and trying to reform them, often simply end up chasing them further away because of their lack of wisdom” (p. 38).

*The Miracle of Life* is a book which has taught me — a Muslima for the last 42 years — a lot and which I would very much like to see published in many languages. It definitely is “a practical guide on sex education and traditional family values” as announced on the book cover.

Fatima Grimm

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Fundamentalism has emerged as one of the most challenging and controversial religious phenomena of our times. While many of the earliest fundamentalist movements emerged at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, it is only in the past few decades that the phenomenon has manifested itself in its full force and danger. Most of the serious scholarship on fundamentalism dates from the 1990’s, and the events of September 11, 2001 have added a certain urgency to come to a correct understanding not only of the concept as such, but also of the social, psychological, political and economical elements involved. *Understanding Fundamentalism* was written before these tragic events, and does not refer directly to the movements involved in the terrorist attacks on America. However, Antoun’s discussion of the phenomenon of fundamentalism in Islamic as well as in other monotheistic traditions may help to clarify some of the central issues involved in all forms of religious fundamentalism.

One of the questions that have been at the centre of scholarly discussion is whether the term “fundamentalism” can be used outside of its American Christian context of origin and applied to movements which do not designate themselves by this term. Antoun takes a middle course in this discussion, recognizing that the circumstances and content of fundamentalism may differ from one religion to the next, while arguing for the existence of a common worldview and a number of universal characteristics in fundamentalist movements across religions. He describes fundamentalism as “an orientation...
to the modern world, both cognitive and emotional, that focuses on protest and change and on certain consuming themes: the quest for purity, the search for authenticity, totalism and activism, the necessity of certainty (scripturalism), selective modernization, and the centering of the mythic past in the present” (p. 2). The focus of the book is a discussion of these five “consuming themes” (the “search for authenticity” seems to be subsumed in the other themes) through examples from the Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions. While most of these themes may be found in other scholarly works on the topic, Antoun offers a distinct interpretation of some that merits discussion. I will concentrate here only on the themes of scripturalism and activism/totalism.

While scripturalism is often spontaneously understood as the literal understanding of scripture, Antoun insists that “it is the emotional and inspirational qualities of scripture, their relation to the numinous, their grounding of nationalism and nation-states, their use as proof-texts in the assertion of certainty and application to everyday life, their scandalous character, and their selective use that is important” (p. 37). This understanding of scripturalism broadens and nuances the different ways in which scriptures are used in different fundamentalist groups. However, it also tends to blur the distinction between the traditional religious and the fundamentalist use of scripture. Religious texts have an emotional and inspirational quality that serves as the basis for everyday activity by any sincere member of a religion grounded sacred scripture. Many of the examples given by Antoun under this rubric may thus strike a religious person as revealing a secularist perspective.

The main difference between a fundamentalist and a traditional understanding of scripture is, as pointed out later in the book (under the chapter on activism and totalism), a matter of epistemology. While established religious traditions have come to understand the need to interpret scriptures and to adapt them to differing social and cultural contexts, fundamentalists perceive scripture as “authentic, transparently obvious, certain and unchallengeable” (p. 110).

Another important characteristic of fundamentalism is indeed their selective use of scripture, or their elevation of only certain passages beyond critical reflection. The question which this raises — and which few scholars venture to discuss — is why particular passages are chosen and not others. How do particular texts or words from scripture address the fears and needs of members of fundamentalist movements?

1 Antoun recognizes that fundamentalism is not an exclusively monotheistic phenomenon, but states that the discussion of Hinduism and Buddhism would be beyond his competency.
In the introduction to the book, Antoun discusses fundamentalism in line with many other authors as a reaction against the changes of modernity, against the emphasis on change over continuity, of quantity over quality, of commercial efficiency over human sympathy, and of a general shift in power relations centring on the West. These forms of explanation are meant to generate a general understanding of, and even sympathy for fundamentalists. Yet this does not explain why, given these general social and historical changes, certain individuals become more fundamentalist, while others do not. Perhaps social anthropology can provide us with an answer to this sort of question.

Chapter five of the book discusses the characteristic of activism and totalism. In the previous chapter, Antoun pointed out that fundamentalists employ various strategies to maintain their own purity and separation from the corrupt and polluted world. This may range from a complete physical separation of the world to a more mental distancing from the corrupt environment. Of course, in itself the quest for purity through separation from the world is not an expression of fundamentalism. One may find such a religious attitude in sects or cults as well as in monastic movements. I believe that it should be made clear, even more than is the case in Understanding Fundamentalism, that the term “fundamentalism” should be reserved for movements that exhibit an activist or militant orientation. This may range from an indirect or limited involvement in politics (as might be the case with the Haredim) to a very active attempt to change the political and social landscape (as in Hamas or Gush Emunim). While fundamentalism may find their resources in religious scriptures and traditions, I believe that the original impulse of fundamentalism is not so much religious, but social, political, psychological and/or economical.

One of the strengths of the book, as well as its weakness, lies in Antoun’s insistence on the fact that fundamentalism and fundamentalists are “ideal types, and no one individual or group is completely fundamentalist or completely lacking in fundamentalist attributes (p. 29).” Many of the characteristics of fundamentalism discussed in this book may indeed be seen to appear in traditional believers and religions. In the last chapter of the book, Antoun relates certain experiences that he had in Jordan with zealous Muslims who tried to convert him to Islam. These missionaries emphasized certain themes of the Qurʾān which point to the urgency of believing in God in light of the coming judgment. Yet one might argue that this is no different from the way in which the original followers of the prophet spread the message of Islam. The difference between traditionalists and fundamentalists lies in the fact that the former attempt to remain faithful to the whole tradition, while
the latter are more selective and use the religion for other purposes. In this line, one might rather say that fundamentalism is a self-conscious reaction against modernity that uses religion as a means rather than an end in itself.

Most of the characteristics of fundamentalism discussed in this book may be found in other scholarly works on the topic, and the more theoretical analyses are borrowed from scholars such as Bruce Lawrence or Mark Juergensmeyer. But *Understanding Fundamentalism* excels in clarity and conciseness and thus lends itself as a very helpful textbook on the topic.

Catherine Cornille

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Muslim mysticism, which is referred to as Sufism or *tasawwuf*, denotes the internal or esoteric/spiritual aspect of Islam. A plethora of literature has appeared on the subject of Sufism highlighting its various aspects and dimensions. The book under review is one such attempt, but probably the first of its kind in English language. The book is unique and distinctive in the sense that it brings to forefront the Sufi thought and ideas as reflected in Urdu poetry. In addition to the poetry by renowned Sufis, the work also includes the poetic contributions of a number of poets having mystic inclination. In particular, it brings out the philosophical leanings of the poets, highlighting their varied Sufi notions as well as the major influences on them. The work covers a period of almost 800 years, beginning from Shaikh Farid al-Din Mas'ud Ganj-i Shakar, the 13th century Chishti Sufi, and coming down to the Urdu poets of 20th century.

Urdu language began to be crystallized in medieval South Asia as a result of interaction between the natives and the migrants from Central Asia, Persia and Afghanistan. It gradually evolved, and took the form of 'Hindustani' or 'Hindwi', as indicated by the medieval writers, before it came to be known as Urdu. Though the official language in medieval times was Persian, which was considered to be the language of power, Urdu became the *lingua franca* of the