

**Nina Käsehage (Ed.). Religious Fundamentalism in the Age of Pandemic** (Transcript: Münster, 2021), 279 pp., US \$ 40.00 [Paperback], ISBN 978-3-8376-5485-1 Open Access: <https://www.transcript-verlag.de/978-3-8376-5485-1/religious-fundamentalism-in-the-age-of-pandemic/?number=978-3-8394-5485-5>.

Reviewed by Ahmet S. Yayla and Serkan Tasgin

The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the health, social, political, and economic well-being of populations around the globe has been severe. In *Religious Fundamentalism in the Age of Pandemic*, a collection of scholarly articles edited by Nina Käsehage (Senior Lecturer at the Department for Religious Studies and Intercultural Theology at the Faculty of Theology, University of Rostock, Germany), the authors examine the effects of the pandemic on religious fundamentalism around the world.

In forming an ideology, social and economic problems can serve as catalyzing factors behind radicalization into extremism as they offer justifications for violence by those who feel affected. From this perspective, the volume examines whether the health, economic, and social crises that resulted from the pandemic would trigger an increase in radicalization into religiously fundamentalist extremism. The Coronavirus crisis has shown that an outbreak of this sort and the preventive measures by governments to counter it can indeed result in new forms of social unrest and lead to conflicts as some populist and extremist groups seek to exploit the fear and uncertainty stemming from the pandemic to further their religious or political objectives. This study fills a gap by providing a wide range of outlooks on the effects of the pandemic on religious fundamentalism, examining militant and extremist Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, and Islamic movements in Central Asia, Europe, Israel, Mali, Russia, Syria, and Tibet and how they responded to the pandemic's impact.

This anthology contains eight chapters. The first chapter, "Cultural Wars and Communal Perseverance: Jewish Fundamentalism in Our Time," by Yaakov Ariel, explores how the COVID-19 outbreak accelerated divisions between separatist ultra-Orthodox Jews and fundamentalist and nationalist Orthodox groups. In her essay, "The Impact of COVID -19 on Orthodox Groups and Believers in Russia," Anastasia V. Mitrofanova discusses the effects of Russia's response to the COVID-19 pandemic on the Orthodox Church groups and believers. According to the author, members of the Russian Orthodox tend to embrace conspiracy theories, e.g. regarding the impact of 5G wireless networks.

In "Towards a Covid-Jihad – Millennialism in the field of Jihadism," Nina Käsehage examines how jihadist and millennialist circles have been affected by the COVID crisis. She focuses on former Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs), who had already returned to their home countries, and on females held in detention camps, who had not yet returned home, to assess the jihadist instrumentalization of the pandemic for their purposes. Uran Botobekov, in "How Central Asian Salafi-Jihadi Groups are Exploiting the Covid-19 Pandemic: New Opportunities and Challenges," examines how Asian Salafi-Jihadi groups, specifically the Taliban, al-Qaeda, and Hayat Tahrir al Sham's (HTS), exploited the COVID-19 pandemic in Central Asia in efforts to increase their influence among local populations and to recruit new members.

Olga Torres Díaz, in her chapter on "Islamic Fundamentalism Framing Politics in Mali: From the Middle Ages to the Age of Pandemic," examines how Islamic fundamentalism frames politics by focusing on religious revival in Mali. Díaz traces the rise and influence of Salafist Islam, known as Wahhabism in Mali, led by Muhammad Dicko. The latter orchestrated two large-scale violent protests during the pandemic to press President Keita to resign. In the chapter on "Global Virus, International Lamas: Tibetan Religious Leaders in the Face of the Covid-19 Crisis," Miguel Álvarez Ortega examines how pandemic crises have been handled positively by leading teachers in Tibetan Buddhist schools. Tibetan Buddhists appealed to their followers to comply with the COVID-19 preventive measures.

The final chapter of the book titled "Religious Fundamentalism – A Misleading Concept?" by Peter Antes discusses how authoritarian regimes often use religious fundamentalist labels to stigmatize religious minorities, while ideological rival groups use the fundamentalist label to weaken their opponents. Antes concludes that

during pandemic times when conspiracy theories are making the rounds, the label of religious fundamentalism can be easily misused.

In sum, this volume provides an in-depth look into the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on different populations by describing how various religious fundamentalists and some of their opponents perceived and reacted to the coronavirus. The volume should be useful for both academics and P/CVE practitioners who are engaged with radicalization and religious extremism. However, further research is needed to explore alternative perspectives on the relationship between pandemic and radicalization as the world continues to struggle with the consequences.

### ***About the Reviewers:***

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