

## BOOK REVIEWS

Antoun, Richard T. *Understanding Fundamentalism: Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Movements*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001. 192 pp. Hardcover, \$69.00.

Richard T. Antoun is Professor of Anthropology at the State University of New York at Binghamton, a former Fulbright Scholar, and a former president of the Middle East Studies Association. As a result of his extensive research in Jordan and Iran over the last forty years, he has written three books, of which one is titled *Muslim Preacher in the Modern World: A Jordanian Case Study in Comparative Perspective* (1989). His interest in comparative religions and his long experience in the Middle East provide him with the authority to write on such a complex issue as religious fundamentalism.

Antoun's approach is well defined by his statement: "The anthropologist aims for empathy rather than sympathy" (vii). The popular view equates religious fundamentalism with religious bigotry, scandalous beliefs, opposition to science, and puritanical sexual ethics (1). Antoun appropriately demonstrates that the truth is more complex: "Fundamentalism is a response to the questioning of the great religious traditions—Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism—in the changing world" (2). He further expands this concept by stating that fundamentalism is not only a response; it is also a "transnational religious phenomenon" and "a cross culturally applicable concept to a wide variety of religious traditions" (3). It must be noted, however, that the author limits his study to Islam, Christianity, and Judaism.

The book's strength lies in its well-articulated explanation of fundamentalism and its complexities. It is well documented and consists of eight chapters with a useful glossary and index. The "Suggestions for Further Reading" section (165) refers to essential titles that cover Christian, Islamic, and Jewish fundamentalism. Antoun's Middle East experiences are supported by other primary sources, written by experts who compare different religious fundamentalist movements.

Antoun explains that fundamentalism is neither limited to certain parts of the world nor an exclusively Muslim phenomenon. In fact, there is a fundamentalist segment in every religion or ideology. Why? Because in each religion or ideology there are some people who are not satisfied with what their institutions and communities have to offer them. They believe the pure and true faith has been abandoned. All fundamentalists idealize the past history of their tradition—"the mystic past with its heroes who are archetypes for contemporary behavior" (55). They strongly refuse the ideology of modernism with its permissive secular society, and try to reverse the process that has removed religion from much of public life.

The "Great Western Transmutation" (GWT) is defined "as part of a major historical shift in world view and power relations" (11). Its consequences are the transfer of loyalties from God and religious institutions to the secular nation-state, which had its inception in Europe at the beginning of the eighteenth century (13). The GWT has long been accused of leading to pluralism of beliefs and relativization of traditional public values. The purpose of life is no longer to go to heaven, but to become rich and to enjoy all manner of earthly pleasures. The inevitable results are social injustice and immorality.

Fundamentalism, the author claims, is not only a critic of our modern society; its main ambition is to bring people back to authentic and pure religion. How can this be accomplished? In chapter 4, the author exposes three strategies common to all fundamentalist entities in their quest for purity: separation—the world must be avoided as impure; political passivism—God himself will change the world; confrontation—among

others, Antoun mentions Hamas and the Christian Coalition, who fit this model. He notes that some groups have shifted from one strategy to another, especially in Islam, where the fundamentalists tend to become politically involved and radical.

I would like to ask Antoun the following questions. Do you believe that Christian fundamentalists in the United States may become as violent as the Islamic fundamentalists? Can we imagine the Christian Coalition acting like Hamas? If not, is it fair to categorize them together? Can we imagine the violence and crimes committed against abortionists as the beginning of violent Christian fundamentalism in the United States?

Because there are so many exceptions, Antoun built his work on an "ideal type" of fundamentalist. But we must continue to explore the idea that religion itself influences and even foments fundamentalism. Are fundamentalists so powerful in Muslim countries, and yet so marginal in Christian countries? Why is the concept of religious freedom and free choice largely accepted in traditionally Christian countries, while it is widely rejected in Muslim countries? What about fundamentalism in the Catholic and Orthodox traditions? Antoun clearly explains the causes and outcomes of fundamentalism in relation to society's transformation. Is the primary influence religious or social?

Antoun's book is an important contribution to the knowledge of a major aspect of the modern world. It explains the religious aspects of terrorism and the mechanisms that create and nurture religious extremism. It is a useful resource for all who are involved or interested in religion, contributing a serious and balanced approach to our understanding of fundamentalism.

Fundamentalism is not terrorism. Rather, fundamentalism is a reaction to a world filled with injustice and immorality, whose values it cannot accept. Violent fundamentalism, however, is the wrong answer to the problems we face today. Unfortunately, especially in repressive societies, fundamentalists are often tempted to use violence as an agent for change. It is possible for fundamentalism to exist in democratic societies, as a religious expression protected by pluralism. Ironically, fundamentalists need freedom to survive and human rights to share their faith. Where fundamentalists control the power, there is no room for other ideologies and religious beliefs; human rights are nonexistent and religious freedoms are annihilated. Antoun, however, does not go this far, but his book helps the reader to better understand a phenomenon that has already become a major influence on geopolitical relationships and delayed hopes at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

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Bar, Shaul. *A Letter That Has Not Been Read: Dreams in the Hebrew Bible*, Monographs of the Hebrew Union College, no. 25, trans. Lenn J. Schramm. Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 2001. xii + 257 pp. Hardcover, \$39.95.

After Sigmund Freud's study on dreams published in 1952, Oppenheim's in 1956, and Jean Marie Husser's in 1999 (to name a few key representatives), Bar's book is the most comprehensive and up-to-date publication on biblical dreams. It is an outstanding exegetical and theological study with pertinent research behind it that fills the gap in the recent theological literature on the topic. The publication is an excellent inquiry that thoroughly treats the phenomenon of dreams in the Hebrew Bible. Shaul Bar, Associate Professor of Bible in the Bornblum Judaic Studies at the University of Memphis, fittingly analyzes the biblical material on dreams, evaluates and categorizes it, and finally draws well-balanced conclusions.