sup> In it he argued that the acquisition of power must serve not the ends of a sect or nation but those of all Islam in its confrontation with error, disbelief, and imperialism. Although Muslims did not have the same weapons of war as their enemies, Fadlallah admitted, the power of Western imperialism was vulnerable because it rested on unbelief and exploitation. And power did not reside only in quantitative advantage or physical force but also in strikes, demonstrations, civil disobedience, preaching—and in the disciplined use of violence.

Although he extolled the virtues of martyrdom, Fadlallah warned against reckless violence—against the surrender to emotion and impulse that, he claimed, characterized Palestinian violence. Legitimate and effective violence could proceed only from belief wedded to sober calculation. Each use of deadly force had to fit into an overall plan of liberation. Fadlallah knew that some Shi'ites were inspired by the theatrical acts of violence launched by Palestinians, but he regarded such acts as spasms of rage that produced nothing and signaled weakness. Thus he attempted to strike a balance between the fiery rhetoric needed to stir the Lebanese believers to self-sacrifice and the rational voice of a religious scholar whose duty it was to restrain the zealous and harness their willingness for sacrifice to a carefully considered plan of action. As it turned out, this balance was easier to achieve in Fadlallah himself than in his young recruits or his fellow clerics.

The violence employed by Hizbullah in the 1980s included campaigns to rid the Shi'ite regions of Lebanon of all foreign presence, operations to free Hizbullah members imprisoned by enemy governments in the Middle East and Europe, and battles against rival movements for control of neighborhoods in Beirut and villages in the south. The campaigns against foreigners included assassinations and massive bombings committed by "self-martyrs" who demolished the American embassy and its annex in two separate attacks in 1983 and 1984, exploded bombs in the barracks of American and French peacekeeping troops in 1983, and destroyed the command facilities of Israeli forces in the occupied south in 1982 and 1983. Hundreds of foreigners died in these suicide missions, including 241 U.S. Marines. Eventually, American and French forces retreated from Lebanon in the face of "Muslims who loved martyrdom," as one Hizbullah leader put it. The violence also pushed Israeli forces back to a narrow "security zone" in the south. Fadlallah boasted of Hizbullah guerrillas and their admirers among the oppressed Shi'ites "suddenly [being] filled with power" as a result of

their tactical use of small force and a zeal borne of faith "which the enemy could not confront with its tanks and airplanes."<sup>49</sup> This sense of power became even more intoxicating when tiny Hizbullah brought foreign governments to attention with highly publicized airline hijackings and hostage takings, thereby providing invaluable "demonstration effect" to other extremist cells, religious or otherwise.<sup>50</sup>

Hizbullah employed violence for a distinct political purpose: to bring the movement greater power to implement and enforce religious law. A set of religious constraints therefore accompanied this form of religious politics. The Shari'a must be upheld, Fadlallah taught, even in its defense. Thus the political goal had to be pursued in conformity with the considerable restrictions the Islamic law places on the use of force. In deference to this requirement, Hizbullah's cadres sought spiritual guidance on a host of tactical issues. "The Muslim fighter needed answers to many questions. Is resistance to the occupation obligatory on religious grounds? What about the question of self-martyrdom?" explained Shaykh 'Abd al-Karim 'Ubayd, a Hizbullah cleric abducted by Israel in 1989. "The law has an answer to these examples, which therefore are not political questions so much as legal questions . . . [therefore] these questions cannot be answered by the military commander, especially for the believing fighter, who must turn to an 'alim who is enthusiastic, responsive, and committed to resistance."<sup>51</sup>

Submission to Islamic law also freed Hizbullah's guerrillas from other types of moral constraints. Indifferent to world public opinion, they addressed their justifications solely to Muslims concerned that Hizbullah's actions qualify as a jihad, launched by the oppressed against the oppressors. Jihad had its own requirements, however. Islamic law is open to interpretation, Kramer comments, but it is not infinitely elastic. Some of its provisions compel acts of punishment or resistance, but others forbid violence against persons afforded protection by law. The religious scholars subjected Hizbullah's selection of targets and techniques to such criteria. In doing so, they forced Hizbullah to resist the temptation to deteriorate into one more sectarian Lebanese militia devoted to battling other sectarian militias. "Parties and movements and organizations begin as great ideas," warned Fadlallah, "and turn into narrow interests. Religion starts as a message from God and struggle, and turns into the interests of individuals and another kind of tribalism."<sup>52</sup>

Some of Hizbullah's acts of violence met these demanding criteria, Kramer notes, but others did not. The earliest bombings approximated the ideal in that they targeted armed, foreign intruders and thereby constituted legitimate jihad in the defense of Islam. The use of self-martyrs as terrorists<sup>53</sup> ensured that these attacks achieved pinpoint precision, avoiding indiscriminate slaughter. Islamic law prohibits suicide, however, raising the question of whether the deaths of the self-martyrs constituted suicide.<sup>54</sup> Fadlallah took the pragmatic approach: "The self-martyring operation is not permitted un-

less it can convulse the enemy. The believer cannot blow himself up unless the results will equal or exceed the [loss of the] soul of the believer." The ulema ultimately banned such operations.<sup>55</sup>

Regimented clandestine violence is difficult to maintain, however, because it assumes its own unpredictable dynamism that defies the "logic" of even the most carefully nuanced theology. When the religious scholars of Hizbullah refused to legitimate acts of sheer terror, such as the indiscriminate 1986 bombings in Paris that randomly killed people in shops and trains, the Lebanese Shi'ite plotters took care not to claim the bombings for Islam and enticed a Tunisian recruit to plant the explosives. (On other occasions the religious leaders prevailed. Hizbullah possessed the capability to launch similar campaigns abroad and was reported ready to do so on many occasions, but the ulema failed to give permission for the acts.)

The killing of Shi'ites by Shi'ites in Hizbullah's war with Amal presented another test case for the religious leadership. Some clerics were willing to rationalize the killing on the grounds that Amal had conspired with the enemies of Islam, had repudiated the leadership of Islamic Iran, and had protected Israel by barring Hizbullah's route to the south. Others, however, were not persuaded that these deeds justified killing, and they labeled the conflict with Amal a *fitna* ("dissension") rather than a jihad. The fighting nonetheless continued.

In the end, Kramer observes, the religious leadership helped inspire the violence and shaped its course but could not completely control or contain it. "Hizbullah was Islamic by day, Lebanese by night. . . . There were some principles, even of Islam, that the poor could not afford." The oppressed nations "do not have the technology and destructive weapons America and Europe have, so they must thus fight with special means of their own," Fadlallah explained to a reporter. "[We] recognize the right of nations to use every unconventional method to fight these aggressor nations, and do not regard what oppressed Muslims of the world do with primitive and unconventional means to confront aggressor powers as terrorism. We view this as religiously lawful warfare against the world's imperialist and domineering powers."<sup>56</sup>

Fadlallah, like other extremist religious leaders, sought to construe the violence as a moral and spiritual obligation within a religiously imagined world, the sustaining of which required its inhabitants to practice ritual prayer, compassion for the oppressed, service to the poor, and militant self-discipline in the pursuit of justice. Fadlallah liked to refer to himself as a liberationist. Yet he realized that sacred ends could be sullied by profane means and urged his followers to cleanse their own impurities, even as they played an instrumental role in driving godless foreign forces out of Lebanon. By currying the favor of Islamic Iran by its abductions of foreigners, securing the release of many of its own imprisoned members, and defeating its Shi'ite rivals, Hizbullah's program of violence served its political ambitions grandly. It also sparked a return to Islam among the Lebanese Shi'ite masses.<sup>57</sup> How faithfully it conformed to the

moral norms of the great tradition of Islam, however, remains a matter of intense debate among Shi'ite Muslims as well as outsiders looking in.

### The Proper and Improper Uses of "Fundamentalism"

Fundamentalism is best understood as both a religious response to the marginalization of religion and an accompanying pattern of religious activism with certain specifiable characteristics. While some militant religious movements or groups display characteristics of the pattern, a fundamentalist movement comes into being in response to, and remains primarily concerned with, the marginalization of the religion in question; such a movement intends to gain or restore religious hegemony. Fundamentalist power may be exercised over the religious enclave itself, in separation from the larger religious and political community, as in the cases of *haredi* (ultra-Orthodox) Judaism in Israel, and the separatist Christian fundamentalist community that emerged in the United States in the 1920s, or it may swell to dominate the larger religious and/or political community, as in the case of revolutionary Shi'ism in Khomeini's Iran. If fundamentalists cannot always avoid collaboration with outsiders, including secular actors, they nonetheless strive to remain independent of forces that would reduce religion to a position of equality with (or subordination to) ethnicity or nationalism as markers of group identity.

Some other militant religious movements and groups resemble fundamentalisms but draw different boundaries. They collaborate willingly and openly with secular nationalists and ethnic extremists and may share their goals. As in the former Yugoslavia, such religious movements and groups may be protecting a long-standing identification of religion and nation, and/or they may find themselves recruited or forced into unfamiliar political roles during periods of intense social crisis. As a result of manipulation by secular political leaders, or in the heat of competition with other religious or ethnic groups, they may take on characteristics of fundamentalism. If such movements are not primarily reactive to the erosion of religious identity (as our definition of fundamentalism stipulates), however, then they are not fundamentalist movements, strictly speaking.

The distinction between fundamentalists and religious extremists with ethnic or nationalist priorities is substantive rather than merely semantic. The differences between the respective political goals of the Sunni *jama'at* of Egypt and the Hindu nationalists of India, for example, derive in large part from the fact that the former seeks to impose Islamic law in its most comprehensive and binding form and to enforce "traditional" Islamic sociomoral norms on Egyptian society; while the latter, swept up in Indian communal and caste politics and mobilized by shrewd secular politicians, have had to manufacture the (rather vague) political content of *Hindutva* ("Hindu-ness"). This suggests, correctly, that Hinduism is relatively bereft, especially in

comparison to Islam (or Christianity or Judaism), of the natural religious resources for a fundamentalist movement—the legal structure, scriptural canon, and theodicy of God acting in history. Nor do the Hindu nationalists seem motivated primarily by concern about the marginalization of the Hindu religion, although that is a complex question requiring careful scrutiny.<sup>58</sup>

The distinction is important, moreover, because patterns of religious extremism vary according to the type of religious movement or group involved in the conflict. This is evident when one compares the ritualized rehearsals of the Hamas suicide bomber's death, the spiritual and military discipline of the Hizbullah cadres, or the Jewish underground to the amorphous collective violence of riots in Sri Lanka, India, and Pakistan involving Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims.

Ethnoreligious movements can harden into or prepare the ground for extremist fundamentalisms. Although segments of the Serbian Orthodox, Croatian Catholic, and Bosnian Muslim communities developed and manifested some characteristics of fundamentalism during the protracted conflict of the 1990s, for example, the religious extremism on display in the former Yugoslavia was, for the most part, of the ethnoreligious variety. The appearance on the scene of cadres of actual Muslim fundamentalists, however, aroused fears that the conflict might take on the aspects of "jihad" and "crusade" drawing more consistently and deeply on both Islamic and Christian sources of extremism.

While ideological and organizational traits usually associated with fundamentalism may appear in a diversity of extremist movements, in fact there are actually relatively few fundamentalist *movements* in the world today. The Fundamentalism Project of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (AAAS) conducted case studies of more than seventy-five religious movements that seemed to exhibit fundamentalist patterns of activism and concluded that ten movements or clusters of movements around the world exhibit the pattern in such fullness and consistency to be considered fundamentalist movements without qualification.<sup>59</sup>

The movements designated fundamentalist in the AAAS project included (1) multigenerational Protestant fundamentalism in North America; (2) *Comunione e Liberazione*, the Roman Catholic movement active in Italy and other parts of Europe; (3) international branches or offshoots of the original Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, including Hamas and Hassan Turabi's National Islamic Front of Sudan; (4) the Sunni *jama'at* extremist cells influenced by the ideology of Maududi and Qutb and led by charismatic figures such as Omar Abdel Rahman of Egypt and Marwan Hadid of Syria (Algeria's Islamist movement, as it developed in the 1970s and 1980s, was also influenced by this ideological strain, as are the aforementioned global terrorist networks of bin Laden); (5) Shi'ite movements in Iran (led by the Ayatollah Khomeini and his successors) and Lebanon (Hizbullah); (6) Maududi's *Jamaat-i-Islami* organi-

zation in southern Asia, which remains strongest in Pakistan; (7) the *haredi*, or ultra-Orthodox, Jewish enclaves in Israel and North America; (8) Habad, the movement of Lubavitcher Hasidim, another Jewish messianist enclave but with missionary outreach toward the larger Jewish community; (9) Gush Emunim, the extremist backbone of the Israeli settler movement; and (10) the Sikh extremists agitating for a separate state (Khalistan) in the Punjab.<sup>60</sup>

Other scholars dispute the particulars of this list, adding or subtracting candidates. With regard to the AAAS list, it is important to note that although all the movements were designated fundamentalist and displayed various degrees of intolerance toward outsiders, not all were violent. The violence of the *haredi* Jewish enclaves was primarily for defensive and enforcement purposes (i.e., directed toward wayward members of the enclave). The two Christian movements were, in the main, militant but not extremist. This may represent a principled sublimation of aggression, or it may reflect a necessary adaptation to societies in which the political culture and the rule of law restrict the violent intolerance that accompanies the fundamentalist pattern of activism elsewhere.

Religious violence is also perpetrated by extremist groups and movements that are not, strictly speaking, "fundamentalist." The April 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Office Building in Oklahoma City brought to public attention a network of indigenous, violent Christian white supremacist groups, including the American Christian Patriot movement and the Christian Identity movement, which are millenarian in outlook.<sup>61</sup> Unlike fundamentalists, who draw their primary ideological and organizational resources from historic, multigenerational religious communities or denominations, the Christian supremacist movements and "citizens' militias" recruit individuals on the basis of their radical political ideologies (e.g., opposition to the Internal Revenue Service, to legislation outlawing firearms, and to other expressions of the supposed despotism of the U.S. government). After the individual joins the militia, the turn to violence is then legitimized by appeals to arcane theological interpretations of scripture.<sup>62</sup>

Terrorist violence associated with religious cults also follows somewhat different patterns than fundamentalist violence. Like the white supremacist groups, cults stand at a distance from multigenerational organized religions. Cult members pledge obedience to an individual rather than a religious tradition or an organized religious body. Their devotion is often centered on a charismatic figure who claims special (sometimes divine) status and therefore exempts himself from the ordinary constraints of religious law, scripture, and tradition: prophecy is fulfilled in him. David Koresh, the leader of the Branch Davidians who died in the 1993 confrontation with federal agents in Waco, Texas, was such a figure, as was Chizuo Matsumoto, the partially blind owner of a chain of yoga schools in Japan. In 1987, after returning from a trip to the Himalayas with a "message" from God that he had been chosen to "lead God's

army," Matsumoto changed his name to Shoko Asahara and founded Aum Shinrikyo (Aum "Supreme Truth" sect), a highly idiosyncratic mixture of Buddhism and Hinduism fused with notions of apocalyptic redemption.<sup>63</sup>

Cult violence tends to follow one of two patterns. Caught up in fervid anticipation of the day of fulfillment, cult members turn inward on themselves, performing ritual suicides (as in the case of Jonestown, Guyana) or inciting apocalyptic confrontation with the forces of evil (as in Waco). At the other extreme, cult members foment indiscriminate violence against unsuspecting bystanders, as Aum Shinrikyo did by releasing deadly nerve gas in the Tokyo subway in March 1995, killing a dozen commuters and injuring nearly 4,000 others. Fundamentalist extremist movements and ethnoreligious nationalists, by contrast, are willing to sacrifice their own members, but they do so in pursuit of a concrete political goal (e.g., to implement religious law or to bring about political change favorable to the ethnic group). Neither self-annihilation nor indiscriminate violence (which might incite massive retaliation) is in the best interests of such movements, for survival over the long term is essential to achieving their goals.<sup>64</sup>

While the motives and patterns of violence differed according to the type of religious group involved, all the religious sects, militias, cults, and fundamentalist movements that spawned terrorist violence in the 1980s and 1990s shared characteristics that set religious extremists apart from secular terrorists.<sup>65</sup> Experts on terrorism describe religious violence as being more intense and leading to "considerably higher levels of fatalities than the relatively more discriminating and less lethal incidents of violence perpetrated by secular terrorist organizations."<sup>66</sup> Fundamentalists and religious nationalists, as mentioned, are concerned with concrete political objectives, including the group's survival. Yet their tendency to seek the elimination of broadly defined categories of enemies means that religious extremists are more inclined than many secular groups to risk large-scale violence as a necessary expedient for attaining their goals.<sup>67</sup>

### Islam and Religious Extremism

By any reckoning, Islam produces more contemporary fundamentalist movements than any other great religious tradition. Not all the Islamist movements are extremist, however; the Muslim Brotherhood organizations in Egypt and Jordan, for example, have renounced violence and pursue power through strictly political means. The reasons for the proliferation of Islamist movements are complex and deserve careful consideration.<sup>68</sup> Irresponsible, of course, are construals of Islamic fundamentalism that suggest that Islam is inherently intolerant and that religious extremism represents its true face. Sayyid Qutb's model of Islamic jihad appeals only to a tiny minority of Sunni Arabs. Equally erroneous is the notion that Islam somehow constitutes a

monolithic "civilization" that spans and effaces the particularities of local cultures. Muslims living in diverse cultural and social contexts tend to produce significantly different political expressions; both the Muslims of southern Asia and the Muslims of Turkey, for example, have different political cultures than Arab Muslims.<sup>69</sup> Given the vast geographical spread and long historical varieties of the experience of Muslim peoples, any totalizing or essentialist description of Islam (e.g., Islam is always opposed to free markets, Islam is essentially socialist in nature, and so on) is profoundly misleading.<sup>70</sup>

It is the so-called Islamist or Islamic fundamentalist movements, in fact, that seek to essentialize Islam. They envision Islam as a comprehensive and stable set of beliefs and practices that determines social, economic, and political attitudes and behavior. Thus they give the narrowest possible readings to Islamic concepts like *Tawhid* (the unity of God), *umma*, and jihad, presenting exclusivist interpretations as the unambiguous Word of Allah. "Ambivalence" is not in their vocabulary. Because Islam exists as a normative set of beliefs at the level of Islamic law, Islamists push for the full implementation of this normative legal system and for greater and greater levels of uniformity in the training of legal experts in the Islamic world; they chafe at what they see as the Shari'a's lack of actual influence over social and government behavior in so many purportedly Islamic nations. The extremists among them believe that they have the right to take life.<sup>71</sup>

Achievement of the measure of uniformity desired by the Islamists is unlikely. Even in Islamic Iran, after almost two decades of government efforts to project a comprehensive and stable Islamic identity, most Iranians would acknowledge that the contents of such an identity remain ambiguous. Even deeply committed Islamist groups can adopt political positions poles apart; for compelling evidence one need only review the broad spectrum of Islamist reaction to the Persian Gulf crisis of 1990–91.<sup>72</sup>

Although consistent coordination of purpose and program has eluded them, the various Islamist movements are not insignificant as a collective source of extremist violence. They increasingly cooperate with one another, transcending national boundaries and the traditional Sunni-Shi'ite divide (e.g., Iranian Revolutionary Guards trained both Sudanese militia and Hizbullah extremists). Individual movements exercise disproportionate influence in their respective societies through the manipulation of modern technology and mass communications. In the absence of alternative religious channels for effectively battling social injustice and expressing discontent, an extremist movement may be able to mobilize larger segments of the religious population.

In Palestine, Egypt, Sudan, Nigeria, Algeria, Iran, Pakistan, Indonesia, and Malaysia, among other Muslim societies, the "argument" that constitutes the living tradition of Islam addresses the challenge of preserving militant devotion to the straight path in an increasingly plural, (ir)religious world. We have glimpsed the forces on one side of that argument in the Qutbs, Fadlallahs,

and Turabis of the Muslim world. Less sensational in immediate impact and therefore less covered in the media are the interpreters of Islam who emphasize and seek to develop for contemporary believers its subtraditions on human rights and religious freedom.

The outcome of the struggle for the soul of Islam seems preordained: the winner will be "Islamic culture," not in the sense of a politically monolithic (and anti-Western) civilizational bloc but in the sense of the diverse, local, variable, and popular Islamic cultures—and Islams—constituting the great tradition.

Why, then, does Islam currently produce dozens of viable fundamentalist movements, several of which are extremist in orientation? Much ink has been spilled answering this question, and readers can consult the literature for the full range of opinions. Three explanations are relevant to our larger argument.

First, mass media have increased popular awareness of the social, economic, and political inequalities and injustices that abound in many Muslim societies and the corruption and mismanagement that bedevils their governments and state-run institutions. The growing popular sense of "relative deprivation" compared with other societies coincided with exhaustion and disgust at the string of failed secular or liberal "solutions," from Arab nationalism to Islamic socialism. Islamists blame the failures (including vulnerability to the Western colonial powers and, especially, military defeat at the hands of the Israelis) on the abandonment of Islam itself as the basis for the ordering of society. Furthermore, the Islamist "solution" is fundamentalist rather than nationalist in character because the glorious Islamic empires and civilizations that serve as precedents antedated or resisted the rise of the modern secular nation-state. Indeed, Islam's own internal religious vocabulary and conceptual repertoire conceives of a transnational, transregional spiritual community of believing Muslims as the basic political entity.

Second, Islam has been remarkably resistant, by comparison to some other religious traditions, to the differentiation and privatization processes accompanying secularization. (In this Islam resembles Roman Catholicism, which officially retained a largely medieval worldview until approximately the mid-1960s.) Often reference is made to the fact that Islam has not undergone a reformation like the one experienced by Christianity that led to a pronounced differentiation of sacred and secular, religious and political spheres. The Western slogan for this observation is often hurled as an accusation: "There is no 'church-state separation' in Islam." Certainly religion remains prior and privileged in Islamic societies in a distinctive and powerful way. Islamism, or Islamic fundamentalism, is in part a nervous reaction to the possibility and perception that dedication to the Islamization of the political sphere is slipping. Extremism is a by-product of that reaction but neither the necessary nor the only imaginable by-product. A growing and vocal minority of Muslim activists and scholars are demonstrating that Islam possesses the internal

resources to become one of the world's most effective advocates for peace and human rights without sacrificing viable and popular Islamic responses to social injustice and violent intolerance.

Finally, Islamist preachers and leaders have competed effectively with mainstream Islamic leaders for resources and respect. They have done so by demonstrating integrity, efficiency in service to the oppressed and needy, and militant dedication to their cause. Their recruitment, training, and retention of core activists is exemplary. Their exploitation of Islamic theological and religiolegal resources has been by turns crude and sophisticated but always effective. Unfortunately, intolerant preachers among the Islamists skillfully distort Islam's fundamental principles and teachings. Under their guidance the traditional promise of submission to the All-Powerful One ("Allahu Akbar!") becomes the chant of the bloodthirsty warrior persecuting the disobedient, and the Qur'anic promise of paradise for the righteous becomes an advertisement for would-be suicide bombers. Islam's traditional acceptance of the use of deadly force as an inevitable concomitant of life in a sinful world becomes in extremist discourse the pretense for the unleashing of jihad against infidels and apostates.

Extremist Islam will fail to realize its ultimate goals. As a result of that failure, ironically, it will continue to be a disruptive and destabilizing force in Islamic societies. It will fail because its vision of Islam stands little or no chance of being realized: the hope for conformity is doomed by the historical variation and internal pluralism in the Islamic tradition, by the consequent areas of radical disagreement among devout and revered interpreters of the tradition, and by the inability of extremists who reject cooperation with outsiders to deliver viable structural reforms to meliorate economic and social inequalities that haunt the majority of Muslims. Policies supportive of Islamists who reject extremism and seek to participate in an open civil society stand the best chance of undermining "fundamentalism" in its violent incarnations.<sup>73</sup>

### Religious Violence and the Sacred Nation

Fundamentalist ideas and patterns of activism are not the only source of religious extremism. As the pattern of religious violence in the former Yugoslavia makes clear, religious actors may identify their tradition so closely with the fate of a people or a nation that they perceive a threat to either as a threat to the sacred. In this indirect sense, such religious actors are concerned, like fundamentalists, with the marginalization of religion. Ethnoreligious extremists and religious nationalists may demonize their enemies, consider their own religious sources inerrant and their religious knowledge infallible, and interpret the crisis at hand as a decisive moment in the history of the faith—a time when exceptional acts are not only allowed but also required of the true believer. To the extent that they manifest these and other tendencies

associated with fundamentalism, such actors replicate a fundamentalist pattern of reaction to their enemies. But enemies, collaborators, motivations, objectives, timing, and use of violence are different when religion is subordinated to and placed at the service of ethnic or nationalist forces.

Extremist religion in either mode does not occur in a vacuum; its course of development is largely conditioned, if not altogether determined, by the particular setting in which it exists. The long-term structures of a society—its religious, racial, and ethnic composition; patterns of social and economic mobility; form of government; system of education and media; strength of civil society; relations with neighboring states; role in the international community; and so on—constitute a web of constraints and opportunities for any social movement that would thrive in that setting. Chance events—a bread riot, the cancellation of promised elections, or the assassination of a dictator—may trigger a change or exploit a weakness in the social structures and create an opportunity for the movement to emerge and grow (or the occasion of its decline). The internal dynamics of a religious movement, including its ideology, program of action, and organizational resources, change in interaction with these external environmental conditions. The leader of the extremist movement plays a crucial role in taking the pulse of the environment—reading the signs of the times, so to speak—and deciding when the time is ripe to strike. In other words, structure, chance, and the choices made by religious leaders combine to determine the emergence and development of extremist movements.<sup>74</sup>

While both the host religion and the sociopolitical environment shape the development of extremist fundamentalisms and religious nationalisms, the primary focus of fundamentalist energies is the host religion, which they seek to defend, bolster, reinterpret, and revive. While they are intensely concerned with the ills of the larger society—its corrupt morality and ungodly political culture—fundamentalists are convinced that its transformation will come only at the hands of the purified religion. Christian fundamentalists in the United States, for example, while seeking to transform the nation's political culture, see the cultivation of militance among true believers as the necessary first step. By contrast religious nationalists feel that the most direct route to purifying or strengthening the host religion is the establishment of a political collective within which the religion is privileged and its enemies disadvantaged. The Hindutva movement has configured itself as one such collective in India. Allied with secular politicians, its goal is the creation of a representative structure resembling the secular nation-state but pursuing a policy of civic intolerance toward "outsiders" (i.e., non-Hindus).

#### Hindu Nationalism: The Construction of Religion as a Political Collective

The violence associated with religious extremism has many causes and takes many forms: suicide bombings, terrorist hijackings, assassinations, rival

militias trading fire, guerrilla raids in a civil war, state violence against religious outsiders, and the mass destruction, looting, and murders accompanying urban riots. The distinctive justifications, purposes, and patterns of extremism among Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, and other ethnoreligious communities of the Indian subcontinent reflect the region's unique history, social composition, and contemporary political structures. Official and unofficial representatives of these religious communities are vying against one another for power, material rewards, and prestige at a time when southern Asian villages and parochial networks are giving way to larger regional and communal forms and when the nation-state as a unitary structure is challenged by the rise of politically aggressive communalisms.

Most commentators agree that the nation-building project of the post-colonial era provided opportunities for some communal groups to monopolize the state apparatus and to dominate, incorporate, or diminish other groups. Communalism attracts both majorities and minorities, elites and masses, who complain that the postindependence secular order has left them "victimized" and grasping for their share of educational opportunities, capital assets, occupational training, and jobs.

The proliferation of communal politics, in turn, has arisen out of the political arithmetic of majority rule: the competition for resources and benefits requires the formation of coalitions of "ethnic concerns and interests acting as a monolithic principle, vertically integrating a people differentiated by class."<sup>75</sup> Majoritarian dominance, experienced by an ethnoreligious minority as exploitation and oppression, also lies at the root of the conflicts in Northern Ireland and Sri Lanka.<sup>76</sup> In such settings religion can become a powerful means of binding together racial, linguistic, class, and territorial markers of identity—if the religion in question cultivates its boundary-setting capacities and sharpens its discriminatory edge. In the process of "hardening," religion provides not only the dedicated cadres of young extremists but also the public rituals and processions that bind religious and ethnonationalist sentiments together and become occasions for intolerance and arenas of collective violence.

In his recent study of mob violence in southern Asia, Stanley J. Tambiah explores the common patterns of urban riots occurring within this cultural and political context. Such outbreaks, unlike the relatively disciplined cadres and orchestrated mass movements of fundamentalists, are spasmodic expressions of the intense competition for access to the benefits of the modern state. These spirals of rage and panic, purposive in their looting, destruction of property, and other violent means of "leveling" society, involve broad segments of the population, including people whose politicized ethnic consciousness draws its intellectual and emotional sustenance from the territorial ties and mythohistorical claims of the subcontinent's major religions.

As the host religion for the nationalist movement flying the saffron flag of Hindustan, the imaginary Hindu nation, Hinduism is a weak vessel for reli-



gious fundamentalism. It lacks a strong historical sense of itself as an organized religion, with a body of revealed religious law and a concept of God acting dramatically within history to bring it to a definitive conclusion. Perhaps for the same reasons Hinduism does lend itself powerfully to the cause of nationalist movements constructed around the fluid categories of "religion" and "ethnicity" and drawing on a mix of secular and religious symbols and concepts, as well as religious and nonreligious actors.<sup>77</sup>

The banner of Hindu nationalism is carried by three organizations: the Rashtriya Svayamsevak Sangh (RSS; National Union of Volunteers), the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP; World Hindu Society), and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP; Indian People's Party). These groups are descended from the Hindu Mahasabha (Hindu Great Council), founded in 1915 in reaction to the formation of the Muslim League. V. D. Savarkar, the leader of the Hindu Mahasabha and author of the book *Hindutva*, formulated the doctrinal basis and ideological tenets of Hindu nationalism around the notion of Hindu racial, cultural, and religious superiority.

In 1925 Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, a Maharashtrian Brahman, founded the RSS in response, he said, to the ineffectiveness of Gandhi's tactics of nonviolence in the face of what Hedgewar described as India's long history of domination and exploitation by the Muslims and the British. Hedgewar and his successor, M. S. Golwarkar, led the organization from its founding until 1973; under their tutelage the RSS became a highly organized brotherhood established through a network of local paramilitary cadres called *shakhas*. The young RSS recruits—more than two million strong by the early 1990s—submit to demanding schedules of indoctrination and physical training. They wear saffron-colored uniforms, conduct military drills at sunrise, and undergo intensive training in forest encampments. Called *svayamsevaks*, by 1990 the recruits were organized in 25,000 *shakhas* in some 18,000 urban and rural centers across the country. The activities of these groups were supervised by 3,000 professional organizers, primarily celibate young men.<sup>78</sup>

Founded in 1964 at the initiative of the RSS, the VHP is a cultural organization led by seasoned officials of the RSS. Through the staging of huge religious processions designed to arouse popular fervor for "Hindu causes" and to intimidate Muslims and other "outsiders," the VHP promotes Hindu revival in the remote corners of India and among the Hindu diaspora overseas. Organized at two levels, with a "religious assembly" at the center directed by advisory committees made up of leaders from participating religious communities in the regions, the VHP boasts 300 district units and some 3,000 branches throughout India. Outside India it claims to have several thousand branches in twenty-three countries. In 1994 it reported more than 100,000 members, with 300 full-time workers, each dedicated to reaffirming "Hindu values." By sketching a broad and somewhat vague definition of Hindu values, the VHP seeks to transcend internal differences among Hindus, to bring secularized In-

dians back to the fold, and to reclaim the Untouchables to Hinduism. The VHP strategy is to propagate a coherent modern version of Hinduism as the national religion of India. Thus it downplays local differences in Hindu religious doctrine and represents Hinduism, ahistorically, as a single all-embracing ethnonational religious community including Jains, Buddhists, and Sikhs.

The Bharatiya Janata Party emerged in 1980 out of the Janata coalition that displaced the Indira Gandhi regime in 1977. Most of the BJP leaders were formed in the RSS, but as a political party contesting nationwide elections the BJP has attempted to appeal broadly to all Indians, including Sikhs and Muslims. In the 1996 national elections the BJP won the largest bloc of seats (160) in the Lok Sabha (the lower house of Parliament), thereby helping to topple the Congress Party from power for only the second time in the forty-nine years of Indian statehood. Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the head of the BJP, served as prime minister of India during the two weeks in May 1996 in which the party attempted unsuccessfully to form a minority government to rule the nation's 930 million people.<sup>79</sup> In March 1998 he became prime minister a second time after the BJP successfully contested the February 1998 elections, winning 178 of the 543 elected seats in the Lok Sabha. Again, Vajpayee was forced to form a coalition government that included regional parties long opposed to the religious nationalists' doctrine of Hindu supremacy.<sup>80</sup>

Vajpayee, a high-caste Brahmin, former Marxist, and member of the RSS, was perceived as a moderate who had led his party's turn to more inclusive policies and language. His public discourse usually employed the ambiguous rhetoric of a veteran politician but occasionally projected an aggressive religious nationalism that appealed to his militant Hindu followers. On the one hand he condemned Gandhi's assassination by a Hindu nationalist as a "terrible crime" and criticized the December 1992 destruction of the Babri mosque, the oldest Muslim shrine in India, by a Hindu mob as a "blunder of Himalayan proportions." At political rallies he made it clear that discrimination on the basis of religion "is not our way in India . . . not in our blood, or in our soil." On the other hand he often described India as essentially a Hindu nation that should enshrine "Hindu culture" at its core. In March 1998 he named Lal Krishna Advani to be his home minister, thereby giving police powers to a vociferous nationalist still under indictment on charges that he incited the Hindu mob to raze the Babri mosque.<sup>81</sup>

The Hindu nationalist movements combine fundamentalist-style religious reaction to secularism (represented by the Indian state under Congress Party governments) and pluralism (represented not only by the many religions of the subcontinent but especially by affirmative action measures for Muslims and lower-caste Hindus) with an ethnonationalist ideology that employs the rhetoric and imagery of blood, soil, and birth.<sup>82</sup> The RSS justifies its extremist tactics by appeals to the martial Kshatriya tradition of Hinduism in its Maharashtrian version.<sup>83</sup> The VHP follows a different pattern, emphasizing the

positive aspects of Hinduism through its revivals and inclusive missionary activity among Untouchables, Tribals, Sikhs, Buddhists, and Jains, excluding only the Muslims and the Christians. In their concern over the possible appeal of Islamic and Christian egalitarianism to the Untouchables, the VHP has also attacked caste hierarchy as socially divisive.<sup>84</sup>

Like "Hinduism" itself, Hindu nationalism is clearly a construct. It has borrowed from the Abrahamic traditions both an eschatology of ultimate destiny (with the Hindu nation depicted as the realization of the mythical Kingdom of the Lord Ram) and the notion of the elect, righteous ones (applied generally to the Aryan race and specifically to the celibate and highly disciplined staff of the RSS and VHP, many of whom are Brahmins or from the other "twice-born" castes). The Hindu groups reconstruct religion around nationalist themes in order to challenge the secular order in India. The central concept of *Hindutva*—"Hindu-ness"—defines the geographic, racial, and religious boundaries of Hinduism and India alike. It rejects the secular pluralist state and would replace it with a Hinduized state occupying the land within sacred boundaries and peopled by practicing Hindus.<sup>85</sup>

The inflammatory and diffuse appeals to "Hindu national pride" in the face of perceived Muslim encroachments have produced a great deal of uncontrolled mob violence. Hindu nationalists are not above calculating the potential advantages of such violence, including the opportunity that a crisis situation presents for recruiting and mobilizing young men.<sup>86</sup> They seek platforms for disseminating their ideology and create "events" that publicize their cause. Characteristically they redefine sacred land and sacred space in a controversial way, using the mass media coverage of their activism as a means of grabbing attention and mobilizing followers. The destruction of the Babri mosque followed a series of fiery speeches given by RSS leaders.

The VHP-BJP-RSS claimed that the site of the mosque is the exact spot where the Lord Ram was born; in commemoration of his birth, a temple called Ramjanambhoomi once stood at the site.<sup>87</sup> In March 1528 Babur, the founder of the Mughal dynasty, came to Ayodhya and ordered the Hindu temple demolished, constructing in its place a mosque that came to be known as the Babri Masjid. Although almost everything in this story is open to question—the historicity of Ram, the massive temple construction, and Babur's coming to Ayodhya—by the mid-nineteenth century these essentially mythical narratives were given the contours of historical fact. For a hundred years, however, it produced no more than a local contestation over facts and proprietorship. But it took on a national focus in 1985 when the VHP announced its intention to have Hindus conduct regular *puja* (worship) in the mosque. After this goal was achieved in February 1986, the VHP demanded that the mosque be replaced with a temple.

To rally public support for the cause, Advani, then president of the BJP, launched his infamous *rath yatra* (pilgrimage by chariot) on September 25,

1990. He announced that he would journey from Somnath in the province of Gujarat to Ayodhya in the state of Uttar Pradesh, covering a distance of 10,000 kilometers. His arrival in Ayodhya on October 30 was to coincide with the construction of the proposed Ramjanambhoomi temple. Before Advani could finish his pilgrimage, the Bihar state government arrested him; in Uttar Pradesh, Hindu activists were banned from travel to Ayodhya.<sup>88</sup> Although Advani failed to raze the mosque, his widely publicized chariot procession earned his party massive political mileage.<sup>89</sup> Emboldened by their success in the 1991 general elections, BJP leaders prepared for a final showdown, convinced that Hindu organizations now had a public mandate to dismantle the Babri Masjid. On the morning of December 6, 1992, over 200,000 Hindus descended on the tiny city of Ayodhya and in less than five hours tore down the Babri mosque. Thousands of Indian citizens, the majority of whom were Muslims, died in the subsequent rioting and Hindu-Muslim communal violence throughout the nation. The demolition of the mosque culminated a propaganda campaign that persuaded hundreds of thousands of Hindus that modern India is ruled by an Anglicized elite that has disowned its own heritage and religion in favor of secularism.<sup>90</sup>

While political machinations often incited these violent communal conflagrations, they quickly developed a momentum and destructiveness all their own. Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph, citing India's long preindependence history of tolerance and peaceful pluralism, describe this dynamic as the result of a deliberate strategy to foment "modern hatreds" for political gain. According to Hindu extremist discourse, the Muslim can remain in the nation only by accepting the hegemony of Hinduism. Such rhetoric led not only to the destruction of the Babri Masjid but also to some of the bloodiest pogroms against India's Muslims since independence.<sup>91</sup>

For our purposes it is important to note how skilled politicians, aided by religious actors, channel traditional religious practices and sensibilities to nationalist ends. The goal of the Hindu nationalists has been to transform a welter of highly localized religious cultures into a homogeneous national religious culture that can serve as the basis for political identity. What better way to effect this gradual transformation than by the appropriation of the familiar pilgrimage ritual and its message of a larger sacred world beyond the village? In a similar way, the campaign for "rebuilding" the temple in Ayodhya engaged the imagination of Hindus who live outside of India but now support the nationalist cause.

In this venture the VHP found support, ironically, from the secular state and its tourism bureau, which was responsible for catering to the needs of middle-class Hindus on pilgrimage. The national entertainment industry also had a financial interest in promoting the popular new mythologies of the Hindu nationalists, as indicated by the proliferation in the 1980s and early 1990s of religious stories in the Indian cinema and on Indian television. In

January 1987 the Hindu epic, the *Ramayana*, was televised as a serial and became the most watched television event in Indian history; it greatly enhanced the general public's knowledge of Ayodhya as Ram's birthplace and thus one of the most important places of pilgrimage in Uttar Pradesh.<sup>92</sup>

Despite the convergence of vested interests around the Ayodhya controversy, Peter van der Veer explains, it was more than a political trick or a conspiracy of manipulative business and political interests. Such interpretations overlook the importance of religious meaning and practice in the lives of millions of believers. Without their prior devotion to places and causes perceived as sacred, no mobilization campaign stands a chance of succeeding. But given such devotion, certain issues can be presented as "naturally" crucial to the "self-respect" of an individual or community. As the places where eternity intersects time and space, sacred sites bridge cosmology and private religious experience. A journey to one of these sites is "a ritual construction of self," van der Veer writes, that binds together the true believers and establishes a symbolic boundary separating them from outsiders. After the ritual pilgrimage, however, the boundary remains ambiguous, capable of being contested and renegotiated. How does the pilgrimage change my attitudes toward others? What ought I do in light of this religious experience?

In the gap between experience and interpretation, religious nationalists and fundamentalists find their opening. They come with cosmologies, doctrines, ideologies, and moral imperatives—all hallowed by their purportedly ancient origins. Sacred sites are alleged to transcend history, but it is also clear that over the course of history these sites are "invented" and "constructed" by religious elites and competing religious movements.

#### Are Liberationist Warriors Religious Extremists?

A challenge could be raised at this point: Are we simply labeling as "fundamentalist" and "religious nationalist" those whose resort to violence comes in the service of political objectives with which we disagree? Is state-sponsored violence against dissidents, for example, less morally objectionable than the kind of "religious terrorism" practiced by Hizbullah? Guaranteeing the survival of Lebanese Shi'ites and defending their rights was the "just cause" of the Party of God. Bhindranwale, Qutb, bin Laden, and the rabbis of Gush Emunim made similar claims to their respective followers.

The proponents of Christian liberation theology, described by its opponents as a "Bible and bazooka" Christianity, endorsed "what for many is a dubious even nihilistic right to violence, where ultimate homage is rendered to the cannon instead of the crucifix."<sup>93</sup> Yet most liberationists, denying the accusation of extremism, argued that they were not intolerant of outsiders but religiously plural and inclusive in their quest for social justice.

Liberation theology's rationale for violence began with restating the question as the moral and religious legitimacy of *counterviolence*. The violence of the oppressed was thereby projected as a response to a prior, "original" violence of the oppressor. Thus, as in South Africa, liberation theologians employed elements of just-war theory, emphasizing the defensive nature of the counterviolence. Recent popes have rejected this argument, however. Pope Paul VI (1963–78 as pope) ruled out violence as a means of fighting injustice:

We are obliged to state and reaffirm that violence is neither Christian nor evangelical, and that brusque, violent structural changes will be false, ineffective in themselves, and certainly inconsistent with the dignity of the people.<sup>94</sup>

The Latin American bishops echoed the pontiff:

The sort of liberation we are talking about knows how to use evangelical means, which have their own distinctive efficacy. It does not resort to violence of any sort, or to the dialectics of class struggle. Instead it relies on the vigorous energy and activity of Christians, who are moved by the Spirit to respond to the cries of countless millions of their brothers and sisters.<sup>95</sup>

The year 1968 was a turning point in the Roman Catholic debate over the use of violence in a just cause. Paul VI's encyclical *Populorum progressio* addressed the problem of oppression in the developing world, recognizing that "men are easily tempted to remove by force the injustice done to human dignity." While the pope characterized nondemocratic and economically inegalitarian regimes as unjust, he equated *violence* against such regimes with insurrection, a form of lawlessness, he argued, that produces new and worse injustices and disorders. That same year, however, the Roman Catholic bishops meeting at Medellín, Colombia, affirmed that Christians must pursue political justice, an official statement that seemed to legitimate the protest movement inspired by liberation theology.

Liberation theologians also took heart when a synod of Catholic bishops, meeting in Rome in 1971, hailed "action on behalf of justice" and "the liberation of people from every form of oppression" as central to the church's mission.<sup>96</sup> The French priest René Laurentin observed the following year that "violence has taken on considerable importance today as a means of exorcising underdevelopment." Among politically engaged Christians, an "about-face has occurred in recent years," he claimed. "Concerned Christians who, right up to the eve of World War II were pacifists and advocates of nonviolence, today speak only of violence."<sup>97</sup>

Laurentin attributed the shift in part to the influence of the French philosopher Emmanuel Mounier, who in the 1930s developed the distinction between institutional violence and insurrectional violence, between established disorder and actions meant to reestablish order. Rehearsing a theme

also found in fundamentalist discourse—the recourse to religious violence as a response to massive systemic violence perpetrated by the powers-that-be—Mounier had described the formation of the revolutionary as a spiritual awakening. “Our revolutionary soul catches fire from the law of perfection and from the continual violence of the Kingdom of God,” he wrote. “We must rid ourselves once and for all of our distorted idea of insurrections which is the chief impediment to a clear understanding of the situation today.” People focus too much on acts of violence, he continued, “which prevents them from seeing that more often there are *states* of violence—as when there are millions of men out of work, and dying and being dehumanized, without visible barricades and within the established order today—and that just as the tyrant is the real subversive, so real violence, in the hateful sense of the word, is perpetuated by such a system.”<sup>98</sup> Mounier’s perspective was confirmed for a generation of Latin American liberationists, Laurentin notes, whose experiences paralleled those of the French Resistance, “when violent men were on the side of human values and freedom while the supporters of the established order found themselves the accomplices of a regime of occupation, police repression, and denunciation. Order proved to be ambiguous and subversive.”<sup>99</sup>

Protestant theologian José Miguez Bonino of Buenos Aires supported the reasoning of the Catholic bishops at Medellín and praised the treatises of the liberation theologians. Recognizing the fact of class struggle, he argued, is a precondition for the poor achieving their own identity and the first step in eliminating the evil of class struggle itself. This evil cannot be eliminated, however, without eliminating the system that produces it, and it is unrealistic to think this can be done without “a measure of violence,” however “repugnant” to the Christian conscience.<sup>100</sup> It is possible to push this perspective to extremes, Bonino acknowledged, by viewing violence “as an ultimate principle of creation, valid in itself because it is, *par excellence*, the destruction of all objectifications.”<sup>101</sup>

Both of these views—violence as antithetical to the life of the Christian and violence as part of the dynamic process by which “justice is established amid the tensions of history”—are present in the biblical and ecclesiastical traditions. The Bible portrays violence “not as a general form of human conduct which has to be accepted or rejected as such, but as an element of God’s announcement-commandment, as concrete acts which must be carried out or avoided.” Moreover, Bonino argued, Christians cannot be neutral regarding the exercise of violence; they are always already involved in a situation tainted by sin and injustice: “My violence is direct or indirect, institutional or insurrectional, conscious or unconscious. But it is violence; it objectively produces victims, whether I intend it subjectively or not.” Even if violence is an inappropriate choice for the Christian—that is, if the cost in human suffering is too great to justify whatever may be gained—the Christian must also acknowledge that this very consideration that leads him to reject absolute vio-

lence also leads him to reject absolute pacifism: “Nonviolence has also to ask what is the human cost in lives, suffering, paralyzing frustration, dehumanization, and the injection of slave-consciousness. We pay for our choice of means for change.”<sup>102</sup>

The liberationist struggle reflects religion’s ambivalent attitude toward violence. In some respects the attitudes we are calling “fundamentalist” and “liberationist” seem to converge.<sup>103</sup> The tendency toward “exceptionalism” is one example. Fundamentalists, as noted, claim that true believers are involved in a cosmic battle, entering its decisive phase, in which violence on behalf of the righteous is a sacred obligation. Liberationists sometimes employ a similar kind of theological and moral reasoning. Christians who supported the Sandinistas in Nicaragua portrayed the revolutionary struggle in Manichean terms, depicting it as a situation in which the normal rules of engagement did not apply. The liberationist priest Ernesto Cardenal contended that the Sandinista struggle was “totally different from the case of political parties that are all trying to come to power.” The faithful Christian, he suggested, must choose between good and evil; there can be no middle ground. “Either you’re with the slaughtered or you’re with the slaughterers,” Fr. Cardenal said in explaining his choice to join the revolutionaries. “From a gospel point of view, I don’t think there was any other legitimate option we could have made.”<sup>104</sup>

### Conclusion: Extremist Leaders and Followers

Having surveyed violent patterns of response to religious marginalization (“fundamentalism”), ethnonationalist competition (“religious nationalism”), and class struggle (“liberationism”), I return to the questions that opened this chapter: Why do some religious actors become intolerant of outsiders and turn violent against them? What roles do religious leaders play in this process? What is the relationship between extremism and religious education and spiritual formation?

If we accept these actors as genuinely religious, we acknowledge that they are acting in faith—belief in things unseen. In the act of faith one abandons oneself to the divine, daring an existential leap into the unknown. The act is based in trust, not certainty. Initially it is seldom an intellectual assent to a specific set of precepts and propositions, less a commitment to a detailed set of practices and duties. In faith a relationship has been joined; its terms remain to be specified.

The new convert is initiated into a community of common life, at the head of which is the authorized interpreter of religious experience, the religious leader: the guru, rabbi, priest, mullah, minister, lay preacher, or religious sage. It is the religious leader and his inner core of disciples who help to give shape and concrete content to the individual’s experience of the sacred, to his leap

of faith. In the case of religious communities poised for political action, it is the religious leader who translates belief into ideology.

If religious belief, ideology, and leadership are central to the process of directing a community toward peace or conflict, the most significant environmental structure is the host religion of the movement; the religious leader, as an orthodox believer, is both empowered and constrained by the historic teachings and practices of his faith. Thus, the relationship between religious leaders and their followers depends not only on their respective (or shared) socioeconomic profiles and political circumstances but also on their respective backgrounds in religious education and formation.

Central to our argument is the question of levels of religious education and spiritual formation. Here the warning against overgeneralizing is especially pertinent, lest readers conclude that the "solution" to religious extremism lies in a simple formula: in order to undermine the appeal and legitimacy of extremist religious leaders, simply provide more systematic and excellent programs in religious education and spiritual formation. It is true that many charismatic extremist leaders are regarded by their peers as poorly trained mediocrities in matters religiolegal and theological (the charge has been leveled against the Sikh radical Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, the Sunni extremist Shaykh Omar Abdel Rahman, and the Hindu nationalist L. K. Advani, among others). And, in the ethnoreligious extremism of the former Yugoslavia and the religious nationalisms of India and Northern Ireland, the religious sensibility of the rank and file is a volatile mix of fervor for the homeland, the songs and stories of folk religion wedded to a nationalist myth, racial and cultural stereotypes constructed by manipulative media or politicians, and elements of formal religious education. In other settings, however, the inner core of a movement is professionally trained in matters religious. The adherents of the Gush Emunim, for example, are highly sophisticated theologically and scripturally; they embrace a version of Jewish fundamentalist ideology in large part because they are persuaded by the intellectually rigorous and satisfying way in which it vividly interprets Jewish history and breaks open the messianic tradition as the relevant guide for concrete political action.

One can readily see the irony of this situation. Fundamentalisms arise in response to the perceived "loss of religious moorings," but they also depend on and exploit the victims of that loss. Hamas, for example, recruits teens and forms them systematically in a version of Islam that has been narrowed for ideological purposes—its extremist edge sharply honed, its compassionate practices reserved exclusively for the righteous inner core.

If the familiar image of the charismatic man of religion exercising spiritual authority over disciplined cadres of true believers is somewhat inflated and stereotypical, it nonetheless projects a defining mark of religious extremism. Of course, some acts of violence in the name of religion are mere hooliganism, perpetrated by peripheral members or bandwagon jumpers who join the

movement to exploit its fervor and direct its resources to their own political ends. Nonetheless, the hard core of extremist movements are true believers, confident that their priest, rabbi, or 'alim speaks the words of revealed truth. Ethnoreligious or religious nationalist movements, while closely allied to and dependent on secular ethnic and nationalist politicians, also rely on authoritarian religious leaders to garb political protest in a religious idiom capable of mobilizing a popular army of activists.

As we have seen, different sociopolitical contexts partly account for the existence of various modes of extremist religion (rather than one universal mode). Whether the movement is "fundamentalist," "liberationist," or "religious nationalist," however, there are certain recurrent external conditions—ineffective or inaccessible political institutions, a deteriorating or structurally unfair economy, discrimination on the basis of religion—that trigger or magnify the tendency of intolerant religious actors to employ extremist violence. It is easier to describe the violence as "defensive," and therefore morally legitimate, when such unjust conditions persist.<sup>105</sup>

A violated social compact may also provide extremist movements with greater access to, and plausibility within, the larger society. Herein lies the power of the charismatic leader over people whose zeal for justice—or merely for retaliation—exceeds their mastery of the religious tradition. The facile invocation of religious symbols and stories can exacerbate ethnic tensions and foster a social climate conducive to riots, mob violence, or the random beatings and killings known as hate crimes. Indeed, most people who do violence in the name of religion or with religious motivations are not members of an extremist movement or organization. But they often sympathize with extremist propaganda, and they may identify themselves as the "victims" portrayed by the intolerant religious leader.<sup>106</sup>

Yet even the so-called true believers, those who aspire to religious virtuosity, can be easily duped. Referring to the mass suicide in Guyana orchestrated by cult leader Jim Jones, Stanley Hauerwas writes, "What is tragic is that no one was well-enough schooled in a normative tradition to challenge Jones's understanding of God or Jesus. A people who have lost any sense of how religious traditions are capable of [both] truth and falsity can easily fall prey to the worst religious claims, having lost the religious moorings that might provide them with discriminating power."<sup>107</sup>

Even when they are quite knowledgeable, the so-called true believers might be trained in a narrow and legalistic version of an inheritance richer and more ambiguously complex than they imagine or would be prepared to acknowledge.

The response to religious extremism, accordingly, is not merely religious education per se, but formation in the tradition's beliefs and practices that reinforce and contextualize the priority given to peace and reconciliation. Such training, in addition to preparing religious actors to participate in conflict

transformation, identifies resources for contesting religious extremism. In the next two chapters I examine movements and individuals in which militant religious commitment is expressed and embodied in practices of compassion and peacemaking—in ways, that is, that counter and discredit the extremist's resort to violence.