

# Editorial



Religious fundamentalism is on the rise. This rise is not limited to geopolitically charged conflict zones but also emerges in Western democracies. There is no politically neutral space from which to explore this pervading phenomenon and analyse its dynamics. [LIMINA – Theological Perspectives from Graz](#) broaches the subject with a dedicated issue on *Religious Fundamentalism. Current phenomena, strategies, and responses* and does not shy away from attempting a delicate balancing act between context-sensitive analyses and practise-oriented engagement.

The aim of this edition is to analyse religious radicalisation in its current form, to shed light on its motives, goals, patterns and strategies, and to discuss theoretical and practical approaches to address fundamentalist trends. Fundamentalism is a central topic whose relevance reaches far beyond the domain of religion. It describes a staunch adherence to selected principles or beliefs, closed off to change and without willingness to enter into discussions, dialogue or compromise. Fundamentalism is a concomitant of the modern age. It is a reaction to the uncertainties arising from the changing tides in the personal, societal and cultural sphere and an attempt to overcome them by “drawing on sacrosanct traditions or artificially immunised certainties” (Thomas Meyer; own translation).

In current practice, various religious groups express and defend this stance and their unassailable assertions by citing alleged original principles and truths to a degree that causes disconcertment even among traditional proponents of the same religion. They pursue a radical regression to certain archetypes of religious identity and practice, declare them to be the only legitimate form of religiosity and are often relentless in its propagation. There is also a growing overlap between religious fundamentalism and nationalist, right-wing populist movements. The ideological basis for both

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reveals a number of common elements: anti-liberalism, anti-pluralism, and in part anti-democratic inclinations. What defines both populism and fundamentalism is that they are, at their core, reactionary in establishing a narrow interpretation of history as a revolutionary programme. Both want to preserve a societal model for the future that has been overhauled by modern progress. Change is perceived as a threat: shifting gender roles threaten notions of masculinity, the discourse on gender threatens gender relations, LGBTIQ rights threaten the order of creation, etc.

The discussions presented in this issue offer two different angles to investigate the subject matter: one is an intellectual or religious-historic and socio-ethical analysis of religious theories and practices; the other is an explicit theological and practical critique of religious and political programmes that are characterised by anti-rational and anti-democratic identity concepts as well as alliances with liberal political movements and the mechanisms of state power. Neither approach can claim an independent neutral position from which to examine fundamentalist religious ideology and action, thus both offer a specific point of view beyond simple analysis. The first four articles in this edition contribute to the intellectual or religious-historic and socio-ethic discourse. They demonstrate the positional complexities by differentiating between various religious concepts of revelation, between inclusionary and exclusionary principles underlying theological positions, between arguments based on reason and tradition, and between universal ethics rooted in human rights and moral systems based on selective cultural or religious argument.

*Sonja Angelika Strube* initiates the discussion by applying additional categories adapted from the discipline of social psychology to expand and enrich the theological study of fundamentalism. Her approach lays bare fundamentalist ideas justified by religious exclusivism and offers clear insights into different religious styles within Christian churches.

*Wolfgang Benedek* analyses religious fundamentalism from the perspective of human rights in three steps. First, he explores the concept of fundamentalism and its manifestations through the lens of international law and international relationships. Then, he examines the threat religious fundamentalism poses for human rights and in particular freedom of religion. Lastly, he shines a light on the role human rights play in the face of fundamentalism. On the example of government measures to combat so-called “political Islam” he shows that any such measures need to be aligned with human rights, or else they risk reinforcing fundamentalist ideas instead.

*Christian Feichtinger* investigates current forms and dynamics of religious fundamentalism in an analysis based on an elaborate theological concept of purity. He makes the category of purity fruitful for a description of fundamentalism that highlights the role of violence and establishes relevance beyond the domain of religion.

*Fabian Müller* casts an investigative eye on the classic topos of fundamentalist religiosity and questions whether biblicism, as still practiced in some Christian communities, can play the role of the “guardian of tradition” as claimed by its advocates. He provides a brief historic overview of Bible exegesis and concludes that the literal and historicising interpretation of the Bible since 1800 contains typical elements of modern religious fundamentalism within it. It becomes clear that this particular approach to Bible exegesis shares little commonality with the various traditions of theological and ecclesial interpretations of the scripture since early Christianity.

The following five articles focus on counter positions against specific forms of fundamentalist religious practices. Their common argument is for the role of civic and human rights in the context of a politically engaged theology and the aim to not only offer options for resistance and critical discourse but to keep channels for dialogue open.

*Adem Aygün* starts the discussion with his article on “Fundamentalism in contemporary Islamic thought”. He proposes that Islamic fundamentalism is rooted in an ideology of resistance, as embodied in Salafism. The multitudinous conditions underpinning this ideology require a long-term preventative strategy in order to effectively counter them. Aygün also outlines educational approaches to address Islamic fundamentalist practices.

*Wolfgang Weirer, Julia Brunner* and *Agnes Gmoser* present their collaborative paper “Professional – missionary – borderline fundamentalist? New religious movements and the religiosity of young adults on the example of the *HOME Church Salzburg*”. Looking at a particular segment of new Christian movements, they observe an emergence of stricter forms and styles of religious expression, which incorporate traditionalist elements and may be perceived as fundamentalist from an outside perspective. The public programmes and church services of the *HOME Church Salzburg*, which forms part of the *Loretto Community*, serves as the case in point and reveals the fine line between markers of a strong religious identity and fundamentalism.

*Rita Perintfalvi* puts the spotlight on Hungary and warns of the urgent threat posed by neo-right ideology through the political instrumentalization of the COVID pandemic. Recent arbitrary amendments to the Hungarian constitution can be seen as a brutal attack on transgender and intersex

people. The government's actions contravene basic human rights, yet their arguments are based on religious-fundamentalist justifications instead of factual political reasoning. This article demonstrates the instrumentalization of Christian religiosity in the name of political authoritarianism. At the same time, fundamentalist religious groups also seek alliances with neo-right politics.

*Larissa Hrotkó's* research also focusses on Hungary and offers another perspective. She investigates fundamentalist tendencies in Jewish neo-orthodoxy, which is currently attempting to assert itself as the dominant force within the broad spectrum of Jewish communities. Hrotkó analyses women's rights in particular and identifies subtle patriarchal patterns within Jewish orthodoxy.

*Tanja Grabovac* examines the current political and religious developments in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the concluding article of this issue. Similar to Perintfalvi, she addresses events and measures affecting the LGBTIQ community. In this article, she highlights the presence of religious fundamentalism in Bosnia-Herzegovina, describes how religious communities reacted to the first ever LGBTIQ march in 2019 and locates evidence of resistance against ethno-nationalism and religious fundamentalism.

The breadth of discussion presented in this edition reveals an important aspect in the discourse on religious fundamentalism: Any engagement with the subject requires a willingness to position oneself and to relinquish the limited claim – in this context – of academic neutrality or innocence in favour of a dynamic dialogue and politically relevant practical examination. We would like to thank the authors of these articles for their courage in their work. The submissions inspired nuanced discussions and an in-depth differentiation of terms in a thought-provoking peer review process. We also extend our thank to the reviewers for their expert contribution. It was not always possible to consistently integrate the different emphases and arguments. However, the scholars who contributed to this edition are open to further discuss and examine their positions and it is our aim to maintain the initiated dialogue.

We want to inspire our readers to explore the subject with critical curiosity and hope that you find the presented perspectives insightful and enriching.

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Issue Editors, on behalf of the editorial team