

Bush's Armageddon Obsession: The Looking Gla

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I'd become accustomed to George W. Bush's use of the word evil until he told the nation this last spring, „The evil one is among us." Anyone with a passing understanding of the evangelical world of Bush's faith knows he was referring to the Antichrist. The implications of this are grave beyond telling and yet scarcely ever noted in the public discourse. On the eve of a misguided war, the Commander in Chief of the most powerful military force in human history has located American foreign policy within a Biblical narrative that leads inexorably towards the plains of Megiddo, roughly fifty five miles northwest of Jerusalem: the battle of Armageddon. Two essential questions, as impertinent as they are imperative, need to be asked: „Mr. President, as a born-again Christian, is it not true that you regard this as the end times prophesied in the Bible? In what way does your religious understanding of apocalypse inform American policy in the Mideast?"

There are many aspects to the fundamentalist understanding of the end of days, not the least being the conversion of the Jews to the true Messiah before the final battle. In his political autobiography (*A Charge to Keep*), Bush places himself squarely in the mainstream of evangelical thought. Recounting his pilgrimage to the Holy Land Bush writes of entering into the waters of Galilee in the apparent baptism of "a Jewish friend. " It was then that the hymn came to his mind:

Now the time is approaching: „By prophets long foretold / When all shall dwell together / One Shepherd and one fold / Now Jew and Gentile meeting / From many a distant shore / Around an altar kneeling / One common Lord adore."

I don't know if the president has read Hal Lindsey, but much of what he says shows a similar perspective. Having sold fifteen million copies, Lindsey's book *The Late Great Planet Earth* remains the most influential text shaping fundamentalist thought on apocalyptic matters. Written within the geopolitical fantasies of the Cold War, the book says, „ As Armageddon begins with the invasion of Israel by the Arabs and the Russian confederacy, and their consequent swift destruction, the greatest period of Jewish conversion to their true Messiah will begin."

I'd rather not believe that Bush is moving according to Lindsey's game plan but the simple fact is that we don't know. The Administration's systematic alienation of our Arab allies (soon leaving Israel as our only viable ally in the Mideast) raises disturbing questions.

Lindsey's book influenced not only American fundamentalist culture but had a pervasive effect on fundamentalist Islam's apocalyptic worldview. According to David Cook, the American expert on Islamic apocalyptic literature, until the late eighties this element of Muslim culture had been fairly static for centuries." The contemporary Muslim," says Cook, „sees the present world turned upside down by Christian millennialism.... In defense, Muslims make heavy use of the Bible, or one might say the Bible as seen through the eyes of Hal Lindsey. There are Muslim readings of the book of Daniel, Ezekiel and Revelation. The only difference is the 'good guys' are Muslims, not Christians."

This strange cross-fertilization between cultures has placed us in the situation in which the current administration and radical Islam share a common worldview in which peace descends after Evil is defeated in an apocalyptic battle. Both parties sing the same song: God will lead our warriors to victory against the forces of darkness.

We are at an extraordinary and critical historical moment. When Bush was in Germany trying to garner support for invading Iraq, the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Pentagon leaked its unanimous objection. More recently Brent Scowcroft, the elder statesman of the Republican foreign policy establishment, declared that Bush's plans could unleash „an Armageddon in the Middle East."

„The comments of Mr. Scowcroft and others in the Republican foreign policy establishment," writes the *New York Times*, "appear to be a loosely coordinated effort." On the domestic front it seems that both the Pentagon and significant figures in the Republican party (Scowcroft, Kissinger, House majority leader Dick Armey) are attempting to rein in a rogue president before American men and women begin coming home in body bags.

On the foreign front the U.S. is facing near universal opposition by our European allies and complete opposition from the Arab world, including Kuwait and the Iraqi Kurds who have

suffered so much under Saddam Hussein. The religious underpinnings of Bush's war against evil are evident as is the absolutist theology he shares with radical Islam. Both of them see such wars as we may be facing right now as righteous, good and necessary.

It is clear, we should be afraid for we are profoundly endangered by the passions of both Christian and Muslim fundamentalisms.

*This essay and its companion „Overcoming Terrorism: A Twelve Step Approach” can be read at www.gatheringin.com. Given the gravity of the world situation the author encourages readers to circulate this freely. **Michael Hill Ortiz** can be reached at: michaelortizhill@earthlink.net*

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