Francisco Goya. *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*, detail, c. 1799. Metropolitan Museum of Art.

STATE OF AFFAIRS

Orthodox Fundamentalism: From Religion to Politics

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In this paper, I want to explore the phenomenon of fundamentalism, which has become an inalienable part of contemporary religious discourse. First, I want to chart the origins of the fundamentalist movement in antimodernist Protestantism and its parallels in the Roman Catholic sphere, and to look at its development in the later twentieth century. In the second part of the essay, I will examine the rise of Orthodox fundamentalisms in various forms and the recent development of Orthodox fundamentalist politics, especially as this has developed in the Ukrainian conflict.

Early Fundamentalism

The fundamentalist movement began with a collection of leaflets, "The Fundamentals: A Testimony of Truth," published in twelve volumes in Chicago between 1909 and 1915.[1] On July 19, 1920, Curtis Lee Laws, editor of the Baptist newspaper the *Watchman-Examiner*, used the term *fundamentalist* for the first time in print, with none of the pejorative connotations it would later have. Before the World War I, fundamentalism focused on polemic with modern biblical criticism and Darwinism, but after the war it opened a wider front against modernity in general. The rhetoric of the fundamentalists began to feature military metaphors of skirmishes, battles, and crusades against modernists. Sometimes they did what they said, and applied physical violence.

The early fundamentalists presented modernism as a different sort of religion. In 1923, J. Gresham Machen (1881–1937), a professor of New Testament at Princeton Theological Seminary, wrote that liberalism was a new religion, different from Christianity:

The present time is a time of conflict; the great redemptive religion which has always been known as Christianity is battling against a totally diverse type of religious belief, which is only the more destructive

[1] R. A. Torrey and A. C. Dixon, *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008).

of the Christian faith because it makes use of traditional Christian terminology. This modern non-redemptive religion is called "modernism" or "liberalism."[2]

Early fundamentalism came to understand itself as embodying a Reformed spirit of protest, no longer against Rome, but against modernism.

Fundamentalism pushed forward against modernism with the so-called Scopes trial in 1925, during which the state of Tennessee prosecuted the schoolteacher John Scopes for teaching evolution. The prosecution was represented by William Jennings Bryan, a three-time presidential candidate and an outspoken fundamentalist, while the defense was mounted by a lawyer from New York, Clarence Darrow, who also engaged scientists and theologians. Scopes was found guilty and fined $100, but this was a Pyrrhic victory: the trial discredited the fundamentalist movement. The media, mostly from the north of the United States, used it as an opportunity to stigmatize fundamentalism as aggressive and behind the times, which was only partially true. After 1925, the conflict between progressives and fundamentalists became polarized as a highbrow-lowbrow, north-south, urban-rural rivalry.

Early fundamentalism was not uniformly received, and the fundamentalist-modernist opposition caused splits in many Protestant churches throughout the United States. At the same time, it facilitated interdenominational alliances, such as the World Christian Fundamentals Association (WCFA) founded in 1919, in which ideological conservatism became more important than the doctrinal differences between denominations. The WCFA nevertheless failed to create a sustainable supradenominational structure on the basis of ideology, and in the 1920s and early 1930s, the moderate fundamentalists reconciled with their denominations. The more militant fundamentalists reappeared in 1941 to found the American Council of Christian Churches (ACCC), a radical alternative to the ecumenical Federal Council of Churches. In 1942, the more moderate National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) welcomed those who chose not to follow strict fundamentalism. Harold J. Ockenga, who cofounded the NAE, coined the term "new evangelical" to describe a moderate fundamentalism that firmly upheld the faith while engaging a wider intellectual and social agenda.

Postwar Fundamentalisms

In the late 1970s, these moderate "neo-fundamentalists" or "post-fundamentalists" continued their work defending the "fundamentals" of Protestant Christianity, while also relying on secular intellectual, social, and media instruments. They joined forces with a variety of conservative Christians, including Roman Catholics, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Mormons. Thus far, fundamentalism had been regarded as an exclusively American phenomenon. The term was coined in the U.S., and the movement developed mostly there. But the word began to be applied more widely after the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, when the word was first used in a non-Christian context.

In the mid-1980s, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences funded a study of fundamentalism with as broad a scope as possible. The project, led by Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, resulted in the publication of five volumes demonstrating that fundamentalism extends far beyond the Protestant milieu and is present in all religions.[3] The study established that fundamentalisms are alike in de-

[2] J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1923), 2.

[3] Martin E. Marty & R. Scott Appleby, *The Fundamentalism Project* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991–1995).

fending the core of their beliefs while also identifying threats to their "fundamentals." Appleby identifies these threats as:

- *religious plurality, which transgresses the traditional religious boundaries and penetrates religious enclaves;*
- *relativism, which has become an outcome of the globalization and liberalization of the societies;*
- *the "divided mind" of modern persons, who perceive themselves as belonging to multiple incompatible domains;*
- *secularization.*[4]

As Richard T. Antoun has remarked, "the ethos of fundamentalism, its affective orientation, is one of protest and outrage at the secularization of society."[5]

Paradoxically, however, in wrestling with secularization, fundamentalism itself becomes a secular and secularizing phenomenon. It becomes an instrument of the self-secularization of the Church. As Appleby writes:

Herein lies a defining irony of fundamentalisms: these self-proclaimed defenders of traditional religion are hardly "traditional" at all… Fundamentalists have little patience for traditionalist or merely conservative believers, who attempt to live within the complex and sometimes ambiguous boundaries of the historic tradition. Fundamentalists, by contrast, are "progressives" in the sense that they seek to mobilize the religious tradition for a specific temporal end (even if the final victory is expected to occur beyond history). Involvement in politics, civil war, liberation movements and social reform is central to the fundamentalist mentality: religion is, or should be, a force for changing the world, bringing it into conformity with the will of God, advancing the divine plan. In this aspiration fundamentalists are little or no different from other "progressive" religious movements for social change and justice, including the Latin American proponents of liberation theology.[6]

Despite its breadth, the Fundamentalism Project paid little attention to hierarchical churches such as the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches, where fundamentalism has specific nuances. In Protestant churches, where fundamentalism may be supported widely, it still cannot be converted into an obligatory policy, because there is no one hierarchical center to impose it. But in hierarchical churches, if the leadership embraces fundamentalism, it becomes a mainstream—effectively official—doctrine.

As in the Protestant world, the early decades of the twentieth century were the heyday of Roman Catholic fundamentalism. The "culture war" against modernism was not marginal, but a mainstream phenomenon. Pope Pius X condemned "Modernism" as heresy in two documents issued in 1907, known as *Lamentabili* and *Pascendi*, and in 1910 he introduced an "Oath against Modernism" for all bishops, priests, and academics. Modernism remained anathema until the Second Vatican Council, which, while reconciling the "Modernists," provoked a new wave of Catholic fundamentalisms.

One such movement features nostalgia for the Council of Trent and the ethos of the Counter-Reformation. Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre and his Society of St. Pius X (SSPX) became the embodiment of opposition to the Second Vatican Council. This movement tends to oppose "liberal" popes, such as Francis, and implicitly or explicitly doubts papal authority when this authority supports what seems (to the fundamentalists) to be liberal apostasy. The Lefebvrian brand of Roman Catholic fundamentalism is the counterpoint

[4] R. Scott Appleby, "Fundamentalisms" in Robert E. Goodin et al., *A Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007), 405–6.

[5] Richard T. Antoun, "Fundamentalism" in Bryan Turner, *The New Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Religion* (Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010)

[6] R. Scott Appleby, "Fundamentalisms," 407.

to another form, which ascribes to the popes an ultimate and unconditional authority, beyond even the definitions of the First Vatican Council.

Orthodox Fundamentalisms

All fundamentalists in all traditions seek unquestionable sources of religious authority. As we have seen, for fundamentalist Roman Catholics, the pope is one such authority, but there are also "visionaries" who are believed to receive direct messages from Jesus Christ or the Virgin Mary. The cult of charismatic spiritual authorities plays an even more important role in Orthodox fundamentalism, which often appeals to "elders" (*gerontes* or *startsi*). Roman Catholic idolatry of the papacy and Protestant biblical absolutism have been absent in the Orthodox Church, but the impulse to which they give expression is present nonetheless in what might be called *gerontolatria* (elder-worship). Obedience to a spiritual elder is undoubtedly an important part of the Orthodox tradition, which generally works in a positive way. From the time of the figures of the early Christian *Apophthegmata* up to modern-day personalities such as John Krestiankin in Russia or Païsios the Hagiorite in Greece, elders have played and continue to play an important role in nurturing the faithful and edifying the Church. However, as with any institution of human authority in the Church, the practice of obedience to elders is vulnerable to mistakes and abuses. One such form of abuse of *starchestvo* (the cult of the elder) is known as *mladostarchestvo*, the cult of the young elder, in which an inexperienced and immature person plays the role of a spiritual authority and develops a kind of personal absolutism or *gerontokratia* (elder-rule). Such persons often promote other kinds of fundamentalism among their followers.

Another form of Orthodox fundamentalism focuses on the fathers of the Church. On the one hand, it is difficult to overestimate the significance of "the fathers" in the life of the Orthodox faithful. Orthodox Christians believe that the Church fathers constitute the most reliable magisterium of the Church and this attitude shapes the characteristic identity of the Orthodox and forms how we like to differentiate ourselves from other Christians. When patristic authority is abused, however, it becomes patristic fundamentalism. The Orthodox then begin to treat the writings of the fathers as absolute authorities, without any reference to their historical context or any recognition of their human limitations. Paradoxically, patristic fundamentalism often misrepresents the fathers (in the same way as fundamentalism in any tradition effectively disrespects the sources it claims to be authoritative) by treating them selectively and tailoring their writings to a contemporary ideological agenda.

A further form of Orthodox fundamentalism relates to the way in which we Orthodox express ourselves most authentically—through liturgy. This form of Orthodox fundamentalism, which can be branded as "ritualism," functions at the level of popular individual piety and can also manifest itself through organized sectarian movements. The two most well-known fundamentalist liturgical movements are the so-called Old Believers and the Old Calendarists.

The Old Believers (who are more correctly called Old Ritualists—*staroobryadtsy* rather than *starovery*) came into existence in the seventeenth century in opposition to the liturgical reforms of the Patriarch Nikon of Moscow. The movement was concerned with more than just reforms of how to cross oneself (with three fingers instead of two) or

how many times to sing alleluia (three times instead of two times), which are its most oft-repeated questions of interest. The *staroobryadchestvo* became the locus of social protests and expressed some of the divisions in Russian society at that time. Nevertheless, it is still remarkable that these social protests took the outward form of a struggle over the minutiae of ritual. Liturgical purity and traditionalism were placed at the very center of the movement.

A more recent movement of ritual fundamentalism is expressed by the so-called Old Calendarists, who emerged in the 1920s at approximately the same time as Protestant fundamentalism in the United States. The pretext of their appearance was the adoption by some local Orthodox Churches of the civil Gregorian calendar, which replaced the older Julian calendar. The Church of Greece in particular faced protest movements, which eventually separated from the mainstream and appointed their own hierarchy. Like the Catholic SSPX, they effectively became sects, which would probably have joined an alliance with other fundamentalist churches, surpassing doctrinal divides, if they had not been anti-ecumenical on principle. For many Old Calendarist groups, ecumenism has become a signature of modernism. In order to differentiate themselves from Orthodox churches that participate in ecumenical activities, these fundamentalist jurisdictions have adopted names such as the Genuine Orthodox Christians (*Gnēsioi Orthodoxoi Christianoi*) and the True Orthodox Churches (*Istinnyje Pravoslavnyje Tserkvi*). These groups often rebaptize those who join them from the "ecumenist" jurisdictions that they consider to be heretical.

At the core of the quarrels regarding ritual, the calendar, and ecumenism is a conservative agenda that opposes liberalism. Sometimes Orthodox fundamentalists do not hide their ideological preferences, and openly join the culture wars in other contexts; they jump into the trenches in which Protestant fundamentalist groups have been fighting for decades and become their unqualified allies. These new relationships between Orthodox and Protestant fundamentalists resemble the attempts to create transdenominational fundamentalist alliances on the basis of common conservative social values in the 1930s and 1940s. But this flirtation is plainly bizarre. Orthodox fundamentalism challenges, in every possible way, American dominion in the world, which is in fact a political priority for Protestant fundamentalism. For Orthodox fundamentalists, their anti-modernist agenda is also strictly anti-Western. It is, in fact, as anti-Western as the Western fundamentalists are anti-Eastern, whether this sentiment is applied to Muslims in the Middle East or Asians in the Far East. Furthermore, these unholy alliances enable American Protestant neo-fundamentalists to turn a blind eye, for instance, toward Russian aggression against Ukraine, despite the fact that their brothers and sisters have suffered and even died as a result of this aggression. When there is a chance to promote their political agenda, the blood and pain of others do not stop ideological fundamentalists, as they have not stopped, for instance, Franklin Graham from praising Vladimir Putin.[7]

Orthodox Fundamentalisms and Politics

It seems that many Orthodox fundamentalists are excited by the reign of Putin and his activity in eastern Ukraine. Orthodox fundamentalism is much at work there. Many fundamentalist ideas have been translated

[7] See http://conservativetribune.com/graham-picked-obama-putin/. Accessed November 1, 2015.

into political action in the quasi-national entities of the so-called People's Republic of Donetsk (DNR) and the People's Republic of Luhansk (LNR), which have been designed and constructed with the support of the Russian Federation. These entities clearly feature elements of religious fundamentalism as a strong ideological motivation. Quite a few separatists are driven by the ideology of the "Russian world" (*Russkiy mir*) which has been crafted as a substitute for Soviet ideology. Post-Soviet fundamentalism is one reaction to the transition from the Soviet political system to a liberal democracy. In Russia, this fundamentalism has exploited the social inertia that followed *perestroika* and has given it a religious motivation. It encourages a reverse drift of the Russian political system back to the USSR. Such a system is being restored in Crimea and the DNR and LNR. The war that adherents to the ideology of the "Russian world" wage in east Ukraine is both anti-liberal and anti-Western. It is a war for the USSR, and a form of revenge for defeat in the Cold War. They consider Ukraine, which has chosen democracy and integration with the West, to be their enemy.

The DNR and the LNR have absorbed a number of Orthodox activists who profess what became known in Ukraine in the 2000s as "Political Orthodoxy." This movement was identified and explicitly condemned by the synod of bishops of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in 2007. At that time, Political Orthodoxy activists marched with icons in the streets of Kyiv, under banners bearing slogans against NATO and the West. In the war with Ukraine, some of these same activists took weapons into their hands and began killing Ukrainians for the very same slogans. For instance, Igor Druz', a protagonist of the "Russian Spring" in Donbas, had previously been an active participant in the marches of Political Orthodoxy, but with the outbreak of war in Ukraine, he became one of the ideologues of the "holy war" *against* Ukraine, with a Kalashnikov in his hands. In support of his cause, Druz' likes to refer to Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre and invokes other classic figures of global fundamentalism. The example of his case demonstrates how short the way is from ideological agenda to political activism, including the most brutal forms, in fundamentalist groups.

The political activism of fundamentalists can easily pass over into terrorism. It has been noted among scholars that fundamentalist activism is by nature separatist. It tries, when it can, to create enclaves, where its ideas may be implemented without opposition. This is precisely the motivation behind the DNR and the LNR. They are enclaves separated from the rest of Ukraine in which the ideals of the "Russian world" are to be implemented. These ideals have been celebrated by modern Russian writers such as Zahar Prilepin and Sergey Shargunov (a son of the conservative priest from Moscow, Fr. Alexander Shargunov), who have praised the DNR and the LNR as utopias where the true Russian soul may thrive.

In reality, however, these utopian enclaves have turned quickly into dystopias, embodying the worst of the Soviet past, including gulags, propaganda, and militarism. According to the reports of the international organizations, media, and social networks, the only line of thinking tolerated in the DNR and the LNR is the one officially propagated by its military leaders. People are afraid to express disagreements openly. The Soviet phenomenon of *stukachestvo* (the reporting of dissenting words and thoughts to organs of state security) is

now widespread in the territories of the DNR and the LNR. Some members of non-Orthodox Christian denominations have been killed, tortured, or forced to leave. Nor are all members of the Russian Orthodox Church tolerated there, but only those who subscribe to the doctrine of the "Russian world." Thus, a number the Orthodox priests who doubted the official line and expressed pro-Ukrainian views had to flee the occupied territories. Coercion has become a common practice; those who do not obey face incarceration or forced work for the good of these "People's Republics."

The worldview propagated in the DNR and the LNR is dualistic. It sees the world in black and white. On the dark side of this world are Americans, Europeans, and Ukrainians, who dream of the destruction of the bright side of the world, which consists of the people of the DNR and the LNR, the Russians, and their allies, including far-right and far-left groups throughout the world. Putin is presented as the universal president of this bright side of the world. This view is enforced by violence, propaganda, and fear, and many inhabitants of the region, including their leaders, consider themselves to be encircled by invisible forces plotting against them. This kind of dualism and paranoia proceeds directly from the fundamentalist mindset.

Conclusions

I have presented the Ukrainian situation in some detail here as one example of the direction of travel of fundamentalism in the Orthodox world. The DNR and the LNR are a laboratory in which religious fundamentalism can be seen fully unfolding as political fundamentalism. And the result is scary. There are, of course, many other areas in which the fundamentalist tendency of some members of the Orthodox Church has begun to take effect. I have briefly surveyed this phenomenon with respect to *gerontolatria,* patristic literalism, and resistance to ritual development. As a whole, this situation should urge the Church to a greater concern over fundamentalism as an ideological standpoint. The first task is to recognize the innovative presence of fundamentalism in the midst of the Church. Fundamentalism cannot be eliminated altogether. Instead of tolerating and even encouraging fundamentalism, however, the Church must work to contain it. If we are unable to do this, Orthodox fundamentalism unleashed will surely lead us to yet more of the crimes against humanity that are now occurring in Ukraine. ✠

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