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Under the stigma of fundamentalism: some reflections on a controversial concept

Sob o estigma do fundamentalismo: algumas reflexões sobre um conceito controverso

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Abstract

This article aims to discuss the current inflated use of the concept of fundamentalism (in media and academic research) and present some reflections on the limits and controversies surrounding the notion of fundamentalism. From the perspective of Conceptual History, especially the reflections of Reinhart Koselleck, the text seeks to reconstruct the history of the concept of fundamentalism in the United States of America, presenting some essential moments to understand the transformations in the use of the concept throughout the 20th century. It highlights the importance of differentiation between "historical fundamentalism" (Protestant and American) and its expansion towards "global fundamentalism", a perspective that gained strength in academia since the 1980s. From these reflections, this text aims to present a current debate between defenders of the use of fundamentalism from a comparative perspective and those who consider that the use of an expanded concept of fundamentalism has become more of an obstacle than a useful analytical tool in contemporary studies of religion.

Keywords: Fundamentalism. History of Concepts. Religion and Politics. Religion and Modernity.

Resumo

Este artigo procura discutir o atual uso inflacionado do conceito de fundamentalismo (na mídia e na reflexão acadêmica) e apresentar algumas reflexões sobre os limites e polêmicas em torno da noção de fundamentalismo. A partir da perspectiva da História dos Conceitos, especialmente das reflexões de Reinhart Koselleck, o texto procura reconstruir a história do conceito de fundamentalismo nos Estados Unidos, apresentando alguns momentos essenciais para se entender as transformações no uso do conceito ao longo do século XX. Ressalta-se a importância da diferenciação entre o "fundamentalismo histórico" (protestante e norte-americano) e sua ampliação no sentido de um "fundamentalismo global", perspectiva que ganhou força na academia a partir dos anos 1980. A partir dessas reflexões, o artigo procura apresentar um debate atual entre os defensores do uso do conceito numa perspectiva comparativa e os que consideram que a utilização de um conceito ampliado de fundamentalismo tem se tornado mais um complicador do que uma ferramenta analítica relevante nos estudos sobre a religião na contemporaneidade.

Palavras-chave: Fundamentalismo. História dos Conceitos. Religião e Política. Religião e Modernidade.

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Introduction

> For the moment, we may simply observe once again that the question "Is Confucianism a religion?" is one that the West has never been able to answer, and China never able to ask.
>
> (Wilfred Cantwell Smith)

In a column published on the *New York Times* website on May 04, 2007, Turkish journalist Mustafa Akyol began his text by stating that: "It is no secret that Islamic fundamentalism is a threat to democracy, freedom and security in today's world". However, "the same values can be threatened by secular fundamentalists, too".[1] Throughout the column, Akyol discusses what those threats would be, but at no time is he concerned with clarifying what fundamentalism is, or what he understands by fundamentalism – what it would even have its Islamic "version" and its secular "version". It seems that fundamentalism was something self-evident and that any reader of the column would know what he was talking about.

Despite its ever-increasing use in academic debates, the media, and even bar conversations, the concept of fundamentalism is an endless source of controversy. And most of the controversies are the result of a recurring lack of precision about what is evoked when the concept of fundamentalism and/or the adjective fundamentalist is used. Fundamentalism, in the contemporary world, has a negative and accusatory connotation. Intransigent religious persons, intolerant people who are not open to dialogue (some even speak of the existence of an atheistic fundamentalism), and all those labeled as "enemies of progress" were branded as fundamentalists. Few are those who assume themselves as fundamentalists. The fundamentalist is identified as the "Other". But not any Other. The "fundamentalist

[1] Available in: <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/04/opinion/04iht-edakyol.1.5565938.html> Accessed on July 27, 2020.

Other" is a threat to our way of life, peace, freedom, democracy, good family interactions, etc.

Unfortunately, as the concept of fundamentalism has become more widely recognized, the precise meaning of the term has become increasingly unclear. Additionally, as fundamentalism has spread beyond its religious origins, there are now instances of fundamentalism appearing globally that lack traditional religious elements such as holy scriptures, religious communities, and even deities. Brazilian researchers have not escaped this debate. The works of Ivo Pedro Oro (1996), Martin Dreher (2006), Zwinglio Motta Dias (2009), and Breno Martins Campos (2018) brought to Brazilian academics the importance of reflecting on history and debates about the meaning(s) of fundamentalism. In *Fundamentalismo e integrismo: os nomes e a coisa* [Fundamentalism and integralism: the names and the thing], Antônio Flávio Pierucci (1992) presented essential concerns with the lack of precision regarding the use of this concept and the confusion that was established between fundamentalism and related terms, such as integralism and traditionalism. With the media and political debates appropriation of the concept, "its original meaning becomes obtuse and obliterated, often to the detriment of clarity, distinction and precision" (PIERUCCI, 1992, p. 146).[2]

Twenty-eight years have passed since the publication of Pierucci's text, but many questions and problems raised there remain relevant to researchers even today. We don't just "reheat" a discussion that has happened several times. Based on recent discussions raised by authors such as David Harrington Watt (2004, 2014, 2017), Gabriele Marranci (2009), Simon A. Wood (2014), and Susan Harding (1992, 2000), we seek to question ourselves about the real usefulness of the increasing utilization that the concept of fundamentalism has been receiving over time. In addition to the debate with the mentioned authors, our discussion will be guided by the principles of Conceptual History and the insights of Reinhart Koselleck, allowing

[2] Our translation. The same occurs in all direct quotes from texts originally written in Portuguese and Spanish throughout the article.

us to trace the evolution of the concept and gain a clearer understanding of its continuities and transformations, as well as its evolving meaning – since the fact that "words that have remained in constant use are not in themselves a sufficient indication of the stability of their substantial meaning" (KOSELLECK, 1985, p. 81). A concept has its own history and this does not only occur in the field of academic reflections and debates. The usage of the term in media and everyday language is crucial in comprehending its utilization in academic research. According to Angela de Castro Gomes (2001, p. 21): "It would be impossible to think, even in a simplified way, of the academic trajectory of the concept without considering its broader appropriation since it starts to act as a force of pressure and conformation of the debates that take place about its use in an extensive way".

Initially, we will present some basic principles of Conceptual History and the possibilities it presents for a more consistent understanding of a given concept's history, in our case of fundamentalism. Next, we will try to "strip" the concept of its current semantic burden and return to the origin of the word and its Protestant and American roots. Succinctly, we will present the understanding of what "historical fundamentalism" was in the United States in the 1920s and some developments and transformations of its understanding in the face of certain episodes that occurred in the 20th century. In the third section, we will deal with the broadening of the discussion and scope that the concept of fundamentalism received after the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and the publication of *The Fundamentalism Project*, developed by Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby in the 1990s. At that moment the idea of "global fundamentalism" gained strength. It would no longer be restricted to Protestantism or the United States but would manifest itself as a worldwide trend in different places and within different religious traditions. Finally, we will present some questions that have been raised in recent research about the real usefulness of the fundamentalism concept. In its extended format – as "global fundamentalism" – would it not have become more of a complicator than a relevant analytical tool?

1 The concepts and their history

Conceptual precision is a fundamental prerequisite for the development of academic reflections that aim to consistently contribute to the accumulated knowledge on a given subject. Either through a kind of reproduction of common sense or through the use of a very subjective perception – and not clearly explained – about certain concepts, we have been dealing with several problems arising from the researchers' lack of greater attention to the content of the concepts they use.

In the field of Religious Studies, the uses of certain concepts – such as fundamentalism, integralism, traditionalism, and secularization, among others – have been marked by a lack of theoretical rigor, leaving their meanings implicit and/or to the personal preferences of the author who uses them. This shortage of conceptual rigor, however, is not a "spectrum" that only haunts Religious Studies. Several relevant authors in the human sciences have explicated the problem of the "excess of meanings" of certain concepts that end up making them analytically innocuous. In the debates about Brazilian political history, Jorge Ferreira (2001, p. 13) states that "the notion of 'populism' has become so elastic and somehow ahistorical, that it has come to explain everything – and, as happens in these cases, to explain very little". In the theological field, Francisco Taborda raises a similar question when discussing the conception of sacrament defended by Leonardo Boff in *Os sacramentos da vida e a vida dos sacramentos* [Sacraments of life: life of the sacraments] (1975). According to Taborda, Boff "extends so much the notion of sacrament, identified with the symbolic, that everything becomes sacrament". Taborda argues that "when a concept is so expanded, it loses its meaning and no longer explains anything. If everything is a sacrament, nothing is a sacrament: it is no longer known what the seven sacraments are or why they are seven, neither more nor less" (TABORDA, 1989, p. 94-95). Historian Robert Darnton also reaches similar conclusions to those of Ferreira and Taborda when he discusses the expansion of the meaning of the Enlightenment in recent historiography. According to Darnton, the eighteenth-century Enlightenment

> has been blown up to such a size that it would not be recognized by the men who first created it. Having been floated at first with a few *bons mots* in some Parisian salons, it became a campaign to crush *l'infame*, a march of progress, a spirit of the age, a secular faith, a world view to be defended or combated or transcended, and the source of everything good, bad, and modern, including liberalism, capitalism, imperialism, male chauvinism, world federalism, UNESCO humanism, and the Family of Man. Whoever has a bone to pick or a cause to defend begins with the Enlightenment. [...] The Enlightenment is beginning to be everything and therefore nothing (DARNTON, 2003, p. 3-4).

How to deflate "inflated concepts"? The first step is to be aware that a concept has its own history and its polysemy should not be discussed only from its linguistic dimension, but also from historical and social factors. In this sense, the Conceptual History (*Begriffsgeschichte*), whose main exponent is the German historian Reinhart Koselleck, offers important perspectives – perspectives that are still little explored in the field of Religious Studies – for research proposals that work with the permanence and transformations of a concept's meanings. This approach goes through the analysis of: the emergence of the concept; its etymology; the different appropriations and meanings that a concept has received throughout history; and the history of studies on this concept. According to Kirschner (2007, p. 50), from the perspective of the *Begriffsgeschichte,* "the study of concepts and the variation of their meanings over time is a basic condition for historical knowledge". The Conceptual History methodology would be a fundamental tool to "grasp the complex process of reframing some concepts over time".

The relevance of this discussion refers, in large part, to questioning the mistakes that can occur in academic works that use concepts and expressions from the researcher's present to analyze the past. The Conceptual History, according to Koselleck (1985, p. 79) has a "methodological minimal claim: [...] that social and political conflicts of the past must be interpreted and opened up via the medium of their contemporary conceptual limits and in terms of the mutually understood, past linguistic usage of the participating agents". In the historiography, a recurring concern among researchers is the risk of conceptual anachronisms in the investigation of past societies. Given that "the historian initially formulates his

questions with the concepts of his own time, as he defines them from the society in which he lives" (PROST, 2012, p. 117), the "temptation" to apply them to the analysis of the past is perfectly understandable – although it is a past for which, many times, such concepts (or their current content) would not make sense or would distort its interpretation.

All concepts are associated with a word, but not every word is a concept. A concept is characterized by being polysemic and, for its proper understanding, must be analyzed in the social and temporal context in which it is activated. In this way, Kirschner (2007, p. 51) emphasizes that in this exercise of contextualizing a concept, "the recourse to other texts of the period examined, which make it possible to construct the historical context in which that particular concept is inserted, becomes indispensable." Koselleck is insistent in highlighting the fact that the discussion of concepts is not confined to the analysis of texts and that history is not limited to the linguistic dimension. This effort to contextualize a concept must also take into account the idea that concepts form a network, in which its understanding passes through the discussion of related concepts (some of which are essential for the theory that often gives rise to the concept), their antonyms and other concepts of close meaning (and that can be confused in their uses).

As we have observed, Conceptual History does not have as its central objective to reveal the original meaning of a certain concept, but to demonstrate its historical construction. Contextualizing a concept does not mean "restricting" it to its context of origin and its initial meaning. Thus, Conceptual History enables the researcher to have a coherent analysis of the permanence and changes in the meaning of a certain concept in different historical and sociocultural contexts. In addition to contextualizing the researched texts and discourse, it is necessary to understand the meaning of the concept from the person who enunciates it. Even people who live in the same historical and linguistic context can give a concept different meanings. In the case of our discussion in this article, often the meaning of fundamentalism, when

pronounced by a conservative theologian, a liberal theologian, a journalist, a political scientist, or a researcher of the religious phenomenon, has very different meanings.

Due to the limits of this article, we cannot delve more deeply into the Koselleckian perspective of Conceptual History. But, for our immediate purposes, we believe that some of its central points and methodological avenues have been presented to the reader. In the analysis of the concept of fundamentalism, one must always be attentive to the meaning of the concept in each context and each social actor who enunciates it. In the next section, we will "strip" the concept of its controversial semantic load and investigate the original meaning and the first transformations in the meaning of fundamentalism in the theological, social, and political context of its emergence - in American Protestantism at the beginning of the 20th century.

2 Historical fundamentalism

In this text, we aim to make a differentiation that makes the historical development of the concept of fundamentalism more intelligible in two decisive moments of its history. The first moment would be that of "historical fundamentalism" which refers to the roots and developments of the concept in its geographical and religious context of origin: American Protestantism. In the next section, we will discuss the expansion of the notion of fundamentalism beyond its original context with the emergence of a "global fundamentalism" perspective.

The history of the origins of fundamentalism is relatively well known, especially among those who study the history of Protestantism. As we said, its origin is Protestant and American. It begins as a theological controversy and an internal dispute within theological seminaries and, especially after the end of World War I, takes on the shape of a movement in defense of "biblical truths" and also of "Christian values" in American society. It is a common understanding among various researchers of the period that the first person to use the term was conservative

Baptist Curtis Lee Laws in 1920 to define his faction within the dispute between liberals and conservatives at the Northern Baptist Convention. But the history of fundamentalism begins before the emergence of the concept.

As an example of such controversies, in his influential The Life of Jesus – originally published in 1835, but by 1869 it already had an English translation circulating in the United States – David Friedrich Strauss argued that the Jesus of the Gospels was not historical but mythical. For Strauss (1869, p. 12), "the discrepancy between the modern culture and the ancient records, with regard to their historical portion, becomes so apparent that immediate intervention of the divine in human affairs loses its probability". The idea of a God incarnated who was born of a virgin, walked on water, multiplied fish and bread, turned water into wine, made paralyzed people walk, etc. would be a later invention of the Church and the result of a mythical view of the world. For the modern man, emancipated from superstitions and beliefs by the "light of reason", these beliefs would no longer make sense.

Soon voices rose in questioning the arguments of this so-called theological modernism or liberalism in American Protestantism. The first more incisive reaction to the spread of the liberals' questions regarding orthodoxy came from the main bastion of traditional Calvinism: the Presbyterians at the Princeton Theological Seminary. Archibald A. Hodge and Benjamin B. Warfield (1881, p. 26) stated that the Bible not only *contained*, but *was* the Word of God, and all its statements were error-free. In addition to being inspired by God and free from errors, biblical truths would be clear and accessible to all men at all times. All generations would find the same truths in the sacred text. The reports present in the Holy Scriptures would not be, as some 19th-century theologians might assert, interpretations of the past from a dated perspective: they would be the faithful narrative of what had happened. According to Panasiewicz (2008, p. 9), this is a perspective that "does not accept that the text can have more than one meaning, even if its understanding is not clear or contains apparent contradictions."

The "conservative backlash" was not limited to Presbyterians. Soon, movements of contestation to theological modernism and in defense of the inerrancy of the biblical text spread across different Protestant denominations, with more strength among Presbyterians and Baptists. The conflict between the two currents intensified and several professors and pastors, on both sides, underwent internal proceedings, were stripped of their seats in the seminaries and many of them purged from their churches. At the same time, meetings began to occur, such as the Niagara Bible Conference in 1878, of conservative Christians who embarked on a great national crusade against the proliferation of interpretations considered heterodox of the Bible. A milestone in this struggle was the release of The Fundamentals: a testimony to the truth, a collection of 12 volumes released between 1910 and 1915, containing a series of articles by conservative theologians refuting the "errors" of theological modernism and re-affirming the non-negotiable points of "authentic" Christian faith.[3]

The transition from what we call the *fundamentalist controversy* to an effective *fundamentalist movement* (thus directly named from 1920) occurred with a progressive expansion (especially after the end of World War I) of the battle against the modern world. We can perceive a gradual extension of the scope of the disagreements: from an initial conflict within the walls of the seminaries limited to issues of theological reflection, the controversies began to revolve around themes such as the positioning of churches in the face of social problems, the benefits (or not) of the new urban order, the relationship between Christianity and new scientific discoveries, etc. The fundamentalist was initially a defender of the faith and the inerrancy of the biblical text, but also a defender of Christian values and a fervent

3 Another issue that united the vast majority of the main leaders of the fundamentalist movement was the defense of the pre-millennial/dispensationalist eschatological perspective – which viewed some aspects of the modern world that had turned its back on revealed truths with pessimism and advocated that the redemption of humanity would only occur after the Second Coming of Christ. Dispensationalism began to spread in the United States during the same period in which theological conservatism increased the tone of its criticisms of liberalism. This eschatological perspective gained sympathy from a large part of the conservative spectrum of American Protestantism, by presenting itself as biblical, favoring a literalist interpretation of the Bible in response to questions about the liberal interpretation of the Scriptures. Its understanding was that all of the eschatological expectations described in the New Testament, by the apostles and by Saint Paul, and in the history of primitive Christianity were clearly pre-millennial. About the history of dispensationalism in the United States, see ROCHA (2017).

fighter against the "moral degradation" that the country was "victim" of. His enemy was modernism and everything it represented.

The country was under threat not only from "false theology," but also from "false science" and the spread of a mistaken conception of human nature in schools and universities. The problems, therefore, were not limited to the adoption of the historical-critical method for the interpretation of sacred texts. Darwinism, which had already been condemned by conservatives since the 19th century, became a symbol of the threat to be fought. The fundamentalists' efforts to ban the teaching of the theory of the evolution of species in public schools were responsible for the great visibility that the movement achieved in the first half of the 1920s.

In 1923, William Jennings Bryan, a Democratic politician (former Secretary of State and three-time defeated presidential candidate) and passionate fundamentalist, began a major crusade against the teaching of the theory of evolution in American public schools. In his view, Darwinism denied biblical truths and would lead American children to atheism and abandonment of the Christian values on which the nation was founded. Bryan filled auditoriums across the country and attracted the attention of the media and public opinion. Bryan's crusade was highly successful in the southern United States, where states such as Florida, Mississippi, Arkansas, and Tennessee created bills banning the teaching of Darwin's theories in their schools.

In the small town of Dayton, in the state of Tennessee, the young biology teacher John Scopes was sued for teaching the theory of evolution in his classes. The Scopes trial mobilized the American press at the time, eager for controversies that would boost their newspaper sales. The major northern press organizations, partisans of a more flexible moral culture, created a big theater where several battles would be fought: science versus religion, urban versus rural, and north versus south (MARSDEN, 2001, p. 195). The stage of the "show" – the rural and southern Dayton – served to further emphasize these antagonisms. For the press, while Bryan

represented the rural and "obscurantist" world, defense lawyer Clarence Darrow represented rationality and the sophisticated and modern urban culture. According to Ruthven (2007, p.12), the Scopes Trial "was an early example of what would later be known as a media event, in which the coverage itself was more important than what occurred in court". Journalists from the major media outlets were present, including the most famous reporter of the time – and fierce critic of fundamentalism – H. L. Mencken of the Baltimore Sun. According to Mencken, fundamentalism was an expression of hate by "inferior men" towards knowledge. The complexity of scientific advances would be an unbearable burden for fundamentalists. "Thus his search is always for shortcuts. All superstitions are such shortcuts. Their aim is to make the unintelligible simple, and even obvious. [...]. The cosmogony of Genesis is so simple that even a yokel can grasp it" (MENCKEN, 2002, p. 167).

Susan Harding (1991) claims that more than 200 reporters from the largest cities in the United States covered the Scopes Trial. However, despite the existence of several fundamentalist newspapers spread throughout the country, especially in large cities, none of them sent "observers" to Dayton. Many did not mention the trial or did so in a superficial way, as just another attack by liberal and Darwinist forces on biblical faith. As a result, the trial was presented to most Americans from the perspective of the "moderns". "The fundamentalist, even the conservative, point of view, spoken in its own voices, was erased, and then reinscribed within, encapsulated by, the modern metanarrative in the 'news' read, and heard, around the country and abroad" (HARDING, 1991, p. 382).

The publicity that the northern press made of the trial discredited fundamentalism among the general public, and the adjective fundamentalist, previously proudly displayed, became synonymous with ignorance and misinformation. *A priori,* fundamentalists would be enemies of science, civil liberties, and progress. The stereotype of the fundamentalist had nothing to do with, for example, teachers at Princeton Theological Seminary or middle-class people in northern cities.

Closing (a bit abruptly) this section, when we refer to "historical fundamentalism," we are talking about a religious, Protestant, and North American movement that arose in opposition to theological liberalism/modernism and advocated a conception of biblical text inerrancy. It is characterized, essentially, by theological conservatism, moral conservatism, political conservatism, patriotism, and a dispensationalist eschatological perspective. It sought to counter the process of secularization by reaffirming the importance of the "true" religion, as expressed in the Holy Scriptures, as a unifying axis and source of meaning for the spheres of knowledge and human action in the world.

3 Global fundamentalism

Despite the transformations that the concept of fundamentalism experienced throughout the 20th century in the United States, its application to this more conservative portion of American Protestantism from the 1920s and 1930s has not raised major controversies among researchers. Its classification as fundamentalism and even the self-identification as fundamentalists of those involved in the battles against the teaching of Darwinism and the liberal "flexibilization" of biblical text interpretation gives researchers who work with this theme during this period certain ease in using the concept without major constraints. However, even in the American case, these agreements began to dissolve very quickly after World War II, in the context of the Cold War.

In the 1930s, while the number of fundamentalists grew despite strong criticisms from the more “enlightened” sectors of the population, membership in liberal churches declined. However, starting in the mid-1940s, Protestantism in North America began to grow as a whole. According to Cecília Azevedo (2001, p. 114), “starting in the 1940s [...], the number of church members increased by 40%, and Bible sales doubled between 1947 and 1952, the early period of the Cold War.” The main driving force behind this new “revival” in American Protestantism was the so-called neo-evangelicalism represented in churches organized around the National

Association of Evangelicals (NAE) and with the Baptist pastor Billy Graham as its great "star." Neo-evangelicals emphasized individual conversion experience (rebirth), had a strong attachment to the Bible (with basically literalist interpretations), and emphasized the importance of moral purity in their preachings. Some authors have no difficulty identifying them as fundamentalists.

However, these neo-evangelicals did not identify themselves with the sectarian discourse and restrictions regarding the social actions of historical fundamentalism. This more radicalized form of fundamentalism, especially in the early decades of the Cold War, was more associated with figures such as the controversial Reverend Carl McIntire. According to Axel Schäfer (2012, p. 10), post-war neo-evangelicalism sought to establish itself as a "third force", distinguishing itself from both fundamentalism and theological liberalism. The identity of neo-evangelicalism had several tensions: between religious devotion and growing adjustment to the "world", between theological orthodoxy and ecumenism (an ecumenism among evangelical denominations), and between traditional moralism and modern values. Furthermore, they reaffirmed a discourse of separation between church and State but maintained close ties with government funding structures for their educational, health, and social assistance institutions. The internal differentiation of the American Protestant field would require a long digression, which would take us away from the proposed objective for this text. Differentiating and historically contextualizing concepts such as fundamentalism, evangelicalism (and the division between white evangelicals and black evangelicals), and classifications such as evangelicals, neo-evangelicals, Bible-believing Christians, born again Christians, among others in the American case is a Herculean task surrounded by a series of debates and disagreements among researchers.

Throughout the 20th century, as David Harrington Watt depicts in *Antifundamentalism in Modern America* (2017), the image of fundamentalists as enemies of modernity and freedoms was consolidated in common sense as well as in academia through critiques from various intellectuals that, to some extent, echoed

Mencken's acidic criticisms of fundamentalism. Watt lists a series of criticisms of fundamentalism from important figures such as H. Richard Niebuhr, and Talcott Parsons – who "suggest that fundamentalism is simply a New World version of Nazism and that Nazism is simply a European variant of fundamentalism" (WATT, 2017, p. 95) – and Richard Hofstadter.

Fundamentalism returned to the press agenda and academic debates in the United States in the mid-1970s. Jerry Falwell, a well-known conservative Baptist pastor who self-identified as a fundamentalist Christian and had a television program with a huge audience, took the lead of the movement that was named *Moral Majority*. This movement became a major political force in the US and had as its main banners: the defense of family values (which included opposition to abortion in any case, the fight against the expansion of gay rights, and also the restriction of pornography); the return of the practice of prayers and the teaching of creationism in public schools; the fight against the spread of communism along with a fierce defense of capitalism and the "American way of life"; the defense of a pro-Israel position by the US government (a direct influence of dispensationalist ideas); among others.

Parallel to the rise of this new Christian Right in the United States, in Iran in 1979, a "religious rebellion in the name of Allah and Muhammad, his prophet, from below [that] had just overthrown, by force, a political regime also of force, but secular" was taking place (PIERUCCI, 1992, p. 144). For some, the similarities between the actions led by Jerry Falwell and Ayatollah Khomeini would be too evident to be ignored. This resurgence of a religion politically engaged, hostile to the process of secularization, and attached to values considered obsolete by the modern world would be the manifestation of a global movement.

The debate that directly interests us here is the "expansion" of the concept of fundamentalism beyond the Protestant and North American context from the late 1970s and the emergence of the notion of "global fundamentalism". In 2014, was

released the book *Fundamentalism: perspectives on a contested history*, organized by the historian David Harrington Watt and Simon A. Wood, professor of the Religious Studies department at the University of Nebraska. In the introduction of the book, Watt and Wood state that the various authors who wrote the chapters of the book present different perspectives on the use of the concept of fundamentalism. And this divergence has been marking the field of studies on the subject among American researchers. Regarding the use of the concept of fundamentalism, there are: 1) those who understand that its use would not only be useful, but also important; 2) those who show some concern regarding its use, but do not reject it; 3) those who understand that the concept has been poorly applied in some important cases; 4) and finally, researchers who simply understand that the use of the concept would not be useful – it would bring more confusion than help. We will seek to present some of the arguments defended by the two most "extreme" tendencies – the first and the last of the mentioned groups.

The heart of these disagreements centers around the use of the term fundamentalism beyond its origin in American Protestantism, the "historical fundamentalism". The controversial notion of a "global fundamentalism" gained strength from the early 1980s, influenced by the rise of the Christian Right in the United States and the Iranian Revolution of 1979. These movements are characterized by their conservative religious nature and the strong bond between religion and politics, as well as their opposition to the growing secularization of society.

Two very important authors in defending the existence of "global fundamentalism" were Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, both responsible for organizing *The Fundamentalism Project*, which brought together several researchers (political scientists, historians, religious scientists, sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists, among others) between 1987 and 1995 in the discussion of the growth of conservative and politically engaged religious movements in various countries and different religious traditions. The results of the

research were published in volumes released by the University of Chicago Press. According to Gabriele Marranci (2009, p. 2), despite the broad disciplinary spectrum of the authors and the different approaches to the topic, the "conclusions of the project suggest that all 'fundamentalisms' are the consequence of conservative religious groups and leaders who reject modernism and secularism", seeking to "preserve traditional ways of life and religious beliefs through scripturalism".

The conception of fundamentalism defended by Appleby goes beyond the borders of American Protestant fundamentalism and points to an inseparability between fundamentalism and political action:

> Fundamentalism is a modern form of politicized religion by which self-styled "true believers" resist the marginalization of religion in their respective societies. Fundamentalists identify and oppose the agents of marginalization (secularists) and seek to restructure political, social, cultural, and economic relations and institutions according to traditional religious precepts and norms (APPLEBY, 1998, p. 280).

This search for political power to transform (or restore) society can occur within the "rules of the game" of constitutional democracy – through elections and legal political action instruments – or through the use of violence, acts of terrorism, holy wars, and/or revolution motivated by religion. The fundamentalist vision – which guides their action also in the political field – would be based on the belief in their "monopoly" of absolute and inerrant truth and a dualistic perspective (the children of light against the children of darkness). Additionally, Appleby (1998, p. 281) states that fundamentalists "believe that they are living in a special time in history, perhaps the last days, in which God is working in a new way among the true believers". The concept of fundamentalism would be an important analytical key in understanding the role of religions in the contemporary world and highlighting certain similarities among religious movements that react to modernity and the "privatization" of religion that gained strength around the world at the end of the 20th century - in a kind of "revenge of God", as dubbed by Gilles Kepel (1991).

The authors who defend the perspective of global fundamentalism advocate for the presence of common elements, both in basic beliefs and in the *modus operandi* of these movements. It would indeed be comparing what is comparable. In the introduction to one of the volumes of the Fundamentalism Project, Marty and Appleby (1993, p. 2) argue that fundamentalism is a useful analytical device in comparative studies that encompass movements within diverse religious traditions. There would be "family resemblances" among these movements based on a "religiously inspired reaction to aspects of the global processes of modernization and secularization in the twentieth century". According to Appleby (1998, p. 281), "Jewish, Christian, and Muslim fundamentalists may not share the same specific beliefs, but they do share a way of thinking about their beliefs". Therefore, despite other religious traditions don't have certain characteristics that could be more clearly identified within the three major monotheisms, Appleby understands that elements of fundamentalism can be found in other religious movements such as "Hindu nationalists in India, Sikh radicals in Punjab, and Buddhist militants in Sri Lanka". The political (often nationalist) and intolerant dimension of these movements would bring them closer to a "fundamentalist trend" spreading across the world.

While the characterization of "historical fundamentalism" allows us to have some clarity about the meaning of the concept, the expansion of its use to different historical, geographical, and religious contexts is done at the cost of its accuracy. In the search for "family resemblances", fundamentalism moves away from the specificity of "historical fundamentalism" to become a kind of "spirit of the times" or, in the words of Marty and Appleby (1993, p. 3), "a tendency", "a habit of mind". Leonardo Boff, whose perspective is very influential among Brazilian researchers, speaks of a "fundamentalist attitude". Fundamentalism "is not a doctrine. But a way of interpreting and living the doctrine" (BOFF, 2002, p. 25). In an interview given to the IHU Magazine on October 8, 2014, Boff stated that:

> The fundamentalist attitude arises when the truth of one's church or group is understood as the only legitimate one, with the exclusion of all others, considered to be erroneous and therefore deprived of the right to exist. Those who imagine that their point of view is the only valid one are doomed

> to be intolerant. This closed attitude leads to contempt, discrimination, and religious or political violence.[4]

If Appleby (1998, p. 280) affirms that the "fundamentalists can be found in any historical religion that has sacred scriptures and basic teachings", Boff goes a little further and states that "fundamentalism, as an attitude and trend, can be found in sectors of all religions and spiritual paths" (BOFF, 2002, p. 26). Based on this premise of the "fundamentalist attitude", some questions arise: If there is fundamentalism in all religions, can there be fundamentalism without sacred books?; If understanding the truth of one's own group as the only legitimate one is to be a fundamentalist, can we talk about fundamentalism before the advent of modernity? (would Galileo Galilei have been a victim of the persecution of fundamentalists?). The search for "family resemblances" would not have made researchers ignore the fact that there are many more differences than similarities between the conservative and politically mobilized religious groups? Could we not ask ourselves here, along with Marranci (2009, p. 6), if these "family resemblances" exist more in the minds of those who write about fundamentalism than in the phenomena about which they write?"

4 Creating the fundamentalism

The notion of "global fundamentalism" is indeed an important chapter in the history of the concept of fundamentalism and is at the root of its current polysemy. The use of the concept has become increasingly usual in academic texts, media, and even in common sense. And the use, in the vast majority of cases, is accusatory and directed at a person or group different from the one that enunciates it. In addition, it is no longer limited to religious issues. It is necessary to add "religious" to fundamentalism to differentiate it from the numerous fundamentalisms that have

[4] A doença do fundamentalismo. Available in: <http://www.ihu.unisinos.br/78-noticias/536010-a-doenca-do-fundamentalismo-leonardo-boff> Accessed on July 25, 2020.

been created. In Juan José Tamayo, we can have an idea of the contemporary "polyvalence" of the concept. According to the author, fundamentalism

> consists in the absolutization of truth, religion, culture, etc., which is intended to be imposed, even resorting to force, as the only and universally valid one [...]. Thus, we talk about religious fundamentalism, when a religion is considered the only true one; of political fundamentalism, when a single political model is absolutized to the exclusion of the rest; [...] of economic fundamentalism, when defending the existence of a single economic model, specifically the market economy, with its corresponding neoliberal theology (TAMAYO, 2009, p. 17).

As we said in the previous section, while there are authors who defend the use of the concept of fundamentalism in comparative analyses and that go beyond the Protestant and American context in which the concept emerged, on the other hand, several authors have expressed concerns with the indiscriminate use of the concept. According to Watt and Wood (2014, p. 5), among the critics of the expanded use of fundamentalism, some understood that the concept is not useful and that it obscures more than clarifies; others claim that it remains too linked to Christian concepts to be applied in a significant way to other religious traditions; and some understand that the concept has become too vague to be useful. "Very broadly speaking, fundamentalism is defined in terms of resistance to modern "threats" or opposition to modern secularism. Beyond that, it is difficult to pin down precisely what the words *fundamentalism* and *fundamentalist* mean" (WOOD, 2014, p. 125). Peter Berger's position on the use of fundamentalism to classify some sectors of Islamism exemplifies the main tone of the critics:

> Both in the media and in scholarly publications, these movements are often subsumed under the category "fundamentalism". This is not a felicitous term, not only because it carries a pejorative undertone but also because it derives from the history of American Protestantism, where it has a specific reference that is distortive if extended to other religious traditions. [...] While the aforementioned common features are important, an analysis of the social and political impact of the various religious upsurges must also take full account of their differences (BERGER, 1999, p. 6-7).

We observe a basic difference in focus between supporters and critics of the use of the concept: while those in favor of the notion of "global fundamentalism" highlight the similarities, their critics emphasize the differences. For the critics, the differences would be much clearer than the "familiar resemblances" and the search for what would be common in such different movements would be responsible for the loss of explanatory capacity of the concept. It would be a "stumbling block" because it would tend to obscure the differences and homogenize very different phenomena into a common classification.

The applicability of the expanded use of the concept of fundamentalism is also questioned because its use replaces other words and concepts that would be much more appropriate to the phenomenon being analyzed than the currently diffuse notion of fundamentalism. Calling things by name would be to choose specificity instead of generalization. Many times, depending on the context in which it is used, fundamentalism can be replaced by intolerance, exclusivism, sectarianism, or intransigence without any loss in the content of the sentence. On the contrary, there would be a significant gain in terms of clarity of meaning. If intransigent, according to the Michaelis Dictionary[5], means "one who does not compromise, who does not make concessions; austere, intolerant, rigorous, severe; [...] revealing austerity of character and rigidity in the observance of principles", wouldn't it be more advisable to talk, in many cases, of religious intransigence instead of fundamentalism? If fanaticism means "excessive religious zeal that sometimes borders on obsession and can result in extreme acts of intolerance; blind adherence to a doctrine or system; factionalism, partisanship", wouldn't the notion of religious fanaticism, in some cases, be more appropriate than the current polysemic notion of fundamentalism?

> Without rehearsing a complete list, we note Khalid Yahya Blankinship's suggestion that frequently what is discussed under the rubric of fundamentalism is effectively separatism or exclusivism. Why not refer to these cases as such? What payoff results from labeling them fundamentalism? We struggle to find one. [...] Or if what we are really trying to conjure up is a category of religious people who are prone to violence or militancy then it might make sense for us to focus on comparing

[5] Digital version of the dictionary available on: <http://michaelis.uol.com.br/> Accessed on July 24, 2020.

> "militant forms of religion" or "violent forms of religion." Similarly, if the object is effectively politicized religion—a reaction to political situations that draw on the resources of religious tradition—why not refer to it as such? That label would apply to some but certainly, not all movements identified as fundamentalist. To be sure, terms such as *Political Islam* bring their own sets of complications and controversies, but these are by our reading less problematical than those associated with fundamentalism (WATT; WOOD, 2014, p. 254).

Besides this group of authors who directly oppose the perspective of "global fundamentalism", there are others who question different implications of using the concept of fundamentalism. An important discussion revolves around the pejorative meaning of the concept and the analysis of those who enunciate it. It is noticeable in the practical use of the concept that "fundamentalism continues to be the symbolic place of the other: *we* [author's emphasis] are not fundamentalists, *they* are" (CAMPOS, 2018, 356).

Peter Burke (2001) offers us an important reflection on our relationship with the Other. According to the English historian, groups confronted with different cultures would react: 1) by denying or ignoring cultural distance, assimilating "others to ourselves or our neighbors through the use of analogy, whether this device is used consciously or unconsciously [...] It is through an analogy that the exotic is made intelligible, that it is domesticated"; or 2) by consciously or unconsciously constructing the image of another culture as opposed to their own. "In this fashion, fellow-humans are 'othered'". In the Middle Ages, Christians, inspired by the Song of Roland, understood Islam as a "diabolical inversion of Christianity" in which Muslims worshiped "an infernal Trinity, composed of Apollo, Muhammad and a certain 'Termagant'" (BURKE, 2001, p. 123-124). Such attitudes, throughout history, would be at the origin of the formation of stereotypes, of generalizations based on preconceived perceptions that did not deepen (and often were not interested) in the knowledge of a certain culture or group. The stereotype, even if it presents some effectively verifiable elements, ignores certain particularities and generalizes what is different. Furthermore, the stereotype is usually negative. It often involves the dehumanization of the Other. According to Burke (2001, p. 126):

> Unfortunately, most stereotypes of others – the Jews as seen by the Gentiles, the Muslims by the Christians, blacks by whites, peasants by townspeople, soldiers by civilians, women by men, and so on – were and are either hostile, contemptuous or, at the very least, condescending. A psychologist would probably look for the fear underlying the hatred and also for the unconscious projection of undesirable aspects of the self on to the other. It is perhaps for this reason that the stereotypes often take the form of inversions of the viewer's self-image. The cruder stereotypes are based on the simple assumption that 'We' are human or civilized while 'They' are little different from animals [...]. In this way, others are turned into 'the Other'. They are exoticized, distanced from the self. They may even be turned into monsters.

Given the criticisms of those opposed to the use of the expanded notion of fundamentalism, wouldn't the use of the concept of fundamentalism and the adjective "fundamentalist" become a kind of stereotype that leaves indelible marks both in common sense and academic reflections? Taking a step forward: wouldn't the current use of the notion of fundamentalism, instead of describing something objective, actually be "creating" fundamentalism? If one of the characteristics attributed to fundamentalism is a dualistic view of the world (God's chosen ones against the sons of darkness), wouldn't modern discourse on fundamentalism also be a form of dividing the world between "us" and "them"? As Susan Harding (1991, p. 373-374) says about the American case, "fundamentalists create themselves through their own cultural practices, but not exactly as they please". They were also shaped by "modern discursive practices", in popular stereotypes, media representations, and academic knowledge. Returning to the repercussions of the Scopes Trial, Harding sees, in Mencken's speeches and those who were inspired by him, fundamentalists as an inferior category of people whose existence in the 20th century needed explanation. The Western enlightenment process would have failed at some point for that type of manifestation to still be present. While the existence of fundamentalists needed an explanation, on the other hand, media coverage and the repercussions of the trial in Tennessee constituted "an apotheosis of the modern gaze, its authorial point of view, its knowing voice, its teleological privilege, its right to exist without explanation" (HARDING, 1991, p. 390-391).

Gabriele Marranci argues that the “creation” of Islamic fundamentalism is inextricably linked to the Western and European discourse, which carries the imprints of Enlightenment ideals. In a similar vein to Edward Said's well-known discussion of Orientalism (1990) – where the Orient is seen as a construct of the West – Marranci examines the ramifications of a Eurocentric view that positions the European Enlightenment as the starting point and the standard for evaluating the compatibility or incompatibility of various phenomena with modern civilization. What has been perceived as “familiar resemblances” among different fundamentalisms globally is more a consequence of a perspective that is based on European evolutionary history and a reductionist comparative approach. This approach measures various religious expressions by the parameter of a kind of religion suitable to Enlightenment and secularism while preserving the autonomy of other spheres of human activity and limiting the influence of religious beliefs on the private sphere.[6] In this perspective, fundamentalism would be a “religious social phenomenon, characterized by a deviance from the acceptable way of living in the contemporary (Western/Westernized?) world” (MARRANCI, 2009, p. 45). This view of fundamentalism would then, as Watt (2017, p. 45) argues, be inherited from an antifundamentalist tradition of thought, which defends a binary division of the world between those who adhere to progress and the values of the modern world (including democracy and tolerance) and the reactionaries, intolerant and "enemies of progress".

Finally, is it possible that this “modern perspective” on fundamentalism is deeply ingrained in academia, even among researchers who specialize in the study of religion? Are we being led by a normative differentiation between “good religion” and “bad religion” (with fundamentalism serving as a synonym for the latter)? Has fundamentalism become more of a politically charged label than a critical one, leading to it becoming an empty or problematic category? (WATT; WOOD, 2014, p. 6). Has the concept evolved into a classification for positions that are not in

[6] An example of this challenge to a notion of religion based on a Eurocentric and "Enlightened" perspective is the criticism that Talal Asad (1993) makes of Clifford Geertz's perspective of religion as a "cultural system."

agreement (even beyond the realm of religion, as exemplified by Tamayo's citation earlier in this section)? Does the researcher have the role of judge over the "quality" of religious expressions they analyze? Is the belief that religious values should permeate all spheres of human action a clearly irrational and/or exotic belief?

Conclusion

As outlined in this text, discussions surrounding the definition of fundamentalism are ongoing. The history of the concept continues to be written. For our part, we tend to take a critical stance towards the usage of the term fundamentalism beyond its original Protestant context. We believe that comparative studies based on the notion of "global fundamentalism" and the application of the term beyond its original context and religious groups have resulted in a loss of objectivity and explanatory ability of the term. To paraphrase Ferreira, Taborda, and Darnton, the term fundamentalism is starting to mean everything, therefore...

But we do not limit the use of the concept of fundamentalism only to the United States of the 1920s and 1930s. The central elements of that initial fundamentalism continue to have an impact throughout the history of the United States and in Protestant groups outside the US that are heavily influenced by certain trends in American Protestantism. When applying the concept, it is important to consider the unique historical and social factors involved and the applicability of the concept in each case.

Despite this, the present text does not have any dogmatic or normative aspirations. When working with certain concepts, researchers face the danger of two potential issues: either adhering to an overly strict or overly lenient interpretation of the concept. We do not view the use of the concept in comparative exercises that draw on the notion of "global fundamentalism" as a "fatal flaw". Concepts are not restricted to their original formulation. Fundamentalism is not tied to Curtis Lee Laws' understanding of it when he first employed the term. Koselleck (2006, p. 115)

asserts that "'once minted', a concept contains within itself, purely linguistically, the possibility of being employed in a generalized manner, of constructing types, or of disclosing comparative insights". However, this use should not come at the cost of a lack of conceptual accuracy or attempts to "compare the incomparable" or to obscure the many differences to emphasize the few similarities. It is up to each researcher to clearly articulate their understanding of the concept. As Pierucci says about the case of secularization, it requires "a bit more logical rigor and conceptual precision to reduce the ambiguity of the vocabulary" (PIERUCCI, 1998, p. 65).

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