

(revised June 2004) George Bush and the Rise of Christian Fascism  
**The Imperial Presidency**

Picture the scene: The Apostolic Congress, which defines themselves as, “The Christian Voice in the Nation’s Capital”, are sitting in a meeting with National Security Council’s Near East and North African Affairs director Elliott Abrams. Abrams is working hard to reassure this small “interest group” that this administration’s foreign policy concerning Israel won’t contradict or oppose God’s plans for Israel. Abrams reassures the Apostolic Congress that their understanding of Biblical prophecy is “in sync” with Bush Administration policy.

Picture the larger scene: Not only was Abrams at the meeting but so was James Wilkinson the Deputy National Security Advisor for Communications. As was Tim Goeglein, Deputy Director of Public Liaison. As was Matt Schlapp, White house Political Director and Karl Rove’s chief lieutenant. As was Kristen Silverberg, Deputy assistant to the President for Domestic Policy. High powered White House staffers meeting with the Apostolic Congress: a group of hard core Christians who believe that “this generation” will see the end of the world and the return of Jesus. Although this group is small it is, nevertheless, important. For it is Christians like these who are the foot soldiers that are currently destroying democracy and freedom both in our nation, and throughout the world.

The men who wrote the Constitution of the United States knew that if power accrued into the hands of an elite the experiment of democracy (power spread out into the realm of the people) would be over. So they created a system of checks and balances which blocked access to any one person, or any one special interest or elite gaining too much power over others. Thus our executive, legislative and judicial branches of government “balanced” each other. The media was yet another “check” on the accrual of too much power, as was the Bill of Rights, and to some extent the Church (or churches). The system wasn’t perfect but it kept alive the possibility of true democracy. It kept alive the dream that one day “we the people” could live in a peaceful commonwealth where every person has what they need to survive and thrive.

That dream came under severe attack and disruption in December 2000 when the checks and balances of our Constitution collapsed and George Bush was inserted into the Presidency of the United States. September 11, 2001 furthered the atrophy of democracy handing the country into the

hands of an emerging Corporate (and I say Christian) Fascism. Fascism meaning the collapse of diverse spheres of power into one. Since that time we have witnessed, and have been unable to prevent, the emergence of an Imperial Presidency that has the unrestricted power to declare war against any country it chooses. The Imperial Presidency has brought to an end the Constitutional mandate that 'ONLY CONGRESS' has the authority to declare war. It has furthered weakened international law and undermined the potential of the United Nations to spread democracy throughout the earth.

The Imperial Presidency has also gained unrestricted potential to round up American citizens incarcerating them in military brigs or concentration camps for unlimited amounts of time. The presidency can keep the accused from ever again communicating with friends, families, and attorneys, simply on the certification that the incarcerated are "terrorists," as he has done with Jose Padilla and Yaser Esam Hamdi. The Presidency may also now kill American citizens abroad solely on the basis of naming the one killed "a terrorist". Just ask the family and friends of Ahmed Hijazi, an American killed with a U.S.-fired missile in Yemen. This nullifies the Constitutional right: "no person shall be denied life, liberty or property without due process of law."

Ominous signs are all around us concerning the accrual of power into the hands of the Presidency. If Mr. Bush stays in office I think our future will continue to witness shrinking political rights, financial collapse and endless war. Part of the power and seduction of this administration emerges from its diabolical manipulation of Christian rhetoric. I want to flesh out the ideology of the Christian Fascism that Mr. Bush articulates. It is a form of Christianity that is the mirror opposite of what Jesus embodied. It is, indeed, the materialization of the spirit of antichrist: a perversion of Christian faith and practice.

### **Christian Fascism**

This country, like it or not, is overwhelmingly dominated by the ideology of the Christian story. It is not so much that our founders were all Christians. Rather, they lived in an atmosphere which was visioned through the lens of Christian thought and rhetoric. What they saw was that America had become the New Israel (the new Promised Land) of God. America was a benevolent nation seeking only the good of all. Our wealth is a blessing given to us as a sign that we are a "chosen, special people" whose larger

meaning is to help the world into an era of peace, prosperity and justice. Every politician draws on this “civil religion story” which gives authority to the politicians ambition and agenda. Another way of saying this is: every nation needs sacred legitimation. It needs the authority of transcendence: of a story larger than itself ... a story that connects past with present and future. An Empire needs an even broader story: one that connects with cosmic and/or historical redemption and new creation.

Martin Luther King understood this sacred American civil religion and was able to wed it brilliantly with the prophetic religious teachings of the Bible. He drew upon Biblical narratives which limited the power and authority of the elite while calling for economic redistribution of wealth. He drew upon teachings rooted in the personal morality of nonviolence and compassion. George Bush, on the other hand, also understands this sacred American ‘civic gospel’ and has brilliantly merged it with Biblical Holiness and Holy War traditions. These traditions call for the emergence of the Righteous Warrior who will cleanse the land of its impurity. These traditions are rooted in the personal morality of righteous zeal and obedience.

For example:

- 1.) Mr. Bush consistently sends signals to his right wing religious base. In the 2003 State of the Union he exhorted: “there’s power, wonder working power, in the goodness and idealism and faith of the American people”. It’s a phrase from a well known Communion hymn “there’s power, wonder working power in the blood of the lamb”. Bush brings together the holiness zeal of Christian evangelicalism with patriotic fundamentalism. The core belief system of this ‘civic gospel’ goes something like this: The United States was founded as a Christian nation with free enterprise as the only economic system truly compatible with Christian beliefs. These religious values are today under attack in America. The danger is that without faith in God America will lose its blessing. Therefore, the government needs to act to protect the nation's religious heritage.
- 2.) Mr. Bush’s teachings on terrorism: “you are with us or against us” cements for the hearer the apocalyptic world of good versus evil. There can be no neutral ground. You have to make a decision. Patriotism is now all or nothing: it is either total agreement or a slippery slope towards treason. In the Church you come to Jesus alone for salvation. In the state you obey the God-annointed leader and are thereby secured.

Renana Brooks writes (The Nation June 24, 2003: Bush Dominates A Nation of Victims):

“Bush is a master at inducing learned helplessness in the electorate. He uses pessimistic language that creates fear and disables people from feeling they can solve their problems. In his September 20, 2001 speech to Congress on the 9/11 attacks, he chose to increase people’s sense of vulnerability:

‘Americans should not expect one battle, but a lengthy campaign, unlike any other we have ever seen. ... I ask you to live your lives, and hug your children. I know many citizens have fears tonight ... Be calm and resolute, even in the face of a continuing threat.’ (Subsequent terror alerts .. have maintained and expanded this fear of unknown, sinister enemies.)”

The terror threat itself can only be combated with increases in military force, domestic security and curtailment of civil rights through Patriot Acts. There are no other options nor any dialogue or debate that would create an alternative way to deal with terrorism.

3.) Mr. Bush certainly sees himself as a Messiah figure. Listen to his language after 9-11: “I will not forget this wound to our country or those who inflicted it. I will not yield; I will not rest; I will not relent in waging this struggle for freedom and security for the American people.” Or, in his 2003 State of the Union speech: “I will defend the freedom and security of the American people”. He has become the nation. He is its embodiment. According to Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas, - Bush told him: "God told me to strike at al Qaida and I struck them, and then he instructed me to strike at Saddam, which I did, and now I am determined to solve the problem in the Middle East. If you help me I will act, and if not, the elections will come and I will have to focus on them." This is Biblical language ... it isn't political script. This is Bush's soul language. He understands himself as a man with a Divine mission. It also means that for him leadership is not “representing the people” rather leadership means transcending the will of the people. George Bush already knows the truth before the evidence is presented. He is guided by God and must blaze the trail even if the people are reluctant.

Iraq, for example, was a necessary war whether or not Saddam had nukes. Saddam, for Bush, was a bad guy who tried to kill “my dad”. The war, for Bush, was holy and justified and necessary. Purging evil is necessary in the

Holiness/Holy War tradition of the Bible. The righteous will purge evil but the unrighteous will be consumed by it.

Like all religions the Bible has various narratives within its pages: Jesus drew on the prophetic traditions that called upon the people to change their way of life even as it critiqued and called upon the elites to decentralize their power. Jesus role modeled a lifestyle of redemptive suffering on behalf of others. Mr. Bush, however, draws on traditions that call for purity and cleansing. It is a language of hostility towards enemies and a strident call for obedience. It calls forth a lifestyle of the RIGHTEOUS ONE who will purge evil from the world through sacred violence. This religious rhetoric, which merges Holiness Christianity with Imperial Americanism, is “in sync” with a growing new movement in theology called Christian Reconstructionism (or Dominion Theology).

### **Reconstructed Fascism**

First and most basic is that Dominion Theology wants to replace democracy with a theocratic elite that would govern according to a very literal and peculiar interpretation of Biblical law. The disciples of Jesus are to have “dominion” over all of creation. It is the role of the Church to rule over the wicked and bring them into the obedience of faith.

In a “reconstructed society” democracy would be heresy. The division between sacred and secular would be abolished. A new insistence on conformity to moral rules would replace the pluralism we now know. The purpose of the Federal government would be to enforce morality through military and police functions. Society would be regulated by a theocratic elite: in the words of Pat Robertson: “just as the Supreme Court justices place a hand on the Bible and swear to uphold the Constitution, so they should also put a hand on the Constitution and swear to uphold the Bible.”

We see this at play in the leanings of Supreme Court Justice Scalia. Against the common assumption that we are a secular state Mr. Scalia has said ( in FIRST THINGS: May 2002 ) “government ... derives its moral authority from God. Government is the minister of God with powers to revenge, to execute wrath, including wrath by the sword.”

Scalia is drawing from Romans 13. If taken literally the implication of those verses would prohibit any resistance against the policies of a government. No more peaceful demonstrations (the government would be justified to do

what it did to those recently in Miami and earlier here in Seattle). Even writings of dissent and opposition could be labeled treasonous (this is part of Ashcroft's passion for Patriot Acts and other warnings not to say too much).

Scalia (and many of the conservative judges placed in Federal Courts since Reagan) believe in interpreting the Constitution in its original intent. As Scalia has said (same article as above) "the constitution that I interpret and apply is not living but dead. It means today not what current society .. thinks it ought to mean, but what it meant when it was adopted." So, as Katherine Yurica points out in her article THE DESPOILING OF AMERICA:

.. since the death penalty was clearly permitted when the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment (which prohibits cruel and unusual punishments) was adopted and at that time the death penalty was applied for all felonies --- including, for example, the felony of horse-thieving, "so it is clearly permitted today".

All a willing Dominionist Republican controlled congress need do to extend the death penalty to those people who practice witchcraft, adultery, homosexuality, heresy, etc. is to find those particular death penalty laws existing as of November 3, 1791 and re-instate them.

Scalia further believes that democracy fosters civil disobedience and is therefore a hindrance to the greater good of law and order. Our Federal Court system is being packed with these types of Judges ... Bush himself will try to fill Court vacancies with these type of judges.

Secondly: The good society according to Dominion Theology has men on top. Society would be reconstructed into a strong patriarchy that would provide the social pressure ensuring conformity. Women would find their true function as supportive wives, mothers and homemakers. Those outside this "patriarchal modality" would be exterminated. (Today the Gay marriage movement is a true threat to establishing a patriarchal society. This administration has no choice but to make this a MAJOR issue in the coming election.).

Thirdly: Purity becomes very important. There is only one right way to see the world. It is therefore of fundamental importance to control education in all spheres of culture. We see this in the Bush administration's approach to testing in schools; in his massive discounting of Global warming and in his repeated refusals to engage in open, diversified conversation about matters

of importance: whether it be Cheney's Energy Task Force, the investigation of 9/11; or the creation of an "in house" intelligence team which created evidence for the Iraqi war after the other governmental agencies couldn't provide it. The Bush team KNEW the answers before the evidence was even accumulated.

Fourth: Dominion Theology denies history and spurns the modern. It is not a conservative (conserving) movement. Although it might appeal to a nostalgic and mythical past it is primarily focused on a radically, revolutionized future of utopia. It assumes that the end will justify the means and it is moral to work as "stealth agents" fooling the pagans. It sees the world as engaged in spiritual warfare pitting "good Christians" against everybody else. This HOLY WAR and HOLINESS rhetoric is foundational in Mr. Bush's worldview.

Now if you think that this talk is bit "hyper" on my part ... that I'm Chicken Little squawking in the wind ... what then do you make of these Texas Republican platform positions of 2002 ???

"The Republican Party of Texas reaffirms the United States of America is a Christian nation.

- 1.) Government: We reclaim freedom of religious expression in public on government property, and freedom from government interference. Support government display of Ten Commandments. ... Dispel the "myth" of separation of church and state.
- 2.) ECONOMY: Abolish the dollar in favor of the gold standard. Abolish the IRS. Eliminate income tax, inheritance tax, gift tax, capital gains, corporate income tax, payroll tax and property tax. Repeal minimum wage law ... Gradually phase out Social security tax for a system of private pensions.
- 3.) UNITED NATIONS: We immediately rescind our membership in , as well as financial and military contributions to the United Nations ... we should evict the United Nations...
- 4.) FAMILY: We believe that traditional marriage is a legal and moral commitment between a man and a woman. We recognize that the family is the foundational unit of a healthy society and consists of those related by blood, marriage or adoption. The family is

responsible for its own welfare, education, moral training, conduct and property.

5.) EDUCATION: Since Secular Humanism is recognized by the United States Supreme Court as a religion ... Secular Humanism should be subjected to the same state and federal laws as any other recognized religion.

6.) ENVIRONMENT: Oppose the myth of global warming. Reaffirm the belief in the fundamental right of an individual to use property without governmental interference.

I do not believe that this coming election will be decided because of political policy. It will not be decided in a debate over free markets versus fair markets; tax cuts or no tax cuts, Patriot Act or no Patriot Act; military draft or no draft. None of these issues will determine the election because the candidates are all for free markets, tax cuts, domestic security and a strong global military presence. The election will be determined by the candidate who can embody the deeply felt, often unarticulated religious yearnings of the populace. Yearnings such as “who will save us, secure us, lead us??? who will connect us with a power greater than the terrors of the night?” Bush speaks this language. Democrats are stuck in political nuance. Or, in other words, Democrats cannot speak the language of Martin Luther King who understood that social transformation requires a transcendent authority. And it is a vision of transformation, not nuance, that gives people courage to risk alternative paths to violence.

The problem comes down to this: Democrats, liberals, and social progressives have simply not grasped how afraid, insecure and how deeply in despair the populace is. They keep speaking as if tinkering with the system is a vision that can win the day. What Bush and Rove, Rumsfeld, Cheney, Wolfowitz and Pearls, Abrams and Bolton, DeLay and Rice etc, have clearly understood is that truth is perception. Image is EVERYTHING! Unfortunately, the inner person of America today is a hollowed out consumer who lacks the will power, stamina and imagination to do anything more than be overwhelmed by appearances. Therefore, a politics of crisis, a politics of fear will keep us locked into a state of conformity.



### *Apocalyptic Fascism*

Fueling this politics of fear is yet another theological worldview of crisis and insecurity. Apocalyptic theology is booming !!! Drawing from the Holiness/Holy War traditions of the Bible it currently dominates the mass media expression of Christian faith from which Bush draws his strength. It is a theology of despair that has given up on the possibilities of redemption.

One of the most popular fiction series making the rounds these days is the LEFT BEHIND series written by Tim LaHaye & Jerry Jenkins. Multiple millions of people are reading these books which fictionalize the end of life as we know it. It used to be that the Church could control people through the fear of eternal damnation. Today it is through fear of the future. The theology is basically this: The Bible is a code book that when rightly interpreted reveals that we are living at the end of history. History is scripted and is about to come to a catastrophic conclusion. The only hope is to accept Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior so that you can be “saved” from the future apocalypse. God will “snatch you up” (Rapture) right before a seven year series of horrible events that will see the rise of Antichrist and the rebuilding of the Jewish temple. There will be world war with most of humanity dying. At that point Jesus will return to restore law and order. This theology of despair “fits” our current culture of powerlessness and fear. From SARS to weapons of mass destruction to the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli conflict, to ecological collapse, the whole world seems to be on a “no exit” slide into an end times abyss. The theology of despair is very seductive and it is shaping the spirituality of millions of Christians today.

It has, at least, five political implications that affect each one of us here today. FIRST: Israel is to be exalted and defended no matter what they do to the Palestinian people. They are God’s chosen people and must reside in their Biblically anointed Land for the “end time clock” to tick to its final minute. Israel has a Biblical mandate to conquer and control all of the land from the Nile River to the Euphrates. Behind the politics of oil lie the religious passion to fulfill God’s will: Syria must fall.

Secondly: institutions like the United Nations are not to be trusted because they are tools of the Antichrist. The Antichrist is thought of (not as a spirituality or ideology) but as a personal embodiment of evil. The Antichrist will be a living person who will come to power at the end of history and proclaim himself to be god on earth. The theory has it that his

power will be generated from within a coalition of nations. Thus ... America, as God's chosen nation, will need to go it alone so as not to be duped by Antichrist. Our destiny is to take the gospel to all the nations: a benevolent gospel of security and salvation for all.

Thirdly: since the world is passing away the environment is not of great importance. There is no need to worry about issues of sustainability because the world is in its final countdown. Part of the unconcern towards global warming and other ecological crisis is the religious belief that we aren't going to be around in 100 years. We're in the end times now ... every moment is merely preparation for eternity. Whether Bush himself believes this or not is irrelevant. This is the religious worldview of those who exalt him and the voter-bloc to which he plays. For Bush to act for sustainability would require a major shift in his religious narrative. ... As an aside this past summer the National Park Service was instructed to approve the display of religious symbols and Bible verses, as well as the sale of creationist books at the Grand Canyon National Park. In December 2003 the Park Service was ordered to develop a "more balanced" version of an 8 minute video shown at the Lincoln Memorial Visitor Center. Conservative Christians wanted the removal of footage of gay rights, pro choice and anti-war demonstrations replacing it with footage of Christian rallies and pro-war demonstrations.

Fourth: Apocalyptic theology believes that Jesus dying for my sins is far more important than the teachings of Jesus. We see this in the recent movie **PASSION OF THE CHRIST**. What this creates is a spirituality that can overlook the teachings of Jesus. The Sermon on the Mount is re-framed as an impossible this-worldly ethic. Teachings about nonviolence, economic redistribution, compassion toward those who are thought of as sinners and resistance to injustice are all discounted. Recently, the Governor of Alabama in a fit of religious zeal wanted to take the economic teachings of Jesus seriously: he tried to reform his state to benefit the poor. The Christian Coalition led the charge against such thinking and foiled his efforts.

Fifth: a leader who loves Jesus is to be followed as God's man for the hour. The Christian leader is God's shepherd over the American flock. When Bush, who sees himself as a messianic figure anointed by God, decided on running for the Presidency he called a group of evangelical Pastors together announcing to them "I have heard the call" and then received from them the

“laying on of hands” which corresponds to divine ordination for the task ahead. On September 14, 2001 he stated: “our responsibility before history is already clear: to answer these attacks and rid the world of evil”. He then launched the crusade Operation Infinite Freedom against Afghanistan. Yet other messianic statements from Bush:

“History has called America to action. ... The great hope of our time, and the great hope of every time, now depends on us.” ....

“We must also remember our calling as a blessed nation to make the world better ... and confound the designs of evil men.”

“Our nation has been chosen by God and commissioned by history, to be a model of justice before the world.”

\*\*\* According to Vice-President Cheney: America “has the duty to act with force to construct a world in the image of the United States.”

In return for this messianic leadership evangelical Christians have poured out an anointing of prayer. During the Afghanistan crusade thousands of “Presidential Circles of Prayer” and “Wheels of Prayer” were organized on the Internet, running 24 hours a day. The Wheel of Prayer was so popular and was hit so often that the website crashed within days.

Pastor Charles Stanley distributed among Marines as they entered into combat thousands of pamphlets entitled “Duty of a Christian in Time of War”. With the pamphlet went a card instructing them to sign and send directly to Mr. Bush. The card says: “I have committed to pray for you, your family and your Administration.” Specific prayers for the President were included for each day.

### ***CONCLUSION:***

The point I’m trying to make is that we are not dealing simply with politics when it comes to the Bush administration. The progressive left, which often pays little attention to Christianity, and the moderate middle, which thinks “these things will balance out”; will be making a huge mistake if they overlook the religious ideology at the core of Mr. Bush personally and the movement he represents. And we are talking about a “movement” (a movement of ‘the people’ not just the elites). We are seeing today the emergence of a “fascist movement”. It is bankrolled and organized by Corporations, and articulated through the ideology of neo-conservatism. But the troops come out of the right wing church. And that church, drawing upon the Holiness/Holy War Biblical narratives of Apocalyptic-Dominionism theology, is growing in this country. This is not a battle

between intellectual and institutional elites. It is far more intimate than that. It's a battle in our homes, our families, friendships, neighborhoods and within our faith communities. Let me make a rather audacious prophecy: **WHOEVER CONTROLS THE INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE WILL CONTROL THE FUTURE OF THIS NATION.** In other words it's the vision of Pat Robertson or Martin Luther King.

When Dave Korten (author of *When Corporations Rule the World*) says that we need a "new story"; he is talking about needing a transcendent authority in which we root our political culture. Human beings cannot live in societal form without a sacred narrative. Neither anarchy nor atheism can construct a house that will hold our future. The Republicans know this well but the Democrats seem clueless.

What we need is a movement of spiritual justice. We need the language of those who can wed America's civil religion with the language and stories that are emerging from the antiwar, fair trade and human rights movements. We need a renewed boldness to once again lift up the vision of checks and balances, limits to power and the need for **COMMONWEALTH** as foundational to national health. This language, wedded to a global vision of America as "lifter of the poor" and "partner in the care of the earth", can form a unique new narrative that has the power to inspire imagination and courage. It is a language that can call forth a new coalition powerful enough to envision a new and better world. It will be a language that articulates "we are the ones we are looking for". It is a language that proclaims "God is with us in our diversity" not God above us threatening wrath and ruin.

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#### SOME RESOURCES

On internet look up Christian Reconstructionism      Dominion Theology

Books:

Eyes Right    edited Chip Berlot      South End Press (1995)

Spiritual Warfare      Sara Diamond      South End Press (1989)

Right Wing Populism in America

Chip Berlot & Matthew Lyons (Guilford Press, 2000)

American Dynasty      Kevin Phillips (Viking Press, 2004)

Sorrows of Empire      Chalmers Johnson (2004)

Articles on Internet:

America As A One Party State      Robert Kuttner  
[www.prospect.org/authors/kuttner-r.html](http://www.prospect.org/authors/kuttner-r.html)

Christian Reconstructionism      Fredrick Clarkson  
[www.informationclearinghouse.info/article5722.htm](http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article5722.htm)

The Despoiling of America      Katherine Yurica  
[www.informationclearinghouse.info/article5646.htm](http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article5646.htm)  
\*\*\* this is THE BEST and most frightening article I have read

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