Religion and Global Modernity

“ACCELERATING GLOBAL INTERACTION” (SINCE 1945)

Despite modernity and science, religion has played a powerful role in the last century—4 major religious trends:

- Further spread of major world religions
- Resurgence of religions in new forms
- Opposition of religions to elements of a secular and global modernity
- Religions’ political role as a source of community identity and conflict

Examples of the further spread of religions:

- Buddhist ideas like meditation and yoga became very popular in the West
- Christianity spread widely in: non-Muslim Africa, South Korea, parts of India, and China
- Millions of migrants from the Islamic world planted their religion solidly in the West
Fundamentalism on a Global Scale

- Fundamentalism = one type of religious response to the modernizing and globalizing world
  - Strict religious devotion that is defensive, assertive, and exclusive
- Fundamentalism emerged because many religions felt threatened by features of the modern world:
  - Scientific and secular focus of modernity challenged the core beliefs of supernatural religion
  - Social upheavals connected with globalization = upset the traditional class, family, and gender relationships valued by many religions
  - Nation-states (often associated with certain religions) = undermined by the global economy and influence of "alien" cultures

Fundamentalism on a Global Scale

- Tactics used by fundamentalists to communicate their message:
  - Educational and propaganda efforts
  - Political mobilization of their followers
  - Social welfare programs
  - Sometimes violence → terrorism

Christian Fundamentalists in the U.S.

- Outraged with: "scientific" and critical approaches to the Bible, Darwinian evolution, and liberal versions of Christianity
- Wanted to get back to the "fundamentals" of Christianity
  - Literal truthfulness of the scriptures
  - Belief in the virgin birth and physical resurrection of Jesus
  - Belief in miracles
- Came to oppose:
  - Political liberalism and "big government"
  - The sexual revolution of the 1960s
  - Rights for the LGBT community
  - Abortion rights
Hindu Fundamentalists in India
- Known as the Hindutva movement = Hindu nationalism
- Believed India was, and had always been, a Hindu land
- Goal for India = to make it a purely Hindu nation again with a Hindu-based government
- Opposed the existence of other religions, beliefs, etc. in India
  - Christians, Muslims, Sikhs, Secularists

Resistance and Renewal in the World of Islam
- Disappointments within the Muslim world that fueled Islamic renewal:
  - “Western” and secular policies not successful = created overcrowded cities with few services, widespread corruption, slow economic growth, and a widening gap between the rich and poor
- Issues with the West that fueled Islamic renewal:
  - A foreign presence still existed in the Muslim world even after decolonization = example: the creation of Israel in 1948
  - Increasing presence of Western culture that was offensive = Barbie dolls, alcohol, scantily clad women, American movies, secular schools, etc.

Resistance and Renewal in the World of Islam
- Argument = the departure from Islamic principles had led the Islamic world into decline and subordination to the West
- Goal = to return to the “straight path of Islam” and use the Quran and sharia (Islamic law) as a guide
Resistance and Renewal in the World of Islam

- Various expressions of Islamic renewal:
  - In their personal lives, many people became more religiously observant, attended mosque, prayed regularly, fasted, etc.
  - Many women adopted modest Islamic dress and the veil voluntarily
  - Many governments sought to anchor themselves in Islamic rhetoric and practice
  - Creation of Muslim organizations that operated to provide social services that the state offered inadequately
  - Islamic activists took leadership roles in unions and professional organizations
  - Another expression of Islamic renewal sought the violent overthrow of what they saw as "compromised" regimes in the Muslim world

Examples of Violent Muslim Fundamentalists

- Egyptian Islamic Jihad assassinated President Anwar Sadat (1981) because of his breakdown on Islamic and Islamic opposition groups
- Radical Islamic groups in Mecca sought the overthrow of the Saudi government because of its modernity, relationship with the West, and un-Islamic lifestyle
- Hamas in Palestine & Hezbollah in Lebanon target Israel because they believe its existence is illegitimate

Examples of Violent Muslim Fundamentalists

- Al-Qaeda = created by Osama bin Laden
  - Grew more radical when his homeland (Saudi Arabia) allowed the stationing of "infidel" U.S. troops in Islam’s holy land during and after the first American war against Iraq in 1991
  - Mid-1990s = he found a safe haven in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan
- Great enemies of al-Qaeda = not Christianity itself or even Western civilization, but:
  - Irreligious Western-style modernity
  - U.S. imperialism
  - An American-led economic globalization