

RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM AND THE NEW CONFLICT OF RELIGIONS

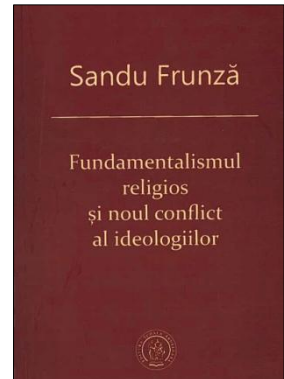
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Review of: Sandu Frunză, *Fundamentalismul religios și noul conflict al religiilor*, Ediția a II-a, revizuită și adăugită, Editura Școala Ardeleană, Cluj Napoca, 2015

The recent meeting between Pope Francis and the Russian patriarch Kyrill has sparked worldwide conversations of the unity of Christianity, given the fact that this has been the first meeting since the Great Schism of 1054. Pope Francis was quoted saying to his counterpart: “We are brothers” (The Guardian, 2016). Moreover, there have been recent conversations related to the possibility of a worldwide ecumenical movement, in the midst of intercultural and interreligious dialogue sparked by the increased interactions between cultures as a result of globalization (Brie, 2008).

In the midst of all these conversations and the resurgence of religious and moral aspects in the socio-political conversations, Sandu Frunză’s provides a different perspective of religion and unity, namely religious ideology, sparked by different mutations of man and society in the modern and post-modern era. While the Pope talks about unity and the brotherhood of Christians, news stories talk about fundamentalists and terrorists killing in the name of a perverted view of Islam. The book provides a perspective on the other side of ecumenism, namely religious fundamentalism and religious ideologies, which generate conflicts. Even if these two are indeed opposed points of view on religious manifestation, they do have a crucial thing in common: they are basic facets of the way people have perceived Christianity, in this example, first as a single religion, and then as a mission to spread it across the world with any means necessary (see the Crusades).

In this respect, the purpose of the book is to provide a comprehensive view on how modern world has affected religions, myths and symbols and how the world we live in has created its own myths and ideologies. Likewise, it analyzes with clear-cut examples the resurgence of fundamentalism in contemporary times. One of the most fascinating aspects of this book is not only the connection made between religion, ideology and modern times, but rather the analysis of religious fundamentalism, made with coherent arguments and examples from modern times. As opposed to the modern perception portrayed in the media that fundamentalism refers strictly to Islamic extremists and fundamentalist ideologies, the author emphasizes both Christian and Jewish fundamentalism in modern times, starting from the assertion that the term ‘fundamentalism’ has roots in American Christianity, as “any traditional militant religious movement”, with a positive connotation (Frunză, 2015).



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The second edition of *Fundamentalismul religios și noul conflict al ideologiilor* [Religious fundamentalism and the new conflict of ideologies] is structured into six main parts, centered around the main themes of the book, namely: part one, focused on myth, religion and identity; part 2, entitled Ideology as a secularized religion and religion as ideology; part 3, aspects related to Christian fundamentalism; part 4, aspects related to Jewish fundamentalism; part 5, on aspects related to Islamic fundamentalism; part 6, on religious ideologies, multiculturalism and global ideology.

The first parts of the book are focused on theoretical aspects related to myth, religion and ideology and the author uses numerous theoretical background to decipher the role of myths and symbols in modern times. The profane character of modern society can deconstruct myths, altering man's relation to reality, hence its identity. But the author postulates that the modern world has created its own myths, for instance as "the tendency of any ideological body to create a complete mythology around individuals who hold on to power" (Frunză, 2015). Regarding the relation between myth and power, he asserts that he who holds power "enjoys a certain degree of purity, which separate him of the common condition and places him at the limit between the sacred and the profane". The connection between myth, power and ideology is made by the author by stating that "in modern political theory, the ideological support of power is made through mechanisms and behaviors taken from theological thinking". In modern times, myth and symbols have been replaced or rather have been subsumed in ideologies, defined broadly as "a world view which has become the foundation for the essential order of a human being and that is manifested as a theological system expressing integrality and total prestige". Also, its imagery is poorly constructed, but it bears the same roles as the imagery of a myth, "it calls to action".

Then, the author discusses the theoretical level of the connection between religion, ideology and modern society, by accepting the fact that ideology has moved more to the political sphere, while the church still remains influential, but the "call to action" specific to ideologies has faded in modern society. Discussing religious and secular ideology, the author focuses on their attempts of recovering conscience by the critique of religion (for instance, in the case of Marx), as well as its revolutionary character. Then, the main part of the research focuses on fundamentalism, specifically religious fundamentalism, which has risen in part due to the rejection of the mythical view of religion, specific to Western mentality: "the secularization of modern world causes religion to be expressed only as a form of social connection or, more simply put, a form of celebration of the community" (Frunză, 2015). We see in the book that the rise of fundamentalism has also other causes, such as the critique of secularization and globalization.

The basic feature of fundamentalism is its militant character against "any thing threatening their identity" or, otherwise, fundamentalists tend to defend a specific world view. Moreover, the author also lists some features of fundamentalism, such as: a community meant to defend authentic tradition, it refuses to harmonize tradition and rejects Western ideologies, it has an ambiguous attitude regarding science and progress, in the sense that they disapprove modernity, but they use the tools of modernity, such as the Internet, to achieve their purpose.

Getting back to religious unity promoted by Pope Francis and his Orthodox counterpart, the aim of these types of initiatives and interreligious dialogue is almost the same as the aims of fundamentalists, but the means are different. The examples presented in this book are focused on analyzing the means used by fundamentalists to achieve their aim of instituting their religion worldwide.

According to the author, fundamentalism initially had a positive connotation, but it has been since degraded, as the first fundamentalists reacted to the crisis brought about by modernity in religious community and their proposed the return to “the fundamentals” of the Scripture. What is fascinating about Christian fundamentalism and the examples presented in the book is the ambivalent relation fundamentalists have with violence in its social endeavors. Some examples are given in the book related to crimes against medical doctors that had performed abortions. Also, across the years, their *modus operandi* has evolved to promote sabotages of the legislative process in order to include their world view into law, especially in the case of pro-life movements. Their one truth is the Scripture and they abide by it with any means necessary. American fundamentalists are the most prominent ones, but they are now called Evangelicals, due to the negative connotation that fundamentalism has received across the years. American Christian fundamentalism also proclaims that the United States is new Israel and its mission is to expand Christian theocracy globally, which is actually not a big chance in American foreign policy in general, considering its role at the “world’s soldier” and its civilizing mission assumed especially during the most recent Bush presidency.

On Judaic fundamentalism, the author provides a theoretical and historical background of the coagulation of the Jewish population into a political community and national ideology, especially considering the fact that “Judaism is not a monolithic religion”. Focusing on the issues of Zionism, as well as Jerusalem, the center of three major religions, he emphasizes the evolution of the Jewish political community that culminated with the creation of the state of Israel. Zionism, the main Jewish ideology, is defined in the book as an ideology that militates for the secularization of social and political life, in order to adapt to the ages. Secular Zionism, whose main goal was to create the state of Israel, awoke certain fundamentalist ideologies, namely the conservative fundamentalism and innovative fundamentalism, whose main enemy is indeed secularization. However, they have different means of tackling this, some of which are very interesting and merit an emphasis. For instance, *Naturei Karta*, a conservative group, considered that the Zionists influenced destiny when they created Israel, and they feel that the state of Israel would be legitimate only when it would be the result of the Messiah’s actions. Hence, the state of Israel will bring more evil to Judaism and will threaten its existence. In this sense, their view is similar to the Muslim points of view, which is fascinating. On the same issue of the existence of the state of Israel, the radical or innovative fundamentalists have a different view, in that they respect the state as a creation of God. This difference in world views is prevalent for other issues, but what is clear is that they both oppose secular Zionism.

On Islamic fundamentalism, the authors delves into the insides of groups, such as ISIL, to explore its manifestations. In this sense, the chapter relies of current issues that appear almost daily in the news to explore fundamentalism in its Islamic form, which is extremely useful for the reader. The rise of Islamic fundamentalism or political Islam is connected to the failure of secular modernization of the society in Arab states, such as Egypt. Once again, political Islam is opposed to Western values, which are focused on secularization. Especially in the media, Islam is portrayed as being extremely violent, which has determined certain misconceptions, which the authors tackles when he refers to violence. Violent Islamic fundamentalists represent the minority and do not represent their religion as such. Indeed, fundamentalists invoke Jihad when they refer to violent acts, but Jihad refers mostly to a continuous process of spiritualization, which can take place inside a human, but it can also refer to taking action against unjust leaders. In terms of violence,

Jihad is the most important political weapon fundamentalists have against the West. The author discusses and analyses fundamentalism starting from the Iranian Revolution at the end of the 70s and focuses on two terrorist organizations and how they exploit their fundamentalist ideologies to pervert the meaning of Jihad. Firstly, there is Al-Qaida, which focuses on Jihad as a political and economic destruction of the West, while organizations like ISIL use Jihad as a show for the Western civilization. The author argues that, in this case, the Western media and ISIL are feeding each other's attention; as the media maintains its focus on ISIL and shows their violence, the media show increases, while ISIL continues its assault with violence.

Christian, Judaic and Islamic fundamentalism have in common the use of violence in order to convey their points. Moreover, the rise of all these forms of fundamentalism responds to a perceived threat mostly from the Western civilization. This can be corroborated with Huntington's theory on the clash of civilization, which lists globalization and the increasing contact between cultures as one of the reasons for this clash. In this context, the last part of the book focuses on multiculturalism, globalization and tolerance as secular tendencies, which have transformed modern society and the influence of religion in society. Religion can become politicized, which has indeed happened, according to the author. It is perverted into an ideology that uses violence to make its point, like Jihad has become a form of political communication nowadays.

Concluding, this book offers a comprehensive view on the relation between religion and ideology, emphasizing how the perversion of religion can become fundamentalism. Globalization offers the global stage for these manifestations, but it has become more of a battlefield for religious ideologies that fight themselves under the umbrella of a single religion, such as the opposition between Judaic fundamentalists, and between different religious ideologies and the Western civilization. In this context, discussions about religious unity seem rather futile.

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