

Competing Fundamentalisms: Violent Extremism in Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism. By Sathianathan Clarke. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017. viii + 246 pages. \$30.00.
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Sathianathan Clarke is a presbyter of the Church of South India and Bishop Sundo Kim Chair in World Christianity at Wesley Theological Seminary. His previous publications, including a monograph and several edited volumes focused primarily on Dalit liberation theologies in India, skillfully navigate the intersections of history, sociology, and biblical theology. *Competing Fundamentalisms* is similarly excellent in this respect, albeit with a wider, comparative approach to the emergence of fundamentalist violence in late modernity. Like Martin Marty, R. Scott Appleby, and other interpreters, Clarke affirms that fundamentalisms have deep roots in the political, economic, and psychosocial disruptions of the twentieth century; unlike some such interpreters, he contends that “no explanation of violent religion that ignores religious ideas and motivations can adequately account for this phenomenon” (5). His book thus offers religious analyses and a specifically religious response.

The argument unfolds in six chapters. Chapter 1 offers an appreciative survey of “nonreligious” theories of religious violence as useful but incomplete tools to address the problem. Chapters 2 through 4 then conduct a comparative survey of reactionary Christian politics and policies in the United States (chap. 2), the Muslim Brotherhood and allied movements in Egypt (chap. 3) and Hindutva nationalism in India (chap. 4). In chapter 5, Clarke analyzes these movements into their component parts and, from this analysis, offers a comprehensive definition:

Religious fundamentalism is a communal mind-set steeped in a revealed Word-vision, corroborated by a definitive ethical system of world-ways for human living, and calibrated by an aggressive movement that labors toward the goal that such a global order will govern the social, political, economic, cultural and religious lives of human beings. (154)

At the conclusion of this chapter, Clarke concludes that such fundamentalism functions as a “surrogate religion,” a “modern and composite” phenomenon that cannot be identified with the traditions of Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism, even while it draws its existence from them (162). Chapter 6 returns to the particulars of the Christian tradition to seek resources and strategies for an authentically religious response to this phenomenon, on the presumption that peace-loving Muslims and Hindus possess their own resources and can offer their own responses. All three traditions, Clarke insists, are

called by the emergence of violent fundamentalism to shift their mutual attitudes from “the *competing* propensity of the battlefield” to “the *completing* possibility of the flower garden” (186).

True to his roots in liberation hermeneutics, Clarke largely ascribes the emergence of fundamentalism to global capitalism and the oppressions of Western neo-imperialism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This approach may explain some of his interpretive choices. One might, for example, wonder why Jerry Falwell and George W. Bush, rather than the leaders of the Phineas Priesthood, the Irish Republican Army, or the Lord’s Resistance Army, come to exemplify violent Christian fundamentalism. Conversely, those familiar with the many controversies around historical Jesus research may be surprised to encounter the subversive constructions of John Dominic Crossan upheld, without significant qualification or challenge, as “the historical Jesus” and liberative key for the Christian Scriptures (171–73). The particular fundamentalisms that most interest Clarke are those that have attained or aspired to national or pan-national, hegemonic power. Conversely, he locates the strongest resources for resistance in a nonviolent, revolutionary image of Jesus Christ. One suspects that there is a more complex and nuanced story yet to be told.

Such qualifications notwithstanding, what Clarke accomplishes in this short, crisp work is truly impressive, highly coherent, and even inspiring. The various expositions are careful and clear, and the work recommends itself for classroom use—in whole or in its treatments of individual traditions. Clarke works successfully to subvert the received identification of terrorism with Islam, along with those scriptural texts and teachings in all three traditions that he candidly admits do condone violence in the name of God. The struggle against violent fundamentalism is one that religious persons must engage, first and foremost, within our own traditions, and Clarke’s book offers valuable resources to engage this struggle effectively. This book belongs in every theological library and in many undergraduate and graduate syllabi.

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In her most recent work, Susannah Cornwall addresses un/familiar theological questions pertaining to the social and church institutions of marriage,