

Religious protest

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- Two types of religious protest
 - local, indigenous religious movements
 - the Ghost Dance
 - cargo cults
 - many others, such as Christian Catholic Apostolic Church of Zion in South Africa
 - large-scale fundamentalist movements
 - Islamic fundamentalism (Iranian version, among others)
 - Protestant fundamentalism (North American version, among others)
 - Hindu fundamentalism (India)
- Indigenous religious movements
 - The Ghost Dance
 - 1889: Wovoka, a Paiute in Nevada, had his vision
 - if the Ghost Dance were performed for five days and nights, ghosts of relatives would return
 - essentially peaceful, a “weapon of the weak”
 - variants spread widely (thanks to train travel: globalization...)
 - became popular with Lakota Sioux in South Dakota
 - who had recently been defeated and forced onto a reservation
 - then the reservation was divided up and much given to settlers
 - they were supposed to farm, but it was too dry
 - they supposedly got government rations, but most of the money was pocketed by corrupt Indian Affairs agents
 - the Lakota saw the Ghost Dance as repudiation of the whites
 - they believed that if successful, the whites would go away and the buffalo return
 - they added a new feature: Ghost Shirts that would stop bullets...
 - an inexperienced, worried Indian agent called in the US army
 - “Young Man Afraid of his Horses”
 - Chief Sitting Bull was arrested for not stopping the Ghost Dancing
 - but was killed in the process
 - some Lakota fled, including families with children
 - the army followed
 - encircled their camp at Wounded Knee
 - set up four “Hotchkiss guns”: carriage-mounted machine guns
 - the Lakota gave up
 - while the cavalry were collecting the Lakota’s weapons, shooting broke out
 - several versions of what happened
 - several involve a Ghost Dancer shaman who either encouraged the Lakota to start the fight or added to the confusion prior to it
 - the army responded with the Hotchkiss guns

- wiped out all the Lakota, including women and children
- and probably some of the US soldiers who died, too
- Cargo cults
 - in New Guinea and Melanesia
 - after early 20th century and WWII contact with missionaries and soldiers
 - who had vast amounts of “cargo” but did not work for it
 - and did strange things (saluted flags, marched, used radios)
 - various prophets interpreted these as magic that got their ancestors to provide the cargo
 - and got followers to help try to duplicate the magic
 - hoping the ancestors would bring cargo and drive off the whites
 - practical Melanesians would try for a while, then give up
 - but some tried a number of the cults
 - belief faded by the late 1930s, as people came to understand the outside world better
 - although one cargo cult persists: the John Frum (as in “John Frum America”) cult on the island of Vanuatu
 - obviously a result of globalization: contact
 - also a result of colonial mistreatment
 - foreigners had a life of ease
 - indigenous people were forced to work to pay taxes and were abused
 - a “weapon of the weak”
 - or a coping mechanism
- Today
 - a variety of local religious movements
 - Robbins gives an example of “Zionists” in South Africa
 - probably thousands of these little religions
 - more “weapons of the weak”
 - non-confrontational resistance
- Large-scale fundamentalist movements
 - See current events as showing decline
 - due to deviation from the true faith
 - Hope to gain political power to set things right
 - either taking over a state or setting up an independent one
 - Try to convert people
 - with organized methods, often aimed at youth
 - Generally have a militant branch willing to be violent
 - Tend to emphasize traditional family structure
 - usually patriarchal, with subservient role for women
 - Most reject consumerism and capitalist competition
 - so they are at least in part antisystemic...
- Cases:
 - Islamic fundamentalism in Iran
 - 1979 revolution
 - replaced monarchy of the Shah with

- a democratic republic
- with extremely strong oversight by a “Supreme Leader” who is a senior religious figure
- Iran hostage crisis
 - while the Shah was in the US for cancer treatment,
 - students took over the US embassy in Tehran
 - capturing 53 hostages
 - holding them 444 days
- rejected a century of Russian, British, and US domination
 - a series of puppet governments
 - the last was Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi
 - installed by a CIA coup in 1953
 - which has been acknowledged by US since 2000
 - the Shah flaunted outrageous wealth while most were poor
 - he used a brutal secret service (SAVAK) to suppress dissent
 - he pushed westernization and secularization
 - granted women the right to vote
- revolution promised a return to morality and justice
 - based on the Qur’an, God’s word, interpreted by scholars
- Protestant fundamentalism in US (Robbins’ version)
 - common tenets:
 - personal conversion is required
 - believers are saved in the afterlife
 - inerrancy of the Bible (it is all true)
 - premillennialism: the world will soon end, with...
 - the rapture: ascent of the church to heaven in a blare of trumpets
 - seven years of tribulation, with battle of God and Satan
 - second coming of Christ
 - the millennium: 1000 years of reign by Christ
 - finally, the last judgment, then eternity
 - is a response to decline of morality and justice in the US
 - tolerance of other cultures that are not Christian
 - tolerance of homosexuality
 - spread of “secular humanism” (not to mention atheism!)
 - Equal Rights Amendment contradicting Bible’s rules for women
 - abortion
 - due to reduced adherence to Christianity because of
 - intellectual challenges by
 - Darwin (evolution due to competition and death)
 - Freud (sexuality forms personality and behavior)
 - sociologist/anthropologist Durkheim (society forms identity, behavior)
 - anthropologist Boaz (cultural relativism)
 - treatment of the Bible as historical text rather than word of God

- rise of science, technology as perceived solutions to problems
- temptations of consumerism... or not, in some cases
- Religious violence
 - Fundamentalist movements tend to depict a struggle
 - between the forces that corrupt the world (evil)
 - and their religion (good)
 - If you believe, then the fight is absolutely important
 - even justifying violence
 - so some religious violence is reasoned and sincere
 - 9/11 hijackers: “cowards”?
 - Scott Roeder, who shot abortion doctor George Tiller
 - it responds to specific grievances
 - 9/11: corrupting secularization and consumerism
 - Roeder: defense of “preborn children”
 - calling religious violence “fanatical” only obscures the issues
 - Is religion
 - the cause of the violence?
 - or a result of political or economic frustration?
 - which causes both religious fundamentalism
 - and violence against perceived sources of the frustration?
 - Religion is clearly used as a political tool
 - elevating a fight to the cosmic level of good vs. evil
 - gets great commitment from believers
 - Ayatollah Khomeini and others called the US “the Great Satan”
 - George W. Bush called Islamic fundamentalists “evildoers” from the “axis of evil”
 - Why do people believe it enough to kill?
 - religion provides
 - certainty
 - meaning
 - hope for change, or at least a better afterlife
 - especially needed by people who
 - are poor despite their best efforts and good faith
 - see no way to improve things
 - feel oppressed by forces beyond their control
 - whose culture and identity are being challenged
 - provides even more certainty and meaning if it involves a flat-out battle between good and evil
 - there is no doubt about what to do
 - you can do something that matters, that is important
 - more still if the war is real and violent
 - “War is a force that gives us meaning” - Chris Hedges
 - So, are religious movements antisystemic?

- Small-scale, local religious movements: Yes
 - usually respond to
 - economic and political disadvantages caused by globalization and capitalism
 - challenges to local culture by the culture of capitalism
- Large-scale fundamentalist movements: Yes and No
 - Yes:
 - popular with people marginalized by globalization and capitalism
 - reject the progressive changes of capitalism
 - reject the emphasis on secular human agency over divinity
 - in the periphery, reject the westernization of local cultures
 - No
 - they also reject the antisystemic values of the 1968 revolution
 - feminism
 - tolerance of other cultures, religions, and sexualities
 - individual and sexual freedom
 - that is, they *support* aspects of the capitalist system
 - or they reject some things other than the capitalist system
- Yes or no, Robbins suggests that...
 - fundamentalist religious systems are the only serious competition to the current global culture of capitalism
 - yikes!