

Wojciech Maksymiuk

Uniwersytet Przyrodniczo-Humanistyczny, Siedlce

ESSENCE AND NATURE OF CONTEMPORARY RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM AS A THREAT TO THE INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

ABSTRACT

The first association that comes to mind after hearing the phrase „contemporary religious fundamentalism” are usually terrorist attacks made by Islamic fighters in western countries. However, it is a fact, that today’s religious fundamentalism is no longer connected only with religion. Its protestant roots are reaching back previous centuries. Also, fundamentalism itself was often a base to terror acts carried out by some radical groups. In this article, author brings closer the concept of fundamentalism itself, points the genesis of religious fundamentalism, and explains its contemporary essence, and nature.

Key words:

contemporary religious fundamentalism, international security, religion, politics, society

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary religious fundamentalism is an extremely complex phenomenon, despite of some simple thoughts that appear in our minds when we hear that phrase. Those simplifies are not appear without the reason. In XXI century we were witnesses of many terrorism acts made by Islamic fighters. They had political aims, but religious motivations. For example we can point World Trade Center attacks in New York, September 11th 2001, bombs at trains in Madrid on March 11th 2004, and London on 7th, and 2nd July 2005. Understanding nature of contemporary religious fundamentalism requires knowledge about its sources, essence, and character. To achieve that, we do not only need to go back to origins of religious fundamentalism phenomenon, but also we have to define the word „fundamentalism”.

When trying to understand reasons, why contemporary religious fundamentalism is a threat to international security, one should to keep in mind that original religions, the source of further fundamental movements, are not incite for violence. The fundamentalists, who are using selected semi-truths are making them aggressive. The purpose of this article is to point out origins, and characteristics of religious fundamentalisms itself, to highlight phenomena, that some traditional religious values, after manipulation, are being used by fundamentalists as a fighting tool. In the article, author will solve the research problem, which is contained in the question: what are the characteristics of contemporary religious fundamentalism, and what is its essence, and nature due to threats to international security?

FUNDAMENTALIZM – AREA AND BOUNDARIES OF THE CONCEPT

To be able to correctly point sense, and character of contemporary religious fundamentalism, it is necessary to explain what the word „fundamentalism” means itself. Albert Pawłowski refuses opinion, that fundamentalism bases are exclusively religious, and he defines it as:

„[...] pick of ideas dominating political essence (thoughts, attitudes, ideologies, doctrines, programs, social movement, or governance methods – in all of them at the same time, or only in some of them), which essence is value system aspiring to be universal, and necessary to achieve happiness in describable time and space, also containing self-realization directive regardless of conditions”⁴⁵.

Author of this definition points out 5 phases of fundamentalism development:

- Phase of *thoughts* – time, when bases, and opinions has its beginnings, which were not spread out before.
- Phase of *ideology* – time, when thoughts, and opinions are becoming ideas, and main subject of some group, but are not spread yet.
- Phase of *doctrine* – time when ideas become organized, and systematized.

⁴⁵ A. Pawłowski, *Czym jest współczesny fundamentalizm*, [at:] *Fundamentalizm współczesny*, edit. A. Pawłowski, Zielona Góra 1994, p. 8.

- Phase of *movement* – time when organized, and systematized doctrines, or ideas achieve high level of consistency, and are being spread outside the group where they are born.
- Phase of *fundamentalistic totalism of power*⁴⁶.

Despite of the area where one wants to think about fundamentalism, there are some synonyms connected with that word, such as „origins”, „beginnings”, „source”, „identity”⁴⁷. For most European countries the word „fundamentalism” is an English⁴⁸ *cliché*. Making the proper definition of the word “fundamentalism” should contain several areas of social activity, and other phenomena, which can be described as fundamentalist, such as social, political and religious movements, and its doctrinal bases proclaiming return to conservative values while lack of its interpretation⁴⁹. Enzo Pace, and Piero Stefani in their considerations say, that if we want to set definitional boundaries of fundamentalism, we need to remember three rules. The first of them assumes, that talking about fundamentalism should happen only in the plural – it is because of that fundamentalisms has their origins in mixed environments, and different contexts (cultural and religious), so using plural form allows to mark that fact in the tone of that word. Secondly, fundamentalism cannot be assigned only to most radical forms of expressing ideas, it also cannot be understand as simple as a fanaticism, because groups which created it does not refer to doctrines, or ideologies referred to using simple violence in opposition to spread opinions. Thirdly, and finally, fundamentalisms has their reasons in one of the great religion (Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Sikhism), and they preach return to forgotten in actual times, conservative values, and giving them dominant position. So it can be understand as political role of religion⁵⁰.

Franciszek Mincer draws attention to the fact, that sometimes we can observe some differences between doctrine of specific group, and their holy books provisions. That is why common man can see fundamentalists unlikely. For example, opponents of Islamists can consider them in negative way because of polygamy, women discrimination, or circumcision of boys. Meanwhile prophet Mohammed accepted polygamy, he did not do it to treat women as object, but to

⁴⁶ Ibidem.

⁴⁷ Ks. A. Bronk, „Fundamentalizm”: sensy i dziedziny użycia, [at:] *Fundamentalizm i kultury*, edit. Z. Karpus, M. Szulakiewicz, Toruń 2005, p. 22.

⁴⁸ J. Sielski, *Fanatyzm i fundamentalizm w polityce*, [at:] *Fundamentalizm i kultury...*, p. 322.

⁴⁹ Ks. A. Bronk, „Fundamentalizm”: sensy i dziedziny..., p.21.

⁵⁰ E. Pace, P. Stefani, *Współczesny fundamentalizm religijny*, Kraków 2002, pp. 21-23.

help them finding a new man in their lives, when late one died in the battle⁵¹. In *Quran* circumcision of boys is not even mentioned, and seeing as traditional practice of hiding women's faces came to Arabia after Mohammed's death.

ORIGINS OF CONTEMPORARY RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM

Precursors of contemporary religious fundamentalism are being considered American protestants movements. They started at the end of the 19th century. In the time of industrial revolution, religious organizations had to adapt their programs to a changing reality. Liberal part of American protestants paid attention to fact, that in dynamically developing world, Holy Bible could not be longer seen as a source of indisputable facts. It should be rather considered as set of metaphors. As an example it can be taken biblical creation of first man, which become false with the statement of the science achievements⁵².

In response to these postulates had been publishing a bunch of traditional essays, called „The Fundamentals of Faith”. They became a sort of set of most important ideological stances, and operating principles. Theirs basis was determined by the statement, that everything that questions whatever is in Holy Bible, is a sin, because Bible is the one, and the only source of God's will. Second statement pointed, that the World will become worse and worse, till the Final Judgment will come. Also, there was a rule, that defined fundamentalists behavior – separatism. Fundamentalists tried to stand out from the others religious organizations instead of fighting against them – they tried to set clear border between „us – righteous”, and „them – opponents”⁵³.

Tactic of the early protestant fundamentalists in the struggle against liberalism was creating alliances. In the year 1917 when initiative of William Bell Riley, and A.C. Dixon an association was established, aimed at literal interpretation of the Holy Bible. Two years later in Philadelphia took place a conference where *World's Christian Fundamentals Association* was created, bringing together thousands of conservative Christians. Leaders of this

⁵¹ F. Mincer, *Kilka uwag o fundamentalizmie islamskim, katolickim i protestanckim*, [at:] *Fundamentalizm współczesny...*, p. 31.

⁵² S. Bruce, *Fundamentalizm*, Warszawa 2006, p. 84.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 85.

association were visiting American cities, running an expansive campaign against „Antichrist”, full of aggressive war rhetoric⁵⁴.

In the beginning of the 1920's, there was an escalation of the conflict between conservative, and liberal protestants. Conservatives did not only criticize their opponents at the religious area, but they also started to attack science achievements, opposite to their ideology. The major example is Darwin's theory of evolution. Fundamentalists accused scientific knowledge, that new waves of young people, who accepted evolution theory as the real way of human birth, began to turn away from the religion. Also, a research has been made, and its results show, that there is relationship between the level of education, and the chance for turn away from religion (the higher level of education – the bigger chance). Also, conservative fundamentalists blamed scientist for starting World War I. Because of them new weapons, and bombs were created⁵⁵.

The climax of conservative fundamentalists campaign was unprecedented „Scopes' Trial”⁵⁶. It have taken place in Dayton, Tennessee in 1925. In that trial, a biology teacher was accused, and sentenced for teaching evolutionism, what was conflicted with the law in the Tennessee state. Leaders of protestant fundamentalists opted for throwing out Darwin's theory of evolution from schools. The trial itself quickly became the reason for national debate on ideological topics. Even despite losing the trial by accused teacher, that moment was the time, when the power of protestant fundamentalists started to fall down⁵⁷.

Since the 1930's, public opinion did not pay so much attention for activity of protestant conservatives in USA as earlier, also, their leaders started to focus on institutionalization. That was a time, when organizations as Christian Crusade, League of America, and Christian Anti-Communism Crusade were formed⁵⁸. Fundamentalists started to gain their lost position in 1970's⁵⁹. That time, they could use mass media (newspapers, radio, television) for their own purposes. They were ambitious, and determined to make an influence to the presidential election results. Finally, fundamentalists power again started

⁵⁴ K. Armstrong, *W imię Boga. Fundamentalizm w Judaizmie, Chrześcijaństwie i Islamie*, Warszawa 2005, p. 253.

⁵⁵ Ibidem, s. 255.

⁵⁶ The trial owes its English name to the name of the accused, prof. John Scopes.

⁵⁷ E. Pace, P. Stefani, *Współczesny fundamentalizm...*, p. 35.

⁵⁸ S. Bruce, *Fundamentalizm*, Warszawa 2006, p. 88.

⁵⁹ See more: M. Emerson, D. Hartman, *The Rise of Religious Fundamentalism*, „The Annual Review of Sociology”, 2006, no. 32, p. 132.

decreasing – it happened after Bill Clinton’s winning run for presidency, just before the end of XX century⁶⁰.

FUNDAMENTALISM TODAY

In contemporary world fundamentalism (not only the religious one) became a global problem. Due to a fact, that it can embrace many areas of human activity, pointing its sense, and character remains a very difficult task. In order to achieve that, the fundamentalism can be understood as:

- *Political ideology* – fundamentalists try to replace secular law with religious one. They split whole world between good ones (fundamentalists), and bad ones (their opposition). They also refuses tolerance, secularity, pluralism, and group interests put over individual ones.
- *Social movement* – fundamentalists try to subordinate all social life aspects to religious values represented in their religion, and by them.
- *Religious movement* – appears as an aspiration to make socio-legal rules would be set by religion. The truth is written in the Holy Bible, which is the one and only God’s will, so there is a need to read it literally, without any interpretations.
- *Extremism* – understood as readiness to use all necessary means, including radical ones, when conservative values, and the foundations of faith need to be protected.
- *Postmodern movement* – denying all signs of globalization, opposition to state secularity, critique of democracy, liberalism, and religious tolerance⁶¹.

Trait of all religious fundamentalists, no matter in what religion they have their origins is, that they try to prove, that if state policy is conducted in neutral way (without references to Final Judgement), they sentence themselves, and societies they rule to moral corruption. Fundamentalists does not only write, and spread their ideas – they are actively involved in social, political, and religious fight, arguing this as their best chance to present their rights⁶². It’s this involvement in people’s lives, which differs fundamentalism from conservatism.

To fully understand the sense of religious fundamentalism, it is necessary to point out some traits, that need to be present to talk about it. That are:

⁶⁰ Ibidem, p. 95.

⁶¹ M. Kubiak, *Kulturowe uwarunkowania obronności państwa*, Siedlce 2012, p. 153.

⁶² E. Pace, P. Stefani, *Współczesny fundamentalizm...*, pp. 17-18.

- Critique for government which left the rules, and laws of religion.
- Treating religious „back to roots” as a cure to moral corruption in society. It usually goes with treating a holy book of specific religion as a source of absolute knowledge.
- Being the only group who tells the truth, the only righteous one.
- Identifying everyone who does not agree with fundamentalists ideology as enemies.
- Spreading represented by them laws, and rules on other life areas, such as social, cultural, or political. Trying to subordinating them to religious laws.
- High level of activity on social, and political fields in the terms of attempting to overthrow the old order, and replacing it by new. That activity is justified by „overriding reasons”, “greatness”⁶³.

Other way helpful for understanding sense, and character of the contemporary religious fundamentalism is to look at it from the perspective of its representatives. Firstly, fundamentalists are trying to find religious-motivated consequences in everything that happen. Even if a specific circumstance does not provide those consequences itself, fundamentalists will try to find it in a convicted subject. Evil things happen not only because they are bad in their nature, but also because people who do them are bad. Secondly, fundamentalists lump all enemies together, despite of their opinions, or ideas. It does not matter if about it is a liberal journalist, politician, church representative, or even ordinary person promoting tolerance, and freedom of speech – all of them are described as one, and is being identified as an powerful enemy. Thirdly, it is characteristic for fundamentalists, that their way of thinking is connected with trying to find hidden symbols everywhere, where it is only possible⁶⁴.

This way of understanding the world is very reasonable, at least from the personal optics of fundamentalists, and their perspective of conducting battles. Lumping together their enemies makes them easier to defend attacks, along with justify their own mistakes, and explain them by enemy smartness. It also makes easier to manipulate believers with scaring, and disturbing them. Each event can be simply described, and justified as a „God’s intervention”, even if it seems not like this at the first impression, and every man behind it can be blamed to be “Satan’s puppet”.

⁶³ M. Marczevska-Rytka, *Fundamentalizm religijny: dylematy terminologiczno-metodologiczne*, [at:] *Fundamentalizm i kultury...*, pp. 50-51.

⁶⁴ S. Bruce, *Fundamentalizm*, Warszawa 2006, pp. 139-140.

Despite of many common traits that are repeated in every religious fundamentalism, no matter where it has its origins, there is some connection between religious system, and a chance to appear fundamentalist movement inside that organization. The largest movements were in Christianity and Islam. These two religions are both monotheistic (faith that there is only one God), and dogmatic (belief about existence of some truths, that have to be accepted by all devotees, and adapted in religious, and social reality). Both of this characteristics are obligatory to possibility of fundamentalism arise. The fact, that fundamentalisms born in Buddhism, or Hinduism, never gained such an influence like their Christian, and Islamic equivalents, only confirms that reason. That comes due to fact, that Buddhism and Hinduism have much more diversions inside, than Christianity, or Islam (besides their internal diversities). Buddhism and Hinduism are more faith, and belief systems, than religions, and inside of them one can find groups, that do not believe in any God. So we can strongly agree, that ideological integrity of specific religion can rise probability of fundamentalism to arise inside it⁶⁵. No matter what fundamentalism we talk about, nowadays it takes form of political ideology, more often than true religious revival. That is why we can consider it as political-religious phenomena. Fundamentalists are trying to politicize religion, trying to replace secular order by God's power, targeting their rebellion not only against specific state, but also modern world order⁶⁶. According to their beliefs, civilizations are graded by religions, so they are in opposition to cultural modernity⁶⁷.

Rise of contemporary political-religious fundamentalisms may be associated to Islam only, but in fact it happens in all great religions. In all of them we can find groups that are against modern culture, society, and politics. The most important conflict remains that with modernism. The rise of fundamentalisms is a kind of social response to international, globalized morality. Their role is to connect small, and local cultures into one, and spreading postulates to make them more value⁶⁸. For most of people, the word „fundamentalism” has a negative connotation. It is being used in order to describe

⁶⁵ Ibidem, pp. 120-121.

⁶⁶ See more: D. Khudori, *Key Issues related to the Rise of Religion-based Political Movements*, [at:], *The Rise of Religion-based Political Movements: A Threat or a Chance for Peace, Security, and Development Among the Nations?*, edit. D. Khudori, Michigan 2009, p. 25.

⁶⁷ B. Tibi, *Fundamentalizm religijny*, Warszawa 1997, pp. 24-25.

⁶⁸ Ibidem, p. 26.

fundamentalists as people who has old-fashioned beliefs, and to make difficult spreading it out for them⁶⁹.

If we want to talk about fundamentalism as a kind of political movement, we need to point out some of its characteristics, which will be helpful to understand its essence, including:

- Unambiguous negative mark for contemporary world changes⁷⁰ – fundamentalists do not doubt, that we live in the times of moral disaster, refutation of God and religion. That can cause moral, cultural, or economic disaster.
- „Golden Age” myth – fundamentalists think, that the only way to protect humanity from disaster is to reverse to the past, when (religious) believers were ready to sacrifice themselves in the name of higher targets.
- Millenarism⁷¹ – fundamentalists say, that we live in the times of waiting for Messiah, who is going to set God’s Kingdom on Earth, and split believers from sinners.
- Anti-democratic character – it comes due to seeing by fundamentalists world in dual categories: „we-them”. So, as a group that consider itself as the only righteous and truth-speaking, they do not accept and do not follow rules of political pluralism⁷².

CONTEMPORARY RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM AS A SOURCE OF VIOLENCE

To understand, why going back to traditional values is not only justifying of aggressive activities, but also is a fighting tool in the hands of radical groups⁷³, we need to pay attention to some events, that are happening inside a specific religion.

⁶⁹ F. Pastwa, *Fundamentalizm – pojęcie polityczne*, [at:] *Fundamentalizm współczesny...*, p. 39.

⁷⁰ This behavior of religious fundamentalists can be described as the "future shock" paradigm proposed by Alvin Toffler. The return to conservatism of some individuals is, in his opinion, one of the defensive reactions to too rapid changes taking place in society. See more: A. Toffler, *Szok przyszłości*, Przeźmierowo 2007, p. 279.

⁷¹ See more: D. Motak, *Nowoczesność i fundamentalizm. Ruchy antymodernistyczne w chrześcijaństwie*, Kraków 2002, p. 57.

⁷² D. Kokoć, *Fundamentalizm religijny – normatywny projekt polityczny?*, „Humaniora. Czasopismo Internetowe”, 2017, no. 2, pp. 99-102.

⁷³ See more: M. Barkun, *Religious Violence and the Myth of Fundamentalism*, „Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions”, 2003, no. 4, p. 55.

First thing, that distinguish Christian fundamentalism from Islamic, and decides about warlike character of the second one, is the way in which the believers of each of these groups participate. In Christianity there is a voluntary membership, but in Islam it became more like religious crusade, with the aim of conquering whole world, and subordinating it to Allah⁷⁴. Before that happen, fundamentalists will try to make religious order in all Islamic states. It will allow to create „God’s state”, from which will start further Islamic expansion to the rest of the world⁷⁵. Unfortunately, it is strongly connected with terror acts against civilian in western countries.

Another trait, that determines fundamentalism as source of violence behavior is politicizing. It causes all things that should remain in sacred sphere are infiltrating secular life. What is more, it is imposed to believers of other religions. Politic aims, which Islamic fighters are trying to achieve by violence, are dangerous due to its religious base. Acting that way, give them respect, and appreciation from brothers, and sisters in faith, and increase beliefs about mission’s rightness. In case of suicide terrorists it also helps to overcoming fear of death⁷⁶.

In fundamentalist communities, besides fighters carrying out orders, the leader is also very important⁷⁷. The leader runs the group, and communicates ideas to the community members. It is not necessary for leader to be a believer – it is enough, when the leader is able to „sell” absolute as a remedy for happiness⁷⁸. That „sanctifying” often comes with disinformation, and half-truths. Sometimes they are presented as dogmas to other believers. For fundamentalist leaders it is also important to base their preaches on a holy book – it is not only easier to „rule” with laws and bans, but it also increases followers loyalty (they don’t need to put their faith in leader only, but they can also refer to written source of religion)⁷⁹.

⁷⁴ S. Bruce, *Fundamentalizm*, Warszawa 2006, p. 16. See more: J. J. G. Jansen, *Podwójna natura fundamentalizmu islamskiego*, Kraków 2005, p. 21.

⁷⁵ J. Kaczmarek, *Problemy współczesnego świata. Terroryzm i konflikty zbrojne a fundamentalizm islamski*, Wrocław 1999, p. 80.

⁷⁶ T. Michalczak, *Europa w obliczu islamskiego terroryzmu. Dlaczego dochodzi do ataków terrorystycznych i jak im przeciwdziałać*, Warszawa 2019, pp. 37-38.

⁷⁷ See more: R.S. Appleby, *Introduction*, [at:] *Spokesman for the Despised*, edit. R.S. Appleby, Chicago 1997, p. 3.

⁷⁸ See more: P. Mazur, O. Wasiuta, S. Wasiuta, *Państwo islamskie ISIS. Nowa twarz ekstremizmu*, Warszawa 2018, p. 58.

⁷⁹ H. Mynarek, *Zakaz myślenia. Fundamentalizm w chrześcijaństwie i islamie*, p. 34-35.

CONCLUSIONS

Summarizing considerations contained in this article, it should be assumed that the scientific goal of the article has been reached. Answering the research problem contained in the Introduction, it can be said, that word „fundamentalism” is very difficult to define. Its boundaries are fluid, and its conceptual scope can cover many areas of peoples’ activity: ecology, society, culture, politics, or religion. The phenomenon of religious fundamentalisms itself has its origins in conservative American protestant groups from back to XIX, and XX century. Nowadays, groups of fundamentalists share some mutual traits, like stand in opposition to progressive globalization, and promotion necessity of going back to traditional roots. Religious fundamentalism itself, because of its high involvement in social affairs, and wish to establish God’s power, is often considered as political-religious. Politicizing of religious fundamentalisms causes, that in the name of religion, and belief about dominating one of them above others, it comes to terror acts made by their followers. Unfortunately, many times innocent civilians become targets of these attacks. Not only from countries with different dominating religion than attackers, but also often from their own ones.

Religious fundamentalism is one of the majors problems in today’s world. Even current global COVID-19 pandemic is considered by fundamentalists as a consequence of God’s wrath. Fanaticism of people who are ready to take their own lives, or worse, other people’s lives, in the name of specific ideology, additionally escalated by religious leaders is a great challenge, or even a threat to internal stability of the state, and to international security. Unfortunately, it is almost impossible to improve that in the near future. Despite of fact, that we live in a globalized world, where there is a lot said about a religious tolerance, there are some loud individuals, and groups, who are against it, and who are ready to spill blood in the name of their ideology. Until that violent voice will be present in international discussion, threat from contemporary religious fundamentalisms will remain actual.

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ISTOTA I CHARAKTER WSPÓŁCZESNEGO FUNDAMENTALIZMU RELIGIJNEGO JAKO ZAGROŻENIE DLA BEZPIECZEŃSTWA MIĘDZYNARODOWEGO

ABSTRACT

Pierwszym skojarzeniem, jakie przychodzi na myśl po usłyszeniu frazy „współczesny fundamentalizm religijny” są zazwyczaj ataki terrorystyczne dokonywane przez islamskich bojowników na państwa Zachodu. Faktem jest jednak, że dziś fundamentalizm religijny nie jest już związany wyłącznie z religią. Jego protestanckie korzenie sięgają poprzednich stuleci, co więcej, nierzadko stanowił on podstawę do aktów terroru dokonywanych przez pewne radykalne ugrupowania. W artykule autor przybliży definiowanie fundamentalizmu, wskazując genezę fundamentalizmu religijnego. Co więcej, stara się wyjaśnić jego współczesną istotę i charakter.

Słowa kluczowe:

współczesny fundamentalizm religijny, bezpieczeństwo międzynarodowe, religia, polityka, społeczeństwo

