

projects could precipitate nuclear war.

When the vocabulary of left and right has run its tired course, we are left with that old standby, "fundamentalist" - a word dredged from the American past and of dubious provenance and meaning even there. What it means for Buddhism, Hinduism, or Islam is hard to understand. Using the term *fundamentalist* is simply a sign of intellectual laziness: a refusal to take seriously what people say they actually believe. If what they believe does not easily assimilate to Enlightenment categories then we assume they must simply be "irrational." Consequently "fundamentalist" is now shorthand for religious obsessive, someone to be categorized rather than heard, observed rather than comprehended, dismissed rather than read.

TAKING RELIGION SERIOUSLY

Religion and War

If we *do* take religion seriously in international affairs, then we will learn a great deal about war, about democracy and about freedom of all kinds.

It was pointed out by religion scholars long before Samuel Huntington's recent important work on the "Clash of Civilizations" that chronic armed conflict in the world is concentrated on the margins of the traditional religions, especially the boundaries of the Islamic world. The Middle East, the southern Sahara, the Balkans, the Caucasus, Central Asia, and South Asia are where Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism and Hinduism intersect. They are also the sites of most wars in the last 50 years.

The point is not *why* people fight, but *where* they fight. These are not explicitly religious wars. But since religion shapes culture, people at these boundaries have different histories and different views of human life, and are more likely to oppose one another. Regardless of the varied reasons for conflict, these are the areas where conflict likely occurs. They are religious fault zones, and hence sites of political instability.

Religion as Sublimated Anxiety

When ethnicity and psychology fail to subsume religion, the alternative is to treat it, in quasi-Marxist fashion, as the sublimation of drives which can *really* be explained by poverty, economic change or the stresses of modernity. Of course these play a role: no part of human life is sealed off from any other. But all too often what we encounter is an *a priori* methodological commitment to treat religion as secondary, as an evanescent and derivative phenomenon which can be explained but never be used to explain.

In 1992 the Chinese press noted that "the church played an important role in the change" in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union and warned "If China does not want such a scene to be repeated in its land, it must strangle the baby while it is still in the manger." "Underground" or "house" church leaders consistently report that the current government crackdown is due to fears prompted by religious events in the former Soviet bloc. Even Chinese government documents actually implementing the crackdown state that one of their purposes is to prevent "the changes