Author's Preface

The article "Shaʻite Islam: Orthodoxy or Heterodoxy" was first published in 1994 in the journal *Epimeleia: revista de estudios sobre la tradición*. It was written with the purpose of analyzing the various arguments and approaches employed by Western scholars and opinion-makers to characterize "Islamic fundamentalism," an ill-defined and ill-understood social phenomena occurring in the Muslim world.

The very term "fundamentalism," as applied to Islam, is inappropriate and arbitrary, and finds its sole justification in the language of the press. The immediate objective of the article was to explain why such a characterization of Islam was not only erroneous in application, but a serious oversimplification, a tendentious interpretation motivated by a hidden agenda.

The article also sheds light on questions related to the use and abuse of certain arguments. It exposed some of the mistakes made by Orientalists and corrected, once and for all, a series of serious shortcomings. It demonstrated how well-known Arabists and Modernist Muslim thinkers repeatedly misapply various terms. It exposed their misappropriation of Western religious terminology–filled with false assumptions and prejudices–and how they indiscriminately apply them to a wide variety of spiritual traditions.

Those who profess expertise in the study and understanding of Islam and Shaʻism, often without possessing even basic proficiency in Arabic and Persian, take terms from the Western world and attempt to apply them to the Eastern world. They take Christian terminology and attempt to impose it upon Islam.[1] Not only are these technical terms misappropriated, they are applied to traditional Islamic concepts which are taken totally out of context.

This common practice is as ludicrous as taking Islamic terminology and applying it to the Christian world. Some scholars could argue that the Catholics are "Shaʻites," followers of the "infallible" Popes. Others would argue that the Catholics are the Sunnis, and the Catholic Church is the Caliphate. The Protestants would be labeled as "Shaʻites," sectarian heretics who broke from the main body of believers.

Yet others would say that the Protestants are "Wahhabis" since they are literalist fundamentalists while the Catholics are "Shaʻites" because of their hermeneutical tradition. Christianity would not be without its

Sūfis like Saint Theresa of Avila, San Juan de la Cruz, Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, Master Eckhardt, John Tauler, and Henry Suso and "martyrs" like Saint Joan of Arc.

As misguided as it may be, this practice of imposing a Western religious framework on the Islāmic faith has been done with impunity so much so that authors have not even seen the need to justify their extrapolations, to confirm their correctness, or to consider their relevance.

When we first wrote the article, we focused our criticism on Western Orientalism. Now, however, we have extended our critique–and most justifiably so–to the social and political sciences in general. In recent decades, these two fields have erroneously employed certain scientific and non-scientific terms.

This includes terms like "fundamentalism" which the social and political sciences apply to anything in the Islāmic world which seems reactionary or conservative. In fact, the half-religious, half-political phenomenon they are observing has nothing to do with "fundamentalism."

According to its original meaning, "fundamentalism" denotes a dry literalist spirit, a concept which is completely alien to the Islāmic tradition. As a result, the application of the derogatory term "fundamentalism" to Islām is a distortion of the true nature of things. It reflects an attempt to impose a label by lexical manipulation. To make matters worse, the application of the term "fundamentalism" gives a false impression of Islām to Westerners. Rather than presenting Islām as it is, they present it as it is not.[2]

Sacred tradition–the source of all spirituality–and religion, which is its outer aspect–cannot be subjected to the same scrutiny as the pure sciences. One cannot approach a spiritual tradition like a physicist deals with gravity, a biologist deals with life, a meteorologist deals with the climate or an entomologist deals with insects.

Studying religious tradition is not the same as observing natural phenomena. For the sociologist, political scientist or philosopher, it is impossible to split religious phenomenon into bits and pieces with the same callous indifference a coroner employs to dissect a cadaver. According to Positivism, such an aloof attitude is natural and to be expected of any scientist.

While the social sciences are not pure sciences, researchers in these fields also focus on observation. Social scientists employ rigorous methods of research, documentation, and analysis when studying a social system.

They use statistics to bring together all the determining factors and conditions in order to describe social change. They attempt, to the highest degree possible, to be as strict and exhaustive as physicists and biologists when dealing with human factors. This scientific spirit forms the very basis of research in the social sciences. However, unlike the pure sciences, which are based on scientific facts, the social sciences rely on human factors, information provided by people, and so-called public opinion, making them particularly susceptible to subjectivity.

From the time the original article was written to the publication of this first English edition, over a decade has elapsed. During that time, we have observed how English terms like "fundamentalism" and "radical Islāmism," along with Spanish and French terms like *integrismo* and *intégrisme*, have been consistently interchanged as if they were equivalents.

These terms were treated as synonyms by specialists in Islāmic Studies. They have been and continue to be used by social critics and political analysts when commenting upon foreign policy and international affairs. These spokespersons are often the initial source of public opinion. Subsequently, whether it embellishes or minimizes, public opinion is one of the greatest influences on public life in the Western world.

A nation's likes, dislikes, admiration, indifference and contempt are all sentiments which are based on public opinion. One has only to look at the popular media in the United States for proof of this assertion. The powers that be are notorious for using public opinion to their advantage to bring people in line with their plans. It is apparent that wars of conquest are no longer waged in the name of expansionism and imperialism.

Whether it is called the New World Order of the Freemasons, the Illuminati, George Monbiot, and George W. Bush; the Jewish Conspiracy of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, Adolf Hitler, and Henry Ford; Karl Krause's World Republic; Aldous Huxley's Brave New World; George Orwell's Big Brother; the World Arrogance or the Great Satan of Imām Khumaynī; the Z.O.G. of the Neo–Nazis; the Evil Empire of Paul Hellyer; the Shadow Government, the Trust, the Syndicate, the World Government or the Invisible Empire from popular culture; globalization–the new term for socio–political and economic world domination–is now being carried out in the name of democracy and freedom of expression, effectively muzzling opposition from human rights activists.

People are no longer conquered and colonized, they are "liberated" and brought into the fold of Western–style "democracy," the new imperialism with its extreme economic model of carnivorous and cannibalistic capitalism. As for the "freedom of expression," it only applies to imperial propaganda aimed at manufacturing public opinion on the basis of its socio–economic and political interests.

Since the message which is emitted serves the interest of the powers that be, it comes as no surprise that it has been systematically manipulated.3 While such spin can be detected by expert analysts, it usually passes unnoticed by the masses. In many cases, the message is diluted by means of subliminal mechanisms which are not recognizable or even perceptible at a conscious level.4

This *public opinion*–which is really nothing more but the opinion of the socio–economic elite–is controlled and constructed by means of the mass media. Public opinion influences the minds of people and affects many aspects of their lives: from personal relations to group relations, from religious to political convictions, and even questions of personal taste.

If public opinion is manufactured, as Noam Chomsky has eloquently postulated, the social sciences,

which depend on the daily offerings of the mass media, find themselves in a particularly dubious position. Within the framework of this conundrum, it is imperative to examine how attempts to construct public opinion by means of the mass media result in what Jürgen Habermas calls a "non-public opinion."5[6] It is a "non-public opinion" because–in reality–it merely reflects the interests of a certain sector of political and economic power.

The creation of public opinion serves social, economic, and political purposes. Part and parcel of this political and economic sector is to use derogatory terms like "fundamentalism," *intégrisme* or *integrismo* to describe Muslims. By doing so, the *nouveaux maîtres du monde*, the new rulers of the world, as Jean Ziegler calls them, group all Muslims with violent extremists, and isolated groups of radical reformists. In this way, themanufacturers of public opinion act as if the term "fundamentalism" could be universally applied to all those who legitimately defend their traditional political and religious beliefs.

Considering the fact that the mass media is manipulated on a mass scale, the question begs to be asked: "Should the social sciences cast aside their objectivity and simply submit to this 'virtual reality' built upon falsehood and deceit?" The obvious answer is no. It should not and it must not. However, when we look at the cultural landscape in the Western world, when we read newspapers and watch television, we see that many social scientists are merely echoing false and deceitful public opinion.

In fact, many of them use the same concepts and terms that social engineers use to falsify the facts. The situation has become so blurred in the social sciences that scholars need to seriously reassess their basic assumptions, academic objectives, and research tools. They need to start addressing these preoccupying epistemological problems. As Barbara Castleton explains:

We live in an age in which a selection of a dozen or so buzz words can turn a nation from protector to aggressor. We live in an age where lies revealed bring no shame in the liar, merely a restatement of the lie in a configuration that both extends and perpetuates it. Ours is not the first era in which this has occurred. History is replete with such episodes, notably the Crusades and the Holocaust.

But the direction taken by the West in its pursuit of "terrorists," and in America's attempts to "protect the homeland" from said "terrorists" through a "war on terror" has ceased to have any meaning beyond the utterance of the words themselves.

As any scientist or scholar knows, true science and epistemology is contrary to opinion because opinion is a notoriously flawed source of information. Opinion, be it personal or public, is subjective, and impossible to be validate scientifically. As Gaston Bachelard has pointed out, opinion does not think and when it does, it thinks poorly, turning need into knowledge.6 Since public opinion is constructed, it can contribute nothing to science unless it is deconstructed à la Jacques Derrida.

The role of the scientist is to overcome opinion, to be utterly objective, to uncover the facts, and to let them speak for themselves. This is even more important for social scientists, those who work with human factors, since prejudice and falsehood can creep into opinion, interfering with the scientific spirit

in a multitude of ways.

Unless social scientists can overcome this epistemological obstacle–the perilous problem of tainted sources–their results will be flawed and their conclusions will be distorted. If social scientists compromise the scientific spirit, allowing distorted data to interfere with their observations, the result will be a slanted view of reality. These methodological mistakes will be implicit in their theoretical framework, inevitably leading to erroneous conclusions based on false premises.

Unfortunately, due to its reliance on public opinion, the field of social sciences now abounds with bias, resulting in a reductionist rendition of social reality. We could not have it any other way since public opinion, as generated by the mass media, reflects the surreal attitude of those who inhabit the world of "virtual reality."

This virtual world has no relation whatsoever to the real world, with actual and factual representations of reality. The virtual world is merely a reflection of television which deforms images, creating a slanted vision of the world. Journalism, too, both oral and written, is aimed at creating public opinion. And it is from journalism that social scientists draw their material for the study of conflicts in the Middle East.

Journalism, to a large extent, is merely officially falsified information. It describes the Islāmic world with inaccurate and tainted terminology. In some cases, it is not only social scientists, but commentators and philosophers, who draw from this same terminology, who err in this way. These professionals, rather than clarifying concepts, employ terms as primitive weapons tossed at one's opponent in a grand scheme of international intrigue.

Within the field of social sciences are those who believe that traditional Islāmic society can be conveniently split apart for the purpose of study. They attempt to separate Islām's sociopolitical aspects from its religious and legal ones. They attempt to separate Islām's outer aspects from its inner ones. By isolating elements, rather than studying them as parts of a cohesive system, they attempt to depict Islām as a type of reactionary conservatism.

In order to make the definition even more damaging, they label Islām as "fundamentalist," *intégriste* or *integrista*. None of these verbal constructions are capable of providing a proper definition. To use the words of Saint Thomas Aquinas, the signifier and the signified are simply not the same.7

If this terminological incoherence, reminiscent of the Tower of Babel, existed solely among Western sociologists and political scientists, there would not be much at which to marvel. However, some modern Arab sociologists like Fātimah Mernessi, and even Islāmized Western philosophers like Roger Garaudy, have joined this chorus of confusion.

By embracing erroneous terms like "fundamentalism" and *intégrisme*, scholars like Mernessi and Garaudy give them scientific and philosophical legitimacy. Sociologists, political scientists, historians, and social thinkers, all use the terms "fundamentalism," *intégrisme* and *integrismo* with complete

confidence, as if these words expressed a positive reality and a defining characteristic of Islām. What is worse is that some of them use these terms in radically different ways. If we were to apply the judgment of R. Otto with respect to the term "irrational," we would say that social scientists have made a "field day" or a real obsession of these words.

There are those who argue that sociology, political science, and history– being reality–based sciences–must work within the framework of facts, concepts, terms, and materials provided by the mass media. However, since the terminology these social scientists use is drawn from the press–which is loaded with inaccuracies–the very basis of their studies can be called into question.

If the terminology is incorrect, it undermines the understanding of the social phenomenon being studied. The terms "fundamentalism," *intégrisme* and *integrismo* are examples of terms which journalists use abusively and irresponsibly. While these concepts can describe a positive reality when used appropriately according to their scientific sense, they are misused by the press, presenting readers with an erroneous interpretation of social events.

It makes little difference to the mass media whether "fundamentalism" is a cause or whether it is a response. For the social sciences, the phenomenon is studied in isolation. It is examined independently of its causes. As a result, the true nature of the subject is lost in thought, pigeonholed, and given the pejorative label of "fundamentalism," *intégrisme* or *integrismo*.

One must wonder whether this biased approach–which fails to contextualize its subject–is not the most blatant form of fundamentalism. Whether it is close reading, the Feminist Criticism of Simone de Beauvoir, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixoux; the New Historicism of Michel Foucault, Walter Benjamin, and Mikhail Bakhtin.

ThePsychoanalytic Criticism of Jacques Lacan; the Structuralism of Roman Jakobson, Claude Lévi–Strauss, and Roland Barthes; the Marxist Criticism of Georg Lukács and Keith Ellis; the Postcolonial Criticism of Edward Saʻīd, Homi Bhabha, Benita Parry, Kwame Nkrumah, Albert Memmi, Aimé Césaire, Derek Walcott, and Gayatari Spivak or the Phenomenological Hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur, Martin Heidegger, Hans–Georg Gadamer or Mario Valdés, a subject should never be studied outside of its context. As I.M. Lewis asserted almost fifty years ago, "Islām can be analyzed sociologically only within the context of the actual life and…beliefs of living Muslim communities" (2).

On what basis, then, do social scientists apply the label of "fundamentalism" to Islāmic movements? Have they conducted fieldwork among Muslim activists? Have they analyzed the socio–political and economic causes of Islāmic activism? On the contrary, much of what has been written about Islāmic fundamentalism has been based on the media. One such book, dealing with the Islāmic Revolution of Iran, was based exclusively on newspaper and magazine articles. Since such work is neither scholarship nor investigative journalism it does not even merit to be mentioned by name. Clearly, if social scientists persist in viewing their subject in isolation, no religious or political movement which resists globalization

will be safe from the labels of "fundamentalism."

This is the same reductionist and essentialist attitude adopted by Formalism and New Criticism with regards to literature. Unless the methodology of the social sciences is modified, unscientific slurs such as "fundamentalism," *intégrisme* or *integrismo* will continue to circulate. Rather than describing and defining social behavior and concepts, terms like "fundamentalism" confuse them, diluting and distorting their true meaning. The only purpose these words play is to obfuscate, disqualify, discredit, abase, and reject…They reflect the very worst of sociological jargon.

As a result of this terminology confusion, it is necessary to clarify certain concepts like "Islāmic fundamentalism," *intégrisme islāmique*, *integrismo islámico*, and "radical Islāmism." Despite the fact that these terms are used synonymously in the mass media as well the academic world, they refer to different political attitudes and currents. The only thing they have in common is that they are rooted in the Islāmic cultural universe.

Introducing the term "Islāmism" or "radical Islāmism" into our discussion is relevant as it is another label which is pinned to Muslims on top of "fundamentalism," *intégrisme* and *integrismo* which have been worn down through constant use. As for Shāʾite Islām, it is commonly considered the very manifestation of "radical Islāmism" in its most militant and combative form.

In the lexical world, there exist words which are erroneous from every perspective: whether considered etymologically, semantically or lexically. One such term is "Islāmic fundamentalism" which is erroneously employed in the French and Spanish sense of *intégrisme* or *integrismo*. All of these terms are drawn from modern Christian religious experience and all predate the phenomenon wrongly labeled as "Islāmic fundamentalism," *intégrisme* or *integrismo*.

Despite this fact, they are almost exclusively applied to Islām, without taking into consideration that the term "fundamentalism" was introduced into Christian theological language as the result of a Protestant controversy which took place at the beginning of the twentieth century. After that, the term was adopted into the language of secular philosophers and historians who were more or less unabashed enemies of both Christianity and Islām.

If we look beyond the present frenzy for the word "fundamentalist," we see that the concept serves to supplant an earlier term: *intégrisme* or *integrismo*. Despite the fact that "fundamentalism," *intégrisme* and *integrismo* have different etymologies they all express the same incorrect concept.

As a result, they are interchanged without distinction and are considered synonymous. Rather than a desire for terminological precision, these terms reflect an ideological motive, a means of legitimizing sociologically what is in reality a political objective. A Catholic writer, when speaking about traditional Islām, might employ the term "fundamentalist," associating it with Protestant conservatism.

A Protestant, Marxist or secular liberal–all anti-Catholic to the core–might opt for the term *intégrisme* or

integrismo, associating it with the reactionary conservative Catholicism of the nineteenth century. As can be seen, the choice of terms depends on the ideological inclination or conviction of the social scientist or philosopher. The selection of terms like "fundamentalism," *intégrisme*, *integrismo*, and "radical Islāmism" are not casual or arbitrary. They are used as part of a deliberate and intentional political policy.

The general application of terms like "fundamentalism," *intégrisme*, *integrismo*, and "radical Islāmism" to every Islāmic group which opposes Western secularism and cultural imperialism misleads those who seek to understand the true nature of Islām. This terminological mudslinging leads to confusion, giving the impression that traditional Muslims reflect the same reactionary and conservative attitude as some recalcitrant sectors of Christianity.

It gives the impression that Muslim "fundamentalists" are the Islāmic equivalent of Christian fundamentalists. The use of terms like "fundamentalist," *intégriste*, *integrista*, and "radical Islāmist" may be well-established in the press; however, the language of the media merely reflects the vague, imprecise and indefinite terminology from the colloquial language. Consequently, it is not well-adapted to the use of science. It can only be of relative value to those who hide their ideological motives under the façade of a pseudo-scientific language.

The use of imprecise notions to describe the socio-political reality of Islām is clearly objectionable. It is inappropriate because it forces the reader to make mental contortions in search for the meaning behind such empty terms such as "fundamentalism," *intégrisme*, *integrismo* and "radical Islāmism." There is no doubt that reality-based sciences are based on information taken from daily life.

This applies to psychology, sociology, political science, history, and so forth. However, one cannot construct something concrete on the basis of concepts which are predicated on an entirely different socio-historical experience. If concepts are transformed into fact, they will vanish as soon as one attempts to reduce them to an abstract formula. Consequently, any sociological concept which is devoid of an intelligible and objective structure is inconceivable. Any sociological concept must refer to the concrete relation with an object. It must constitute a typical plexus of the significant intentions grouped together in the definition of the social reality. Let us analyze, then, the term "fundamentalism."

Examining any aspect of the Islāmic world on the basis of erroneous terms like "fundamentalism," *intégrisme* or *integrismo* can only lead to perilous postulations. As we explained before, these terms are erroneous because they fail to consider the correlations between doctrine and social groups. As a result, the use of such terms prevents an objective analysis of the relationship between traditional Islāmic thought, the Modernist mentality or any other political and religious currents.

No religious or political movement can be understood from the outside. It is essential to examine any such movements within the broader doctrinal controversies from which they surge and develop. In the case of traditional Islāmic thought this is particularly relevant. When applied to Christianity, the term fundamentalism fits the context: it has antecedents, off-chutes, and aberrations. When applied to Islām,

the term *fundamentalism* is outside the framework of its socio–religious evolution.

Unlike Christian fundamentalism, which has a history and a development which can be traced, *Islāmic fundamentalism* does not reflect a concrete doctrine like liberalism, fascism, socialism, communism or anarchism. The terms *Islāmic fundamentalism*, *Islāmic fascism*, *intégrisme* and *integrismo* are applied to a vast array of imprecise ideas covering virtually every political current in Islām. These multifarious manifestations of *intégrisme* or *integrismo* share a combination of social concern with religious doctrine. At the same time, they constitute other complex realities which are frequently only definable by their opposites.

As we have seen, the mass media is responsible for spreading falsehood and legitimizing slanderous and scientifically inaccurate terms like "fundamentalism," *intégrisme*, *integrismo* and "radical Islāmism." This does not mean that the mass media is the mother of all evil–quite the contrary–it is the very concept of secular modernity and globalization, the "progressive" anti–traditional attitude of modern man which poses the greatest threat to humanity.

From the time concepts like secularism and Positivism first emerged in the West, the world has been transformed into a "global village," according to the definition of Marshall McLuhan. It is not the mass media, then, which is the cause of certain aberrations of interpretation which offend the good sense of any critic. It is part and parcel of the Western worldview.

As for us, we will continue to criticize social scientists and philosophers for converting "opinion" into "fact." While we risk sounding like a "fundamentalist," *intégriste* or *integrista*, our stance forms part of a long line of spiritual resistance to all attempts to homogenize the world and the word, seeking to lower language to the lowest common denominator; in this case, taking the language of science down to the level of the mass media.

As social scientist and philosopher, we find it difficult to digest that scholars in the social sciences–particularly anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists and modern historians–have refused to redefine the terms "fundamentalism," *intégrisme* or *integrismo*. Despite the rich body of terminology at their disposition and their ability to coin new terms, they have failed to reconsider the terms "fundamentalism," *intégrisme* or *integrismo*.

This scholarly stagnation is startling considering the central importance of scientifically accurate terms to the social sciences. At the very least one would have expected social scientists to employ different terms than the biased ones used by political commentators and opinion makers. It is certainly strange to see social scientists and philosophers give credibility to terms like *intégrisme* or *integrismo* when their use is technically inappropriate.

Such terms contribute nothing to scholarship, nor do they enrich the language of journalism. When people speak of "Islāmic fundamentalism," they often forget that "fundamentalism" is a modern Christian term. Even though the concept has left its Christian origin and found broader applications, it continues to

convey the idea of American Protestantism. Its application to Islām, which is completely distinct, contributes nothing to the understanding of the social reality in question. The term "fundamentalism" may be appropriate as an analogy when comparing Christianity to Islām.

In the Muslim world, the term "fundamentalist" might be partially applicable to radical reformist movements like Wahhābism or Salafism.8 However, if the term "fundamentalism" ceases to be used as an analogy and is considered as a definition, the end result is an erroneous oversimplification. We must always remember that fundamentalism is rooted in American Protestantism. The term does not refer to a universal phenomenon and is applicable exclusively to certain Christian currents in the United States.

Fundamentalism, per se, refers to a form of American Protestantism which opposes scientific and hermeneutical methods of scriptural criticism. Christian fundamentalists adopt a reactionary attitude which insists on a literal interpretation of the Bible. This is especially so with regards to those parts of the Scripture which refer to Creation.

As a result of a literalist reading of Genesis, Christian fundamentalists reject the modern theory of biological evolution. As a result of this attitude, the issue of teaching evolution in public schools became a political controversy. Defending the infallibility of Scripture, Protestant fundamentalists attempted to organize a solid Christian block against Darwin's theory of evolution. Besides American Protestantism, there are other doomsday cults and charismatic evangelical movements who interpret contemporary events in light of biblical prophecy.

Not only are they opposed to Western secularism, they are fervent defenders of the cultural supremacy and religious hegemony of Christian civilization. Religious fundamentalism, in the true sense of the term, is a purely Western phenomenon. It is the product of the "cultural wars" which took place at the beginning of the twentieth century and which have polarized American society into secular liberal democrats and neo-conservative right-wing Christian fundamentalists

The origin of Christian religious fundamentalism in the United States traces back to 1830. This was a period in which evangelical Protestantism had essentially become the official religion of American civil society. National identity was based on the perception that the United States was a Christian country. The defense of Christianity was viewed as the law of the land. During the nineteenth century, and despite the process of secularization and the separation of Church and State, Protestant Evangelism undeniably maintained its hegemony with regards to the religious, cultural and social life in the United States.

It was in this context, between 1910 and 1915, that a group of 64 Anglo-Americans published a series of twelve booklets titled *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth* which caused a controversy between two Christian currents: a radical conservative one and a more theologically liberal one. Written from a conservative Protestant perspective, the goal of the work was to confront modern liberal Christians who interpreted the Gospel in light of secular modernity. As a result of advances in science and scholarship,

these liberal Christians came to view certain Biblical passages as allegorical and metaphorical rather than historical. This was fiercely opposed by Christian fundamentalists who insisted that the Bible was the literal word of God which could not be subjected to scientific scrutiny.

As a whole, *The Fundamentals* established five points which became the basis of Christian fundamentalist identity: 1) the belief in divine inspiration and the infallibility of the Bible; 2) the belief in the divinity of Jesus, including his virgin birth; 3) the belief in his physical resurrection; 4) the belief in redemption through Christ's sacrifice on the cross; and, finally, 5) the belief in the immanent second coming of Jesus Christ. Adherence to these five fundamentals became a symbolic starting point for the fundamentalist movement.

The title of the publication was used to identify this literalist movement within American Protestantism, which already had a long history. As can clearly be gathered, fundamentalism is Christian in origin and is undoubtedly associated with Protestantism. Fundamentalism developed in the United States as a modern reaction of American conservatism. It is essentially anti-liberal and anti-modern. It opposes the critical analysis of the Bible, the secularization of the educational system, and Darwin's theory of evolution. Furthermore, it opposes socio-cultural, linguistic and racial diversity in American society.

It was only in the 1920's that Protestant fundamentalism joined its forces to fight its cultural and legal battles. They declared war against "heretical" modernism, secular humanism, and the liberal ideas circulating among Christians who were open to Darwinism, Freudism, and Marxism, which were being taught in high schools and universities throughout the country. Stressing the infallibility of the Bible and the messianic mission of the American people, Protestant fundamentalists struggled against modern liberal thought which they viewed as a foreign influence on the "American way of life."

For most of the twentieth century, Christian fundamentalists viewed Catholicism, secularism, and Socialism, as the greatest threats to their ideology. The first line of battle between fundamentalists and secular liberals was drawn around the teaching of evolution in the public school system. While the fundamentalists were able to win cases against Darwinist professors, the fall-back from public opinion was costly as Christian fundamentalists came across as backwards and intolerant.

Their anti-modernist rhetoric had little resonance with an American society firmly focused on perpetual progress. It is on the basis of this pre-existing public opinion of Christian fundamentalists that the mass media constructed the image of "Islāmic fundamentalism," associating it excessively with the American Protestant fundamentalism of that period.

Protestant fundamentalism spread much easier in the southern states and the Mid-West than it did in the western and north-eastern states. The fundamentalist lobby was so strong in Tennessee that the state effectively prohibited the teaching of the theory of evolution, the culmination of the famous trail against Professor John Thomas Scopes in 1925. The law was later deemed unconstitutional by the Supreme Court of the United States in 1968.

Despite this set-back, fundamentalist efforts opposing the teaching of biological evolution have continued to this day under the guise of presenting a "balanced view" of the two theories–evolutionism and creationism–and the recent incorporation of the "theory of intelligent design." After 1925, Protestant fundamentalism lost much of its credibility.

Unable to unite the nation under the banner of fighting the enemies of Christianity, the fundamentalist movement remained relatively inactive in American society for the next fifty years. Nonetheless, the years of absence from the public sphere helped renew the ranks of the fundamentalist forces. The fundamentalists survived as a marginalized religious movement and remained vigorously persistent. It was thus that a Protestant fundamentalist sub-culture came to be created in the United States. Although not numerous, Christian fundamentalists represents a solid, well-organized group with a strong identity.

Protestant fundamentalists have attempted to present themselves as an alternative to liberalism, Catholicism and, in recent decades, to Islām, which has spread rapidly among African Americans. As part of their evangelical mission, fundamentalists have created their own particularly powerful press on top of their already Abundant body of publications thus helping to spread their theological message.

In the early 1930s, the programs *Old Fashion Revival* and *Lutheran Hour* greatly increased the fundamentalist presence in the mass media. In 1941, Carl McIntire, one of the leading fundamentalists in the Presbyterian Church, created the ACCC, the American Council of Christian Churches, to counter the creation of liberal organizations organized around the ecumenical FCC or Federal Council of Churches.

After the Second World War, the ACCC became one of the founders of the International Fundamentalist Council and one of the main opponents of the World Council of Churches. McIntire, the founder of the ACCC, and host of *20th Century Reformation Hour*, became the most fervent and closest collaborator of Joseph McCarthy, the Senator for Wisconsin and Chief of the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee, notorious for the famous "witch hunts" he started during the presidency of Harry Truman. McIntire, the fundamentalist leader, would prepare black lists of pastors suspected of collaborating with the Communists and would hand them to McCarthy.

McIntire, who crusaded against communism, ecumenism, and liberal theology, was convinced that the new translation of the Bible, the Revised Standard Version, was the result of a "red conspiracy." All of these factors contributed to the resurgence of fundamentalism in the public sphere and political activity in the 70's and 80's and its impact on Presidents Ronald Reagan and George Bush has been decisive. In the most recent Presidential elections in the United States, the neo-conservative protestant fundamentalist camp turned towards George W. Bush just like secular liberals turned towards John Kerry.

In light of the above, it can be seen that the term "fundamentalism"–as applied to Islām–has a pejorative connotation. Originally, the term fundamentalism represented an intolerant attitude combined with a literalist interpretation of the Scriptures which was devoid of spirituality. When applied to Islām, however,

the term "fundamentalist" represents a categorical rejection ofmodernism, secularism, and pluralism.

While the meaning of the word has shifted semantically, it also serves as a politically motivated slur which poorly describes a social phenomenon. As regards the other term, *integrismo*, it was first used in 1898 by Cándido Nocedal, a Spanish politician and journalist of Catholic faith, founder of the *Partido Integrista*.

The term was used in the party's political organ, *La Constancia*. It was also used by Cándido Nocedal's son, the Spanish journalist and playwright, Ramón Nocedal y Romea, the founder of the newspaper *El Siglo Futuro*. The term *integrista* was employed by the *Partido Integrista* to designate a political attempt to *integrate* and *unite* all Catholic and Republican forces opposed to progressive liberal policies under the banner of Isabel II and the Spanish monarchy.

In our days, the words "fundamentalism," *intégrisme* and *integrismo* are applied to completely different issues, thus impeding a correct understanding of the actual phenomenon. Unfortunately, these terms continue to circulate from article to article and from book to book, gaining more contemptuous connotations with each subsequent use. To add chaos to confusion, there are scholars who insist that there are different types of "fundamentalism," *intégrisme* and *integrismo*.

This amplification, multiplication, and variation of these base terms–which are inherently flawed–makes it increasingly difficult to differentiate between the American Protestantism–which is truly fundamentalist–and traditional Islāmic thought emanating from the Muslim world. The very ambiguity of the term "fundamentalist," *intégriste* and *integrismo*, should be sufficient to demonstrate that they do not designate anything objectively. They merely gather everything which is deemed intolerant under the same subjective umbrella.

The terms "fundamentalism," *intégrisme* and *integrismo* do not provide an objective description the Islāmic phenomena they are supposed to describe. As a result, the validity of these terms cannot be acknowledged. They simply do not meet the scholarly standards established by the social sciences.

Rather than reflecting a reality, the application of terms like "fundamentalism," *intégrisme* and *integrismo* to Islām manifests a psychological problem on the part of the observer. Since the observer is biased, the observer is subjective. Since the observer is subjective, the observer makes value judgments, dismissing as backwards anything which is contrary to personal concepts of progress and modernity.

The observer views Islām as an obstacle to personal advancement. The observer is terrified by the term "fundamentalist," particularly when preceded by the adjective "Islāmic," reflecting the observer's insecurity as well as an utter ignorance of the true nature of Islām. In fact, if what is wrongly labeled "Islāmic fundamentalism" were properly defined, it would no longer arouse fear.

To object to the shortcomings of terms like "fundamentalism," *intégriste*, *integrista*, and "radical Islāmist" it not a mere intellectual exercise. Besides being used a weapons against Islām, these terms are full of

conceptual flaws. They impede a proper description of the phenomena in question because they identify it erroneously.

When Westerners think about "Islāmic fundamentalism," they are not thinking about a spiritual tradition, but rather a type of Christian religious extremism characterized by a rejection of science, an attitude which is completely alien to Islām. If it is an opposition to modernity which they wish to characterize, then it might be proper to qualify some types of Islāmic activism as "traditionalism." This term, it should be noted, is coined for descriptive purposes. It is not used pejoratively as we have no malicious intent to discredit those who oppose the Western worldview.

As a result of this terminological confusion, we wrote a series of articles between 1994 and 1998 in which we attempted to differentiate between Protestant fundamentalists and Catholic *integristas* from the ill-named "Islāmic fundamentalists" or *integristas.*9[10] We referred to the latter as "principialists" rather than *integristas* or "fundamentalists."10[11] The term "principialist" is far better suited to describe those who adhere to the principles of faith than term "fundamentalist," with its strong right-wing Christian connotations.

The term "principialist" is also the correct translation for the Arabic *usul al-dīn* or the Basic Principles of Faith. We proposed the term *principialist*, not to add another label, but as an objective acknowledgment that in Islām following the principles of faith is neither backwards nor the reflection of a medieval mentality. The principles of faith [*usūl al-dīn*] are the pillars [*al-arkān*] on which any interpretation [*ijtihād*] of Islām rests: its formulation, articulation, and development.

At the same time, the *usūl al-dīn* represent the metaphysical or transcendent principles of the illuminative wisdom of Islāmic Gnosis. The concept of the *usūl al-dīn* can also be translated as "roots," "bases," or "basic components" of faith. The *usūl al-dīn* represent the cultural foundation of what is erroneously labeled as Islāmic fundamentalism.

The *usūl al-dīn* are the roots or foundation of Islām because the term *asl*, the singular form of *usūl*, contains all of these shades of meaning. The correct term to describe those who defend the integrity of traditional Islāmic principles would be "Islāmic principialists," which is far better than "Islāmic fundamentalists," as the term "principialist" indicates a call for a return to the principles of Islām.

What we refer to as "traditional principialism" is the common cultural foundation of Islāmic thought. Like a polished diamond, "traditional principialism" presents multiples faces, reflecting different points of view with respect to political and doctrinal questions, yet which always emphasizes a strong Islāmic identity.

Whether they are from the East or from the West, whether they are traditional activists or radical reformists, Muslims have no doubt that Islām is the solution to all the problems faced by the world today. This conviction is based on the fact that the Prophet Muhammad, as the Final Messenger of God [*Rasūl Allāh*], brought forth a revelation, the Qur'ān, which would last until the end of times.

However moderate or radical Muslims may be in the eyes of the Western world, they universally agree that Islām can solve every single economic, political or personal problem. On the same token, these principles constitute the pillars or foundations [al-arkān] of the Islāmic tradition. These principles have governed the formation of Islām, its expression, and the development of its legal code. At the same time, these principles are the metaphysical foundations of Islām.

They transcend the limitations of the legal experience. They extend to speculative or contemplative matters of Gnostic illumination. They lead to Divine Truth, the Primal Cause, the source from which all knowledge flows as a guide to human beings, covering every dimension of human existence. For Muslims, the usūl al-dīn are *universal unitarian principles* which allow us to perceive the multiplicity within Divine Unity [al-tawhīd].

Besides Islām, all of the great religious, philosophical or legal traditions of the world are *principialist* because they are all based on their respective doctrinal principles. As the famous saying of Latin philosophers goes, *nihil est sine ratione*, "Nothing is without a reason." For many people, including a large number of specialists, the first problem posed by a study of Islāmic movements is as elementary as the inappropriate use of the term "fundamentalism."

In general terms, the word "fundamentalism" can be used with extraordinary dexterity. It can be applied to many differing religious, political, and social phenomena. This very versatility, however, is the single greatest proof the term is nothing more than an insidious and malicious label rather than the true formulation of a concept solidly grounded in a sociological, political or historical description. Furthermore, the use of the term "fundamentalism," with regards to Islām, excludes the notion of spiritual tradition.

This is because the term "fundamentalism" refers to modern attitudes which, by definition, are anti-traditional. In the Islāmic context, so-called "fundamentalism" is actually a traditional attitude in defense of the immutable principles of divine truth. It is certainly strange to see how quickly certain ideas spread, imposing themselves with authority, when in fact, as in the case of "fundamentalism," they are a recent invention.

Considering this background of bias towards Islām, no sociological, political or historical study on so-called "Islāmic fundamentalism," *intégrisme* or *integrismo* can be entirely objective. Rather than attempting to understand the phenomena, they have simply labeled it, avoiding any other explanation. At no point in time have Western scholars considered that what is perceived on the outside as "fundamentalism," *intégrisme* or *integrismo*, may in fact corresponds to an entirely different type of social conduct.

They very term "fundamentalist" has become hopelessly confused due to excessive comparisons to the Christian model: be it Protestant fundamentalism or Catholic *intégrisme* or *integrismo*. The use of terms like "fundamentalism," *intégrisme* and *integrismo* to refer to Islāmic activism manifests "the fallacy of comparing Christian phenomena to Muslim phenomena. It is the proverbial case of comparing apples to

oranges or, in this case, apples to cactus. By doing so, one commits an implicit logical error.

Once established, however, and conveniently disseminated, terms like "fundamentalism," *intégrisme* and *integrismo* have become accepted by specialists as official truth and objective reality. As we have seen, however, these terms are not the least bit objective; they were drawn from Christian religious terminology and imposed on Islām when the model simply does not fit the mould.

Terminological half-truths can only be maintained by eradicating any conceptual differences, thus negating any distinctive traits in the observed phenomena. When one wishes to mislead, to misguide, to conceal and to camouflage a reality, there is nothing more fitting than reductionism. As a result, whether they are Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Hindu or Muslim, those who adhere to their principles of faith, their traditional belief, and reject modernity, secularization and globalization, are denounced as irrational "fundamentalists," without the desire to understand or expose the reasons for their resistance.

The result of this biased outlook, this desire to assimilate, to confine, to reduce, and to redefine reality, can be seen in the social sciences when scholars attempt to make the facts fit the definition. By doing so, they undermine a true interpretation of "Islāmic fundamentalism" as a legitimate form of traditional resistance against an invading cultural force.

What is erroneously described as "Islāmic fundamentalism" is the normal defensive mechanism of a healthy organism against a foreign body, a phenomenon described as "Occidentosis" by Jalal-I Ahmad and "Westoxication" by ʾAlī Shariatī. Clearly, the biased approach of the social sciences is self-evident. The stubborn desire to follow a line of thought which goes against the observed facts, blindly following footsteps founded on fallacy, impedes any possibility of real research.

Social scientists need to be reminded that the term *investigate* comes from the Latin *investigare* which means to "carefully research," "to follow the path," and to "discover." It is derived from *vestigare* which means "to follow the track," "to find the path," and to "discover the traces," in other words, the *vestigio*, from the Latin *vestigium* or "trace." Any approach which claims to be critical and scientific, but which does not meet these conditions, does not merit to be called investigation or research.

If one wishes to identify scholars who seek to subvert Islām, it is quite simple: their works have the sole purpose of reinforcing the belief in "Islāmic fundamentalism." As a result of their myopic approach, they refuse to examine any evidence that might lead to a rectification or refutation of the concept in question, replacing the inexact term with one of greater precision. In other words, the approach of these scholars is biased from the beginning.

Rather than being empirical from the beginning, letting the facts lead them to a conclusion, they commence their research with a thesis they seek to confirm at any cost. In science, the theory needs to fit the facts. In pseudo-science, the facts are made to fit the theory. When studying Islām, many scholars collect evidence to support their hypothesis that Muslims are "fundamentalists," failing to pursue other possibilities that might invalidate their arguments. As can be appreciated, this is not the

approach of a scientist. It is the approach of a dogmatic fanatic: one who holds on to his dogma at all cost, refusing to examine other avenues.

When it comes to describing a social reality, sociology and political science already have a large body of technical terms. These words gain credibility through their use in the daily press which loads them with popular notions, giving rise to substantial interference. Considering this rich body of terminology, it is inconceivable that there does not exist a noun which can describe the phenomenon knows erroneously as "fundamentalism."

Of all religions, Islām is the tradition which is the most opposed to the literal interpretation of Scripture. It opposes any reading of the Qur'ān which does not consider the various layers of meaning and their interrelationship. The Qur'ān itself is opposed to literal exegesis. As the Prophet Muhammad explained, the Qur'ān has seven layers of meaning, and each of these seven levels contain numerous other levels of meaning which help interpret the others.11[12]

Both Sūfī and Shā'ite Gnostics share this point of view. Since Sūfism and Shā'ism are both spiritual branches of Islām, they are the ones that least deserve the groundless label of "fundamentalism." None of these two branches of Islām engage in a dry literalist interpretation of the Scripture or the Prophetic Traditions and neither of them adopt characteristics of Catholic political conservatism known as *integrismo*.

Islāmic activists are not "fundamentalists." With the exception of the Wahhābis, they are not literalists. Islāmic activists are not opposed to science and modernity. They are opposed to secularism. Merely because they are opposed to liberalism does not mean that they are conservatives. They are political and economic centrists. If one does not wish to accept our proposal to replace the term "fundamentalist" with that of "traditional principialists," then it would suffice to simply refer to them as "traditionalists." Islāmic activists are traditional Muslims who advocate a re-rooting in the principles of faith.

Our goal in writing this preface to the English edition is to call for greater accuracy in socio-political, religious, and philosophical terminology. Besides providing a proper definition for the term "fundamentalism," we explained the nature of this religious phenomenon. We examined whether its application to Islām was justified and found that it was excessive.

The term "fundamentalism," when applied to Islām, simply fails to distinguish between radical reformist literalists like the Wahhābis and genuine Muslims, disenchanted with secularism and liberalism, who wish to defend the fundamentals of faith of Islām from outside interference or distortion.

We noted that the term "fundamentalist," traditionally applied to literalist Protestants, is now almost exclusively applied to radical, violent, and intolerant expressions of Islām, without analyzing the problem in depth. When properly contextualized, so-called "Islāmic fundamentalism" is not a cause, it is an effect. It is not an action, it is a reaction. It is not aggressive, it is defensive. It is a response to centuries of Western colonialism and cultural imperialism.

As part of its anti-Islāmic onslaught, the Western world tries and tests the patience of Muslims, deliberately provoking them by insulting their faith, its religious symbols, mocking their lifestyle, the values they most treasure, and even slandering the Prophet Muhammad. These provocations are not isolated incidents. They form part of a campaign to offend Muslim sensibilities organized by Western operatives and *agents-provocateurs*.

Their purpose is two-fold. Their first goal is to determine the depth of commitment to Islām in a certain region, to see whether more political pressure needs to be placed or whether it can be eased. The second goal is to incite violent reactions from Muslims in order to depict them as intolerant and backwards. In most cases, Western media focuses exclusively on the effect, and not on the cause. In the event that they mention the cause, they never contextualize it.

They trivialize the offence to make the reaction seem all the more absurd to Western readers and viewers. Western arrogance, with its notions of cultural supremacy towards traditional cultures continues to be a source of permanent conflict throughout the world. Unless people are Westernized in their attitude, attire, and lifestyle, they are condemned as backwards. This attitude of cultural superiority is no longer a simple prejudice. It has become a motive to encourage cultural, linguistic, and political assimilation of the entire Islāmic world.

Many "progressive" Westerners are fascinated with showing off their "cultural superiority." They are fond of contrasting their "tolerance" with traditional cultures which, for the sole fact that they are not ostentatiously "modern," are deemed backwards. In the Western world, it suffices for a Muslim student to appear in public with some "ostentatious" religious symbol like the *hijāb* to offend the sensibilities of a European President.

As soon as an incident like this comes to the fore, reactionary secular fundamentalists, the guardians of the flame of liberty which burns in the altar of modernity, rush forth in the name of "democratic values." They rise up to show off their "progressive mentality" and their incomparable "cultural superiority."

They pass laws suppressing the civil and religious liberties of Muslim women which, had they been passed by so-called "Islāmic fundamentalists," would have been denounced as backwards and medieval when in fact the laws of modesty called for by Muslim activists are merely a normal defensive reaction to so-called "progressive" and "modern" ideas.

In the Western world, "freedom of expression," "democracy," "liberalism" and "secularism" have all been used as a double-edged sword. As the Native American saying goes: "The white man speaks with a forked tongue." With the help of the mass media, terms like "freedom of expression," "democracy," "liberalism," and "secularism" are a highly effective instrument.

They serve to construct public opinion in accord with the interests of the powers that be, supporting or discrediting any movement in accord with their interests.

The Muslims of the world have long understood the hypocrisy of Western rhetoric. However, as Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadlullāh observed in the 1980's, the West claims to defend human rights and international justice while violating them at home and abroad: "Human rights are for them, not us."

Proud of its double-speak and unveiled hypocrisy, the Western world demands the Islāmic world to respect freedom of religion and freedom of conscience while at the same time denying those liberties to the Muslims living in their midst, by prohibiting "ostentatious displays of religious symbols."

If Muslims nations require women to cover themselves, it is denounced as an oppressive violation of human rights. If Western nations oblige Muslim women to uncover themselves, it is viewed as an act of progress. The double-standards of the Western world speak for themselves.

Safar 1427 H/ March 2006
Professor Luis Alberto Vittor
John F. Kennedy University
Buenos Aires, Argentina

---

1. Editor's Note: While most Orientalists have traditionally compared Shāʻites to Protestants, and Sunnis to Catholics, Bernard Lewis has suggested that the Sunnis are Protestants and the Shāʻites are Catholics. See: Lewis, Bernard. Islām in History: Ideas, People, and Events in the Middle East.

2. Editor's Note: Take, for example, the depiction of Arabs and Muslims by Hollywood. In Reel Bad Arabs, a comprehensive study of nearly one thousand films, Jack Shaheen has documented the tendency to portray Muslim Arabs as Public Enemy #1; brutal, heartless, uncivilized "others" bent on terrorizing civilized Westerners. Another older, but still useful, book is Edward Saʻīd's Covering Islām: How the Media and the Experts Determine How we See the Rest of the World.

3. Author's Note: The bibliography on this subject is extensive. Consequently, we shall limit ourselves to suggesting a few introductory titles. Regarding the psychological manipulation of public opinion, see: Schiller, H.I., Los manipuladores de cerebros, Ed. Gedisa, (Buenos Aires 1974); for the use of stereotypes to defend political interests and to construct public opinion, see the following classic work: Lipmann, W., Public Opinion, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich (New York 1922).

The latter work is available in a Spanish translation under the title of La opinión pública, Compañía Fabril Editora (Buenos Aires 1949). The third and eight parts are especially relevant. For more recent work on the topic, see: Price, V., Public Opinion, Sage Publications (Newbury Park, California, 1992).

For a clear example of media manipulation used to influence public opinion, we need look no further than the treatment of the war in Iraq. The media coverage of this war by major broadcasting corporations like CNN highlights the way information is perverted by what Mattelart has labeled the "global democractic marketplace" in which the economic elite has become the political elite. During the Gulf War and the present invasion and occupation of Iraq we have witnessed various strategies of disinformation and media manipulation.

Information has been censured, altered, and even invented in order to manipulate public opinion. This transmission of falsified information could only have been made possible through the complicity of the media conglomerates and the military and political establishment. This has been highlighted by Susan L. Carruthers who denounced the fact that the Rendon Group was hired to organize the clandestine propaganda campaigns of the Pentagon. Cfr. Carruthers, S. L., The Media at War, Ed. Macmillan Press Ltd., (London, 2000), 142–43. She says:

Indeed, to understand how television became 'Pentavision,' it is necessary to consider not just how negative dimensions of

the management system prevented news media from reporting certain aspects of the war but how readily reporters succumbed to the positive side of news management, relaying event through the eyes, and in the terminology, of the military. [...] Euphemisms were the order of the day. Emitting a stream of 'bovine scatology' (one of Schwarzkopf's more colorful coinages, though applied by him to journalists' stupid questions rather than to the briefings) the briefer used opaque jargon to obscure reality, so that civilian casualties became 'collateral damage' while 'degrading capabilities' was the preferred substitution for bombing.

For more on this issue, see: Mattelart, A., Historia de la utopía planetaria. De la ciudad profética a la sociedad global, Ediciones Paidós Ibérica, (Barcelona 2000), 431–32.

4. Author's Note: Cfr. Chomsky, N. and Herman, E., Los guardianes de la libertad, Editorial Grijalbo–Mondadori, (Barcelona, 1990):

The mass media acts like a system of transmission of messages and symbols for the average citizen. Its function is to entertain and to inform as well as inculcating values, beliefs, and modes of behavior in people that will ensure that they integrate into the institutional structures of society. In a world in which wealth is concentrated and in which there are great conflicts of interest between the classes, the fulfillment of such a role requires systematic propagation.

5. Author's Note: Cfr. Habermas, J., Conciencia moral y acción comunicativa, Editorial Península, (Barcelona. 1985).
6. Author's Note: Cfr. Bachelard, G. La formation de l'esprit scientifique. Paris, Librairie philosophique Vrin, 1999 (1ère édition : 1938), chapitre 1er; 13–14:

La science…s'oppose absolument à l'opinion. S'il lui arrive, sur un point particulier, de légitimer l'opinion, c'est pour d'autres raisons que celles qui fondent l'opinion; de sorte que l'opinion a, en droit, toujours tort. L'opinion pense mal; elle ne pense pas: elle traduit des besoins en connaissances. En désignant les objets par leur utilité, elle s'interdit de les connaître. On ne peut rien fonder sur l'opinion: Il faut d'abord la détruire. Elle est le premier obstacle à surmonter. Il ne suffirait pas, par exemple, de la rectifier sur des points particuliers, en maintenant… L'esprit scientifique nous interdit d'avoir une opinion sur des questions que nous ne comprenons pas, sur des questions que nous ne savons pas formuler clairement.

[Science…is absolutely opposed to opinion. If it happens to confirm opinion, it is based on reasons other than opinion because opinion, in and of itself, is always wrong. Opinion does not think properly. It does not think for itself. Opinion turns need into knowledge. By designating objects on the basis of their need, opinion prevents a proper understanding of them. Nothing can be based on opinion: it must first be destroyed. Opinion is the first obstacle which must be surmounted. It would not suffice, for example, to correct some aspects of it at the moment… The scientific spirit forbids us from having an opinion on questions which we do not understand, on questions we do not even know how to formulate clearly.]

7. Authors' Note: S. Tomás, Summa Theol. I, XIII, 8: Non est semper idem id a quo imponitur nomen ad significandum, et id ad quod significandum nomen imponitur.
8. Author's Note: As Morrow explains in Arabic, Islām, and the Allah Lexicon, the wahhābiyyah and salafiyyah follow a literalist and essentialist interpretation of Islām which stands in sharp contrast to the intellectual and hermeneutic traditions of the mainstream Sunnā, Shāʿah and Sūfā. In an attempt to "return to the roots of Islām," and "follow the letter of the law" as opposed to its spirit, the Salafās wish to disregard and even wipe out fourteen centuries of sound scholarship (48). For more on the literalist approach of the Wahhābās, see Wrestling Islām from the Extremists by Khaled Abou El Fadl and Islām, Fundamentalism, and the Betrayal of Tradition, edited by Joseph Lumbard.
9. Author's Note: Cfr. Vittor, L. A., "La Religión en el mundo contemporáneo: El fundamentalismo como encrucijada entre la tradición y la modernidad" en Enfoques. Revista de Ciencias Sociales y Comunicación (Buenos Aires 1998), Año I, Nº 4; 11–23; as well as "Situación actual del pensamiento tradicional en el mundo moderno" in Enfoques: Revista de Ciencias Sociales y Comunicación, Año II, Nº 5, (Buenos Aires 1999), 11–29; and especially "El Islām Šiʿita: ¿principialismo tradicional o integrismo iraní? Una respuesta a Roger Garaudy," published in three parts in Enfoques: Revista de Ciencias Sociales y Comunicación (Buenos Aires 2001), Año III, Nº 12; 17–35; Año IV, Nº 13, (Buenos Aires 2002), 11–29 y Año IV, Nº 14 (Buenos Aires 2002), 9–25.

10. Editor's Note: Attempting to find an adequate term to describe the phenomenon ackwardly defined as "fundamentalism" is no easy task. The term "principalism" is already an accepted term in English, French, and Spanish, and refers to those who defend the principles of a scientific method or a philosophical or legal school. The term "revivalism," in its general sense of "reviving practices or ideas of an earlier time," might be suitable. A "revivalist," however, refers to "a preacher of the Christian Gospel" and can be used pejoratively.

"Revivalism" is thus an inadequate term, not only because it alludes to evangelical movements, but because Corbin has used it to refer to sectarian movements like the Bābis and the Bahā'ī who were opposed to Shī'ite Islām. The term "foundationalism" can also be discarded as it refers to any theory in epistemology that holds that beliefs are justified based on what are called basic beliefs.

The Arabic term usūlī conveys the sense of "foundationalist;" however, it is inextricably linked to the struggle between Shī'ite rationalists, the usūlī, and the traditionalists or akhbarī. Despite the fact that it is used in the field of bioethics and jurisprudence, with the sense of respect for beneficence, non-maleficence, autonomy, and justice, the neologism"principialism" remains the most adequate term to describe "fundamentalist," "revivalist" and "activist" Islām.

The author, of course, does not limit the term "principialism" to its ethical uses. In reality, by selecting the term "principialism," the author follows in the footsteps of French metaphysician René Guénon, a revert to Islām and naturalized Egyptian citizen, who took the name of 'Abdul Wāhid Yahyā. Guénon was the first to use the term "principial" to refer to the transcendental principals of faith which constitute the roots [usūl] or pillars [arkān] of a traditional doctrine. By using the term "principialism," the author is echoing notions which are more metaphysical than they are legal, ethical or philosophical, although from a traditional perspective none of these aspects exclude one another.

11. Author's Note: According to a hadīth, the Prophet Muhammad said: "The Qur'ān has a beautiful exterior and a profound interior" (Kulaynī). He said that "The Qur'ān has an inner dimension, and that inner dimenion has an inner dimension up to seven inner dimensions" (Kulaynī). Other versions of the hadīth explain that each of the seven levels has seventy to seven hundred levels.

Each inner level is more profound than the previous one, yet each level contains and illuminates the others. According to some sources, each dot on the Arabic letters of the Qur'ān contains 70,000 meanings. The numbers 7, 70, 700, and 70,000 are symbolic in nature. They are used to indicate that the interpretation of the Qur'ān is limitless and inexhaustible. Attempting to empty the Qur'ān would be as absurd as attempting to empty the ocean in a glass. The Qur'ān will always be protected from any such attempts eminating from literalist or Gnostic sectors. As Imām 'Alī has explained,

There is no Qur'ānic verse but it has four meanings: an outer one [al-zāhir], an inner one [al-bātin]; a limit [hadd] and a divine designation [mutlaq, lit. "something which is absolute"]. The outer meaning is for oral recitation. The inner meaning is for in-depth understanding. The limit determines the legal and the illegal. The divine design is what Allāh proposes to achieve in humankind by means of each verse.

The Sixth Imām, Ja'far al-Sādiq, said that:

The Divine Book contains four modes: enunciated expression ['ibārāt], allusion [ishārāt]; hidden meanings relating to the subtle word [latā'if], and elevated metaphysical truths [haqā'iq]. The enunciated expression is the one which applies to all believers ['awāmm]; the allusion concerns the spiritual elite [khawāss]; the hidden meanings are the domain of the awliyyā' Allāh [the Holy Friends of the Divine]; and the elevated metaphysical truths belong to the Prophets [anbiyyā'].

Source URL: