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SUMMARY DOCTORAL THESIS

RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM -
MAJOR CHALLENGE AT THE ADDRESS
OF CONTEMPORARY RELIGIOUS LIFE.
MISSIONARY EVALUATION

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The present doctoral thesis intends to address a complex and little-addressed problem in its religious and social structure: fundamentalism. Religion has become a central topic of scholarly debate in the West, especially after the terrorist bills. Years ago it was downgraded to the marginal pages of quality media or limited to sex scandals in tabloids. Terrorist attacks and their repercussions have added a boost to the recent prominence of religion. There is nothing more current with the perception of the constant threat of the religious conflict in enhancing the awareness of the problem. However, the issues raised by this debate are far from an answer. For example, should we attribute the intensification of religious conflict to religion in general, or only to its extremist limits? Some commentators, for example S. Huntington¹, have argued that religion is a key feature of every different historical civilization in the world. Conflict, when it arises, is primarily between civilizations, rather than within a civilization. Therefore, religion in general inspires and justifies such a conflict. Other researchers argue that fundamentalism is especially responsible for religious conflicts. It is considered that fundamentalism must be distinguished from the ordinary religion as a perversion of its central message of peace and justice.

Other issues and debates are also pressing. For example, in a democracy should appeals to the religious dimension have a higher weight than other criteria to determine what is legally acceptable? Is the law the only criterion for what is acceptable behavior in a multicultural society or should there be an attempt to promote a unifying national identity? What happens when religious people try to challenge the Western liberal consensus that religion is a matter of private choice for the individual and should not enter the political arena institutionally?

The answers to such questions have been diversified. Books, studies, research have been developed that attack religion in general, often from an evolutionary perspective.² However, the greatest hostility was especially reserved for fundamentalism, demonstrated both in the media and in the results of opinion polls. It is necessary to develop a comprehensive and comprehensive understanding of the

¹ S.P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996, p. 4.

² R. Dawkins, *The God Delusion*. London: Bantam Press, 2006.

phenomenon of fundamentalism before deciding how to respond, both personally, religiously, socially and politically.

First, we must establish that there is a phenomenon that can be understood. Is there really a category of religious movements that we can call "fundamentalism" or is it the simple term used pejoratively for people who take their religion too seriously in relation to others? The theologian, the missiologist, the sociologist must answer whether such a category can be established only if some religious movements can be distinguished from the rest, because they uniquely possess certain common features. Extensive sociological research has indeed identified five such characteristics³.

1) The first and most basic distinguishing characteristic of fundamentalist movements is that they are reactive. Fundamentalists believe that their religion is under immediate threat from the secularism of the modern world and they are fighting this ideology. They can resist in different ways, but they are all essentially oppositional; they must have an enemy.

The other four distinctive features are all means of adjusting the purpose of the resistance. First of all, fundamentalists are dualists. That is, they conceive the world in binary oppositions: God and the Devil, good and evil, truth and falsehood, etc. Such thinking helps the idea of resistance, because it justifies the development of an in-group dynamic in relation to the out-group and everything that results from such a dynamic.

2) Secondly, the fundamentalists believe that the holy book, through interpreters or read directly, has the supreme authority over what is to be believed and how to act. It reveals God's will for mankind.

3) In any case, thirdly, the fundamentalists' interpretation of the holy book is selective. They choose specific ideas from it and emphasize them, often changing their traditional and correct meaning when doing so. Such a selective adaptation of the holy book offers justification for resistance strategies and tactics.

4) Finally, they hold a millennial view of history, waiting for God to fully establish His dominion over the world at some future time. Some believe they can hasten the arrival of this glorious event by fighting, literally or spiritually, in the name of God. The cosmic range of millennial thinking motivates and inspires believers and offers a structure and meaning to their lives.

³ G. A. Almond, R.S. Appleby, E. Sivan, *Strong Religion: The Rise of Fundamentalisms around the World*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003, p. 16;

5) Fundamentalism is a phenomenon from the 20th century. Many researchers have used the term generally to denote movements, over the centuries, that have reacted to political, social or religious changes by fighting for the traditional religion. Certain religious societies / groups, such as the Jesuits in the Roman Catholic Church and severe Islamic sects, such as Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia, are historical examples of such self-defending defenders of true faith. However, fundamentalism is by definition a modern phenomenon, because it reacts against modernity. We argue that modernization, and its last expression, globalization, is a unique historical process. It offers new threats to the traditional religion, but it also offers new opportunities for reactionary religious movements to proliferate. Therefore, we are justified in distinguishing fundamentalisms from older reactionary religious movements, because they are fighting against new and different enemies. We are seeking to understand a modern phenomenon: today's religious movements, which are currently helping to create today's world.

We note that all five defining characteristics must be present in the structure of a religious movement in order to be called fundamentalist. There are, for example, many movements that offer great authority to the holy book, which could probably be said about Islam as a whole. However, these movements cannot be hostile to the modern world and therefore signal that they are not fundamentalist. There are other movements that are primarily political, rather than religious in their inspiration. For example, the Protestant and Catholic enemies in the Northern Ireland conflict. These do not justify the label of the fundamentalist.

Moreover, we should not assume that all members of the fundamentalist movements are fundamentalist persons, although there is strong pressure to comply. There are also many individual fundamentalists who are members of the non-fundamentalist movements. For example, there are many members of the main Anglican community who are fundamentalist believers. Indeed, the conflict between fundamentalists and general believers appears in many religious movements, including many of the Christian denominations.

From this analysis, it follows that individualist and fundamentalist movements are not always easy to differentiate from other religious movements or other individuals. There are a large number of traditionalist believers who, at first glance, might be seen as fundamentalists. We must be sure that all five criteria are present, especially the first and essential criterion: hostility to aspects of modernity. Their

specific enemies may vary: fundamentalist Muslims may target apostate Muslim governments or the degenerate West, while fundamentalist Christians attack specific groups that challenge their moral agenda. However, to repeat: labeling some groups and people as "fundamentalists" requires an analysis of their beliefs and practices. The term cannot simply be used to describe people who are unusually religious or who claim to represent true and traditional faith.

Given the basic criterion of hostility to modernity, it is interesting to note whether we can place fundamentalism in a postmodern context. In short, "fundamentalisms are great rogue narratives, in competition with other great narratives such as secular humanism and religious pluralism. Their key feature is their hostility to modernity and they are likely to prefer democracy theocracy and universal moral laws to respecting minority rights. Globalization is better interpreted as the possible final blossoming of late modernity and it is primarily modernity, rather than postmodernity, against which fundamentalism reacts."⁴

As objects of the present doctoral work we list the following:

- a) exhaustive analysis from the religious, social, political point of view of fundamentalism;
- b) identification of the generating and catalytic factors of the religious fundamentalism;
- c) cultural and religious conditions of the proliferation of fundamentalism in a global society;
- d) the psychological cases of religious radicalization in the form of terrorism;
- e) exploring the dimension of religious tolerance;
- f) identification of missionary measures to counter religious fundamentalism through inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue.

The topic of the doctoral thesis is more than acute and relevant, both in missionary and social order, but also in politics. Every year there are registered in the European space as well as in other areas of the world terrorist attacks with innocent dead soldiers, in the name of a "God". On the other hand, the Islamic State is effectively ravaging the area of the Middle East, after which hundreds of Christians are effectively martyred, and thousands, hundreds of thousands of people are embarking on a broad

⁴ Peter Herriot, *Religious Fundamentalism. Global, Local and Personal*, London and New York, Routledge, 2008, p. 4.

migration movement to the West. For these reasons, obviously, the cultural, social, and world morphology changes in the interaction between religions.

The reference to the five distinctive features of fundamentalism is crucial in understanding this phenomenon. They serve to highlight how different and unusual the fundamentalists appear to other people. Often, fundamentalists signal these differences visibly through their appearance and behavior. They lead many to come to the conclusion that there is something unique and strange about them. Observers assume that they cannot be understood in normal terms and require new explanations. For example, many have assumed psychological anomalies or personality defects, and others have developed unique theories to deal with what they believe is a unique phenomenon.

Fundamentalism consists of religious movements that can be understood using well-established concepts from the social sciences and especially from social psychology. Fundamentalists are indeed different; they try to make a difference at every available opportunity.⁵ But only theory and thorough research can hope to answer the basic question: How do fundamentalist movements succeed in attracting, retaining and motivating people living in modern societies with a view to a pre-modern world view?

Of course, it is also extremely important to understand why very few fundamentalists act violently. However, this question is logically secondary to the question of why they are fundamentalists in the first place. Fundamentalists also vary in many other ways, while all share the same five defining characteristics. For example, some fundamentalist movements are highly politicized; others are concerned with saving souls or keeping them clean, as the charismatic Christian movement is more concerned with spiritual experiences than gaining political victories. Of those fundamentalisms that are politicized, the vast majority try to achieve their goals through political methods, rather than violent methods.

Such differences between fundamentalisms need explanation, and the approach we will take is to relate them to the differences between cultures. But the hardest question to answer is the key to fundamentalism in general: how can we explain why, in the late modern world, fundamentalists can successfully propagate a set of pre-modern beliefs, values and practices? This doctoral thesis unusually tries to address this

⁵ S. Coleman, *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity: Spreading the Gospel of Prosperity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 53.

question at various levels. Only by understanding the cultural context at global, national, religious, organizational and group level can the power of fundamentalist belief and the attraction of fundamentalist identity in the lives of individual people be properly understood.

The analysis I will present depends largely on two key concepts: culture and identity and the relationship between them. These are very broad concepts, but width is a necessary feature if they are to bear the explanatory weight that is placed on them. Culture is used to analyze the different levels of context for the fundamentalist belief, the cultures at a lower level of analysis sometimes forming subcultures of those at higher levels. American Protestant fundamentalism, for example, is treated as one of the subcultures of American culture. Identity, on the other hand, explains how cultural categories are internalized in the mind of the believer, along with the beliefs, values and norms of behavior that constitute the major elements of the cultures. The two concepts, culture and identity, are treated more as a process than as a content. This is due to the fact that fundamentalist movements have managed to survive successfully in the late modern world, located at a rapid change rate, by adapting to their social environments. Their cultures and social identities are always on the move. In particular, it is the process of changing symbolic meanings, often initiated by fundamentalist leaders, that creates revised ideologies. These in turn motivate new strategic directions. The new and aggressive meaning of jihad, for example, developed by radical Islamic theorists, has provided justification and motivation for attacks on nominal Muslim governments and, ultimately, Western nations. In turn, these attacks have acquired a symbolic immensity of significance, confirming and further developing the idea of jihad in the minds of militant Islamists. But there is also a continuous process of changes in beliefs and values that justify and motivate new behavior, which accumulates symbolic significance and, therefore, affects beliefs and values to motivate new behavior, etc. This analysis contradicts the self-presentation of fundamentalist movements, which usually claim that they return to the immutable and traditional truth to which religion has erred.

Religious fundamentalism is a topic that is little treated in the Romanian theological space, at least in the Christian Orthodox area. An exhaustive analytical, systematic and missionary approach, as well as general and covering the generative factors of radicalism, is missing from the Romanian theological spectrum. Religious fundamentalism is a topic with an analytical density that can only be approached on an

interdisciplinary horizon: theology, psychology, politics. In this order of ideas, we identify, some doctoral theses supported at other institutions with university profile, but other than those of theology: *Terorismul de sorginte fundamentalist-islamică - risc asimetric la securitate*, sustained in 2015 within the Faculty of History and Philosophy ("Babeş Bolyai" University, Cluj Napoca), *Studiu privind terorismul fundamentalist prin prisma relației dintre Islam și Islamism*, held in 2018 within Police Academy " Al. I. Cuza ", Bucharest, *Terorismul contemporan în contextul globalizării reprezentărilor sociale*, held in 2018 at the National Defense University " Carol I ", Bucharest.

Here we also record excellent analyzes on the phenomenon of religious fundamentalism in the Romanian and foreign literature: Sandu Frunză, *Fundamentalismul religios și noul conflict al ideologiilor*, ediția a II-a revăzută și adăugită, Editura Școala Ardeleană, Cluj-Napoca, 2015; Nicolae Emanuel Dobrei, "Fundamentalismul religios", în Mihaela Miroiu (coord.), *Ideologii politice actuale. Semnificații, evoluții și impact*, Iași: Ed. Polirom, 2014, pp. 420-446; G. A. Almond, R.S. Appleby, E. Sivan, *Strong Religion: The Rise of Fundamentalisms around the World*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003; Peter Herriot, *Religious Fundamentalism. Global, Local and Personal*, London and New York, Routledge, 2008; M. Percy, *Fundamentalism, Church, and Society*, London: SPCK Press, 2002; Lawrence Davidson, *Islamic fundamentalism: an introduction*, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2003; Bassam Tibi, *The Challenge of Fundamentalism: political Islam and the new world disorder*, Berkeley, CA.: University of California Press, 2002; M. Riesebrodt, *Pious Passion: The Emergence of Modern Fundamentalism in the United States and Iran*, Berkeley: Univ. Calif. Press, 1990; G.A. Almond, Appleby, RS, Sivan E., *Strong Religion: The Rise of Fundamentalisms Around the World*. Chicago: Univ. Chicago Press, 2007; R.T. Antoun, *Understanding Fundamentalism: Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Movements*, Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 2001; B.B. Lawrence, *Defenders of God: The Fundamentalist Revolt Against the Modern Age*, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989; Anderson Benedict, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and the Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, London/New York, 1991; M. Riesebrodt, *Pious Passion: The Emergence of Modern Fundamentalism in the United States and Iran*, Berkeley: Univ. Calif. Press, 1990; G.A. Almond, Appleby, RS, Sivan E., *Strong Religion: The Rise of Fundamentalisms Around the World*. Chicago: Univ. Chicago Press, 2005; R.T. Antoun, *Understanding Fundamentalism: Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Movements*, Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 2001, B.B.

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For the purpose of a systematic analysis of the researched topic, the doctoral work is structured in 4 chapters, each chapter being structured into subsections. This method of systematization offers us an exhaustive approach to religious fundamentalism in all its meanings.

The first chapter - The architecture of contemporary religious pluralism in globalization. Missionary configurations - displays a number of conceptual and contextual details in which religious fundamentalism has articulated and proliferated. The main topics discussed in this chapter are: globalization as the cultural-social metacontext of the XX-XXI centuries, ideological tendencies and axiological mutations of globalization towards the Christian, modernity and postmodernity - continuity and discontinuity between religious and secular. The last point reached in this first chapter is the relationship between the reality of religious pluralism and the structure of tolerance, without which the framework of religious fundamentalism cannot be understood. In line with these last details, the second chapter of the present work opens: Religious fundamentalism - a complex and expanding contemporary phenomenon. For methodological reasons, this section opens with the conceptual delimitations of religious fundamentalism, mentioning adjacent the transnational and transcultural character of fundamentalism, the particularities of fundamentalism at the individual and collective level, the progress of religious fundamentalism in sec. XX-XXI. The next section is reserved for the psychological factors of radicalization, taking into account the exploration of the following ideas: dilution of the psycho-social meaning in the homogenization of culture and rooting of traditional values and customs, the fundamentalist attitude in response to global monoculturalism, religious fundamentalism - and a sense of offer - in a fragmented world. It then proceeded to analyze the relationship between globalization and religious fundamentalism, emphasizing the theoretical psychological perspectives (theory of terror management,

social identity theory, motivated cognitions and religious fundamentalism). The last section of this chapter is reserved for the presentation of religious versions of fundamentalism in different socio-cultural environments: valences of the version of fundamentalism in the American space, Islamic fundamentalism, Christian fundamentalism, Jewish-national fundamentalism.

Chapter III - Radicalization and terrorism: proliferation of contemporary Islamic fundamentalism - is a presentation of the effects of religious fundamentalism of Islamic nature, the focus being on terrorism. In this order of ideas, the conceptual delimitations of terrorism were reviewed in the first phase, then continuing with the presentation of terrorism as a psychopathology in two directions: cognitive - terrorism as irrationality and social - group influence. Great attention is paid to Islamic militant fundamentalism Daesh (ISIL, ISIS) as a reaction to the failure of contemporary ideologies of modernization, the significance of jihad.

The last chapter of this paper - From intolerance to tolerance: missionary strategies to combat religious fundamentalism - is a missionary evaluation of the problem of religious fundamentalism and its effects in society. For this purpose, several capital ideas are developed here: The Christian mission in the global and pluralistic society, the aspects of religious pluralism, the articulation of religious freedom, the promotion of peace - an essential element in the contemporary Christian mission, the inter-religious and intercultural dialogue, the religious tolerance - the parameters of understanding and acceptance. otherness.

Regarding the research methods of the proposed theme, we will combine the systematic, historical-critical and comparative approach, highlighting the content of globalization, modernity, secularization, terrorism and religious fundamentalism.

The systematic analysis of the theme proposed for research has the advantage of offering a coherent and careful presentation of the generating factors of religious fundamentalism. The historical-critical method prefaces the possibility of understanding the development of religious fundamentalism, and the comparative method will involve the complementary analysis of the religious fundamentalism from theological and psychological point of view. In our research, although it is of theological-missionary nature, a social psychological approach that characterizes the treatment of fundamentalism is absolutely necessary. This is because, uniquely, social psychology tries to correlate social structures at all levels with individual identity and with a variety of psychological constructs, such as beliefs, values, attitudes and

behavior. This does not mean to deny the contributions of other academic disciplines: sociologists have done excellent research in explaining fundamentalisms as social movements; psychologists have analyzed in detail the beliefs, attitudes and norms of behavior of fundamentalists; experts in political studies have demonstrated how fundamentalist movements have gained and exercised power; historians have pointed to the origins of fundamentalism in reactionary religious movements over the centuries; and theologians and philosophers force us to constantly review the nature and status of the concepts we use in our analyzes of the fundamentalist phenomenon.

However, unusually for books on fundamentalism, the social psychological approach determines their purpose and structure. In this sense, I emphasize the social origins of fundamentalism. Although the Western preference is to treat religion as a matter of private and individual choice, fundamentalism can only be understood in the social context in which it has developed. Therefore, our intention of analysis goes from the largest context of all, the globalized world, through national cultures, to fundamentalist movements as social movements. Then, the unit of analysis becomes smaller, because I analyze fundamentalisms from a theological perspective. Such a range of perspectives is essential to understanding fundamentalism in a way sufficiently nuanced to highlight its complexity.⁶ Thus we will begin with analyzes of religious, cultural identity, and then move on to the belief system of fundamentalism. Values, attitudes and behavior follow from beliefs. The sequence of analysis is thus from the outside to the inside, that is from the context to the person, and then from the core of the person, the self, to his visible behavior.

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