



Fundamentalism: The Search For Meaning

By Malise Ruthven

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Since the end of the Cold War, fundamentalism has been seen as the major threat to world peace, a conclusion that was burned into our consciousness on September 11th and that is reinforced almost every day in the Middle East. But what exactly is fundamentalism?

Here is the first book to explore the real nature of secular and religious fundamentalism worldwide, highlighting the many different forms fundamentalism can take. Examining Christian, Islamic, Jewish, Buddhist, and Hindu sects, Malise Ruthven offers a sweeping look at this phenomenon, examining its historical, social, religious, political and ideological backgrounds and providing a critical view of the burgeoning literature on this highly diverse set of movements. Fundamentalism, he concludes, is a problematic term that defies easy definitions. Coined by American Protestant evangelicals in the 1920s, the word's meaning has expanded to include radical conservatives and ideological purists in many spheres of activity, not all of them religious. Fundamentalism embraces Islamic radicals in the Muslim world as well as the militant Israeli settlers who oppose them. It has been used to describe Sikh, Hindu and even Buddhist nationalists who seek to justify their political agendas by reference to divine edicts or religious tradition. Ruthven agrees that there are some "family resemblances" between different fundamentalist movements, especially over concerns of national identity and gender, but he ultimately questions its usefulness as a term.

One of the world's leading commentators on Islam, Malise Ruthven writes with a clarity and directness that never fails to engage the reader. In this superb volume, he guides us through what is clearly a complex topic, but one that is vitally important in the modern world.

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Fundamentalism: The Search For Meaning By Malise Ruthven Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #1129481 in Books
- Published on: 2005-06-02
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 5.00" h x .60" w x 7.70" l, .45 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 254 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

'This is a gentle, civilised book, written with some style. I enjoyed reading it.'

Sasthi Brata, Spectator 10/04/2004

'The first clear definition of this indispensable yet misused term.'

Anoush Ehteshami, University of Durham

'... an important contribution to the current political and cultural debates about Islam and the West, religious extremism, and the changing identity of supposedly secular societies.'

R. Scott Appleby, University of Notre Dame

About the Author

Malise Ruthven is the author of *A Fury for God: The Islamist Attack on America*, *A Satanic Affair: Salman Rushdie and the Wrath of Islam*, and *Islam in the World*.

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