

WHILE THE PEOPLE SLEEP, CRITICS WEEP

by Frances O'Connor*

INTRODUCTION

For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets,,insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. [Matt. 24:24]

How Should a Diverse and Democratic Society Deal with Issues of Religion?

In the past fifteen years much has been written about both the fundamentalist evangelical Christian movement and the conservative element of the Republican Party. More recently there has been a focus on the efforts of leaders of the two factions to merge their respective movements, name George W. Bush their leader and emblaze their "Christian" imprint on all three branches of government. Once these goals are accomplished their stated intent is to make inroads internationally.¹ This paper will examine the strategy for merging the two factions, Bush's emergence as leader and, most importantly, the influence an underestimated movement of ideas has had as a catalyst for an historic shift in American religion and politics. For the first time in American history a sitting president has openly acknowledged that his personal faith beliefs significantly influence his policies and politics. Perhaps of greatest significance is the power the president's endorsement adds to fundamental evangelical Christian ideas, and their widespread rate of acceptance in the Republican Party.

Political scientists have presented a detailed accounting of how the conservative element of the Republican Party and the fundamentalist evangelical Christian movements evolved, how they have advanced their respective agendas and how George Bush was selected as the deified "Prince" to lead the theocracy called Dominionism.² What merits exploration is why the electorate has rallied to support Dominionism and George Bush as its anointed leader. By all indication, few Americans understand the depth and

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¹ Frederick Clarkson, *The Rise of the Religious Right in the Republican Party*, Church and State, November, 1993, p. 1.

² Larry Ross, *The Dangers of Fundamentalist Beliefs on George Bush and on U.S. Foreign Policy*, Ross is Secretary, New Zealand Nuclear Free Peacemaking Association, delivered to the Christchurch Unitarian Fellowship, Sunday, March 21, 2004.

breadth of the melding of Christian Fundamentalism and Conservative Republicanism.

In order to comprehend the impact Dominionism is having on U.S. domestic and foreign policy, it is necessary to examine what the movement is, how and why it developed along with its inherent dangers. Dominionism is a form of divine-right theory that pictures the seizure of earthly (temporal) power by the people of God as the only means through which the world can be rescued.³

It is the eschatology that Bush has imbibed; an eschatology through which he has gradually (and easily) come to see himself as an agent of God who has been called by him to ‘restore the earth to God’s control’ a ‘chosen vessel’ so to speak, to bring Restoration of All Things.⁴

S. R. Shearer of Antipas Ministries, calls this delusion “Messianic leadership” – that is to say usurping the role usually ascribed to the Messiah.⁵

Dominionism seeks to reverse the liberalization of society through the last century and the long-standing separation of church and state dictated by the First Amendment of the U. S. Constitution.⁶

Our founding fathers wisely left this notion behind and chose to establish a secular state, clearly setting forth its basis and philosophy of religious toleration and lack of established religion, the dominionists despair that, without a common religious authority and due to the creeping influences of liberalism and humanism, society is somehow in decay.⁷

In the early 1980s leading televangelists Billy Graham, Jerry Falwell, Jimmy Swaggart, Oral Roberts, Pat Robertson, et. al., began using the media to rally Christian followers to accept a new political religion, initially with the intent of amassing a following and infiltrating the Republican Party at all levels.⁸ This political religion originally called Political Reconstructionism has

³ Op. Cit., Ross, p. 2.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ S. R. Shearer, “The God-Men of America’s new World Order System,” in Antipas Ministries, Endtimes Network, March 31, 2005.

⁶ David R. Koespell, “On The Frontlines of the Culture War,” Secular Humanist Bulletin, Volume 20, No. 2, Spring 2000, p. 3.

⁷ Ibid.

also become known as Dominionism. Journalist Frederick Clarkson, who has written extensively on the subject, warned in 1994 that Dominionism “seeks to replace democracy with a theocratic elite that would govern by imposing their interpretation of Biblical law.”⁹ He described the ulterior motive of Dominionism as “eliminating ... labor unions, civil rights laws, and public schools.”¹⁰ Clarkson further predicted the creation of new classes of citizens:

Women would be generally relegated to hearth and home. Insufficiently Christian men would be denied citizenship, perhaps executed. So severe is this theocracy that it would extend to capital punishment, blasphemy, heresy, adultery, and homosexuality.¹¹

The creators of Dominionism called Christians to enter politics and work for world domination so that Jesus could return to an earth prepared for his earthly rule by his faithful followers. On the contrary, they purport to follow a Gospel that in Jesus’ own words proclaims that his “kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36).

Leading evangelists of the 1980s saw the benefit of merging their religious beliefs with their political agenda. In 1985, Billy Graham publicly articulated the intent of the evangelical Christians to organize corporately with the goal of gaining control of congress, the judiciary, and the executive branch of government. Many people find their success very disturbing.

Pat Robertson’s Christian Coalition, which formally organized in 1989, sought to gain control of the Republican Party by 1996.¹² The Coalition managed to draft a detailed long-range plan, orchestrate superb organization, amass millions of dollars and take the nation by storm while the masses slept.

The Coalition has two consistent central goals: to control the agenda of the Republican party by working from the grassroots up and training and electing pro-family, Christian candidates to public office. Prior to the early 1990s, conservative fundamentalists were considered as a “band of theological misfits”¹³ without a following. All that changed during the 1990s. In 1993 the Christian Coalition held its first “Road to Victory Conference” with workshops

⁸ *Taking Over the Republican Party*,” President of the Alamo City Republican Women’s Club, 1993, p. 6.

⁹ Katherine Yurica, *The Despoiling of America, How George Bush Became the Head of the New American Dominionist Church/State*, February 11, 2004, p. 3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Frederick Clarkson, “Christian Reconstructionism: Theocratic Dominionism Gains Influence,” *The Public Eye Magazine*, Vol. VIII, Nos. 1 & 2, March/June 1994, Part 1 of a four part series.

¹² *Op. Cit.*, Clarkson, *The Rise of the Religious Right*, p. 1.

¹³ *Op. Cit.*, Clarkson, *Christian Reconstructionism*, p. 4.

teaching the mechanics of how to take over the Republican Party from the inside. Attendees included then President George H. W. Bush, Education Secretary Lamar Alexander, his predecessor William Bennett and Oliver North as speakers. That same year, the Christian Coalition claimed 250,000 members.¹⁴ From the beginning this annual conference has been a “veritable *who’s who* in right-wing and mainstream conservative circles.”¹⁵ In 2000 their list of speakers included: Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, House Majority Leader Dick Armey, House Speaker Dennis Hastert, Majority Whip Tom DeLay, Reverend Jerry Falwell, and then presidential candidate George W. Bush via video. Jerry Falwell, leader of the Moral Majority, charged, “Get them baptized and get them registered.”¹⁶ The Christian Coalition’s initial approach to elections, popularly known as “stealth” tactics, has three essential components:

- 1) Targeting low-profile elections that normally attract few voters
- 2) Focusing on get-out-the-vote efforts on certain conservative churches
- 3) Instructing the candidates to hide their views from the public by avoiding public appearances and refusing to fill out questionnaires¹⁷

In 1992 Ralph Reed, then head of the Christian Coalition, told a Coalition gathering that the first strategy, and in many ways the most important strategy, for evangelicals is secrecy. The first documented success the Coalition achieved was in San Diego in 1990, when they organized and helped win 60 of the 90 races for a variety of local offices ranging from school to hospital boards. Reed’s comments following the Coalition victory should have set off alarm bells but the public did not notice. Reed announced:

Stealth was a big factor in San Diego’s success, but that’s just a good strategy. It’s like guerrilla warfare. If you reveal your location, all it does is allow your opponent to improve his artillery bearings. It’s better to move quietly, I do guerrilla warfare. I paint my face and travel at night. You don’t know it’s over until

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 3.

¹⁵ “Right Wing Watch” Heritage Foundation, April 25, 2005.

¹⁶ Op. Cit., Taking Over the Republican Party, p. 6.

¹⁷ Op. Cit., “Right Wing Watch”

You're in a body bag. You don't know until election night.¹⁸

Why Reed's proclamation didn't shake the very core of every American remains a mystery. Even more disturbing, Reed wasn't the only one making such pronouncements. In 1991, Pat Robertson delivered a statement as shocking as Reed's.

I believe that during the next couple of years there will be a fierce struggle between the militant leftists, secular humanists, and atheists who have dominated the power centers of American culture for the past 50 years and the Evangelical Christians, pro-family Roman Catholics, and their conservative allies. The radical left will lose its hold, and by the end of this decade control of the major institutions of society will be firmly in the hands of those who share a pro-family, religious, traditional value perspective.¹⁹

Clearly, the clarion call had been given and yet, the people slept. In 1992, the *Denver Post* quoted from the Coalition's platform stating, "We want...as soon as possible to see a majority of the Republican Party in the hands of pro-family Christians by 1996." That same year Pat Robertson sent a direct mail piece to his constituents stating, "The feminist agenda is not about equal rights for women. It is about a socialist, anti-family political movement that encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism and become lesbians."²⁰

In 1994 the Republican Party took control of Congress for the first time in 40 years. Until then Democrats held strong majorities in both houses of most state legislatures. In 1992, Democrats had majorities in both bodies of twenty-five state legislatures, Republicans eight. In 1994, Democrats had majorities in eighteen, Republicans nineteen. By 2003, Democrats had sixteen, Republicans twenty-one.²¹ That same year, thirty-five million Americans identified as conservative Christians, making them a viable political force as well as in American society.²² Evangelical born-again Christians of one stripe or another were then, and are now, 40% of the electorate, and they support Bush 3-1.²³

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Pat Robertson's Perspective, July-August 1991.

²⁰ Pat Robertson's direct mail, Summer 1992.

²¹ Ibid., p. 9.

²² Op. Cit., Yurica, *The Despoiling of America*, p. 3.

²³ Joe Bageant, "The Covert Kingdom," published in *Counter Punch*, May 2004.

Their goal of establishing a theocracy to “Christianize” America is well on its way to being achieved and, arguably, America and the world will never be the same.

During the 2004 presidential election the presence of the Christian Coalition was once again glaringly evident. Ralph Reed moved beyond the Christian Coalition to evolve as a leading republican political strategist and was a senior member of the Bush-Cheney team. During the campaign he stated his goal to organize a “party for the president” and, if re-election is the measure of success, he succeeded.

What did these founders have in mind when they set out to form a party for the president? Dominionist views are right in line with conservative political views, the difference being Dominionists have created a comprehensive agenda with Biblical justifications for far right political policies.²⁴

Dominionists argue that the Bible is the governing text for all areas of life – such as government, education, law and the arts, not merely social or moral issues like pornography or homosexuality and abortion. More broadly, Dominionists believe that there are three main areas of governance: family government, church government and civil government.²⁵

How fundamental evangelical religion became wedded to conservative political theory is one of the most important questions in American politics in this century. In order to know the “how” and “why” we must examine how George W. Bush has been pivotal in this merger. Katherine Yurica, in *The Despoiling of America*, says,

It happened quietly, with barely a mention in the media. Only the *Washington Post* dutifully reported it. On December 24, 2001, Pat Robertson resigned his position as President of the Christian Coalition. Robertson’s act was symbolic, but it carried a secret and solemn revelation to the faithful. It was a signal that the Bush administration was a government under God that was led by an anointed President who would be the first regent in a dynasty of regents awaiting the return of Jesus to earth. The President would now be the minister through whom God would execute His will in the nation.²⁶

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Op. Cit., Yurica, *The Despoiling of America*, p. 1.

A Dominionist belief that is perhaps most applicable to the current Bush administration is the tenet that Christians are the “new chosen people of God,” commanded to do what Adam in Eden and Israel in Canaan failed to do... “create the society that God requires.”²⁷ Bush is a self-described born-again Christian who considers God a key influence in his life. The President was quoted by Scripps Howard News Service on March 5, 2003 as saying he considers God a key political ally, and that he is “God’s messenger.” Who better to lead this movement than a president who is comfortable executing the wrath of God on evil doers? But most of us missed the significance of Bush’s ascension to evangelical leadership. While the public focused on Bush’s political agenda he and his administration subtly cloaked their views in religious robes. How did the public let this happen?

Yurica contends, “To a people who are largely uneducated and who often remained ignorant even if they attended college because of their fear of becoming tainted by the ‘world and worldliness,’ Dominionism came as a brilliant light that assuaged their deep sense of inferiority.”²⁸

Politicians like Karl Rove, Bush’s political advisor and Lee Atwater, political advisor to George Bush Sr. discerned the most effective way to realize their shared goal of infiltrating the political system was to place their agenda within the context of religion. Both Rove and Atwater believed Machiavelli’s *The Prince* provided the model. Machiavelli was one of the first modern political thinkers and he provided a shrewd commentary on the psychology of control and leadership. Machiavelli’s *The Prince*, written in 1513, provided the framework for the political fundamentalists who shaped the Bush administration. Machiavelli laid out in great detail a handbook for those who would acquire or increase their political power. Among the many who have studied and implemented his directives are Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin and Lenin.

There was a concerted effort on the part of the religious right and conservative politicians to select George W. Bush as their leader and their “Prince.” Thus, the marriage of political conservatism and Christian fundamentalism was consummated in 2000 with the election of George W. Bush to the presidency. George W. was the ideal candidate to fulfill that role because, as a born again Christian, he fits the major criteria determined by the Dominionists as having the necessary attributes to qualify as being one of God’s elect.

Both the evangelists and the politicians seeking power and control realized that by combining their political agenda with fundamentalist Christian beliefs they could glorify greed, hate and nationalism and even create a

²⁷ R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, (Nutley, NJ: Craig Press, 1973), p. 4.

²⁸ Op. Cit. Yurica, *The Despoiling of America*, p. 15.

Christian empire with ease.²⁹ Dominionism answered the need of both political and religious factions who sought power and control.

Among the most frightening of Machiavelli's tenets incorporated into Dominionism are:

- A leader must only appear to have qualities of goodness, he need not actually possess them.
- It is better to be cruel than merciful.
- It is better to break promises if keeping them would be against one's interests.
- A good leader changes course whenever it is expedient to do so.
- In order to achieve the most noble accomplishments, the leader may have to enter into evil.
- Good acts sometimes advance the triumph of evil, as there are circumstances when doing evil ensures the victory of a good cause.³⁰

Leo Strauss (1899-1973), a Jewish scholar of political science from the University of Chicago, is most famous for resuscitating Machiavelli and introducing his principles as the guiding philosophy of the neo-conservative movement. His more prominent students include Paul Wolfowitz, Abram Shulsky and Harry Jaffa. Each of these men created a following as well as extending Machiavelli's influence to a range of people including Justices Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas; Robert Bork; J. Danforth Quayle; John Ashcroft; Newt Gingrich and many others who hold or have held key positions in the Bush administration and Defense Department.³¹ Scalia, in an article entitled *God's Justice and Ours*,³² wrote, "The Bible teaches and Christians believe ... that government derives its moral authority from God. Government is the 'minister of God' with powers to revenge, to execute wrath, including even wrath by sword...." The "believers" and their philosophy have infiltrated and influenced all three branches of government.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 6.

³⁰ Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Translation from Italian by Hill Thompson, Palm Springs, CA: ETC Publications, 1988, pgs. 115-117.

³¹ Ibid. p. 12.

³² Antonin Scalia, "God's Justice and Ours," in *First Things*, 123 (May 2002): 17-22.

Since the Bush administration is heavily influenced by Machiavelli's writings and those who have kept his teachings alive, it is important to highlight the Machiavellian tenets Strauss believed to be the most important:

- A leader had to perpetually deceive the citizens he ruled.
- Those who lead must understand there is no morality, there is only the right of the superior to rule the inferior.
- Religion is a handle by which the ruler can manipulate the masses.
- Secular society...is the worst possible thing, because it leads to individualism and relativism, both of which encourage dissent and rebellion.
- Political order can be stable only if it is united by an external threat; and following Machiavelli, he maintains that if no external threat exists, then one has to be manufactured.
- Liberal society dispenses with noble lies and pious frauds. It tries to found society on secular rational foundations.³³

Ross, in *The Dangers of Fundamentalist Beliefs on George Bush and on U.S. Foreign Policy*, poses a very serious question:

How much do Bush's Christian fundamentalist beliefs influence his decisions to tell a pack of lies to fool people into supporting his phony war and killing thousands of people; spreading tons of depleted uranium weapons to contaminate Iraq causing countless deaths and mutations there and in neighboring countries for 4.5 billion years, making new far more dangerous nuclear and pre-emptive war doctrines, ushering in a new nuclear weapons and nuclear proliferation era, thus increasing the dangers of a nuclear war, spurning environment crisis such as global warming and the Pentagon's vitally important report on 'abrupt climate changes that could precipitate nuclear conflict, mega droughts, famine, etc.'

³³ Shadia Drury, *Leo Strauss and the American Right*, St. Martin's Press, 1999.

withdrawing from international treaties, record U.S. deficits, suppressing U.S. civil liberties and the militarisation of space to protect American dominance and many other issues?³⁴

As Bill Wiser, in his advent meditation *Opium for the People*, writes,

Before getting down to the business of addressing the hemorrhaging deficit, a war without end, the failure to provide adequate schooling and health care for millions of children, and the dichotomy of galloping consumption and disappearing resources, we have to deal with the pernicious source of the illusion: civil religion, America's opiate.³⁵

As Karl Marx prophesized years ago, religion is the opium of the people. This deadly cocktail of patriotism, religiosity, moralism and nationalism that has evolved under the Bush administration, has come to call itself "Christianity." Based on Bush's performance, one can only surmise that he truly does believe that he was chosen by God to dominate the world as he proclaims. The implications and danger in integrating any set of religious beliefs go without saying. One needs only to look at this ideology of omnipotence, as evidenced in statements like "...I sense my country is going to need me... I know it won't be easy... but God wants me to do it," and the ensuing results to understand the danger. As Ross concludes,

His quite appalling series of lies used to justify the war with Iraq can all be excused by Bush, as simply following divine orders – part of the divine plan. Who are we to question or know what is so clearly (to Bush) God's' will? For Bush, mentally armed with the Christian Fundamentalist religion, anything is possible and everything can be divinely justified.³⁶

As antiwar sentiment mounts, the administration may be using this "Bush and God" gambit as a way to say: Forget it. March and lobby as much as you want. Nothing can stop this Christian soldier from marching out to war.³⁷ The influence of Christian Fundamentalism on Bush and his

³⁴ Op. Cit., Ross, p. 4.

³⁵ Bill Wiser, *Opium of the People*, Advent Meditation, 2005.

³⁶ Op. Cit., Ross, p. 7.

administration's thinking is apparent when Christian Fundamentalist basic tenets are examined. Believers' hold:

- A binary concept of reality that sets black and white boundaries through the establishment of rigid norms and behavioral codes.
- An obsession with time due to the possibility that the world may end at any moment.
- A belief in a universal gospel that crosses cultural and historical contexts....This outlook compels them to impose their version of God's will upon other people.
- An intolerance for dissent. Considerable scholarship has linked religious fundamentalism with authoritarian decision-making and behavior.³⁸

From the beginning of the Bush presidency this influence was abundantly clear. Early on the president warned that nations are either with us or they're against us. He viewed his role as part of a divine unfolding of events with eternal consequences. Political science professor David Domke offers evidence of time fixations throughout the administration's discourse and news coverage, and argues that they allowed the administration simultaneously to push for immediate action on specific "war on terrorism" policies and to justify this desire as a requisite step in a long-term, God ordained process... Indeed death and the Apocalypse were perpetually imminent. Before the Iraq war, the Bush administration consistently exhibited a unified voice in public communications ...the message never veered...choices for rebuttal were always limited...any strong disagreements not in the interest of U.S. citizens imposed significant cost for dissent; anyone holding opposing views was unpatriotic, potentially placing people in the U.S. at risk.³⁹

From the pulpit of the presidential podium, Bush has deceived the people, both at home and abroad. Osha Gray Davidson, a prolific environmental journalist, stated "No president has gone after the nation's environmental laws with the same fury as George W. Bush and none has been so adept at staying under the radar."⁴⁰ While professing to support clean air and

³⁷ Ira Chernus, "The 'Bush and God' Scam: Don't Buy it," published in *Common Dreams. Org.*, March 10, 2003. Ira Chernus is professor of religious studies at the University of Colorado at Boulder.

³⁸ Adapted from David Domke, *God Willing*, London: Pluto Press, 2004, p.24-26.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.26-27.

⁴⁰ Osha Gray Davidson, "Dirty Secrets," *Mother Jones* September/October 2003, p. 53.

clear skies the Bush administration has eliminated the environmental controls designed to provide clean air and water. While promising to care for the poor and elderly Bush proceeded to eliminate many from coverage leaving those who still qualify paying more for drugs than they paid before his drug benefit bill passed. Concurrently he approved an estimated \$139 billion dollars in increased profits from the Medicare funds.⁴¹ At \$17 billion annually, this means about a 38% rise in drug maker profit. An estimated 61.1 percent of the Medicare dollars that will be spent to buy more prescriptions will remain in the hands of drug makers as added profit.⁴² Clearly Bush has mastered Machiavelli's first tenet, the deception of the people.

The president has demonstrated that he will knowingly tell a number of lies, in order to fool the U.S. Senate and U. S. public into supporting his political initiatives both at home and abroad. Bush managed to incorporate all of the Machiavellian tenets Strauss emphasized when he and his administration deceived both Congress and the American people by telling them that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction when none were found; when he asserted America was in imminent danger of being attacked by Iraq when there were no documented signs of intent; when he linked Iraq to the attack on the World Trade Center in spite of the fact that no connection was ever documented; precipitating a series of events that could culminate in a nuclear world war and gambling with the very future of humanity is a very big risk to take on the basis of lies.⁴³ Lying to the American people is one thing, lying to Congress is a federal felony and an impeachable offense.⁴⁴

John Dean, former White House Counsel to President Nixon, writes, "So egregious and serious are Bush's misrepresentations that they appear to be a deliberate effort to mislead Congress and the public."⁴⁵ Dean found in Bush's 2003 State of the Union Address, eight major representations of fact that constitute making "false statements" under Title 18, Chapter 47, Section 1001 of the United States Code.⁴⁶ Dean further writes in his book *Worse Than Watergate*,

⁴¹ Alan Sager and Deborah Socolar, *Sixty-One Percent of Medicare's New Prescription Drug Subsidy is Windfall Profit to Drug Makers*, "Health Reform Program, Boston University School of Public Health,

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.2.

⁴³ *Op. Cit.*, Ross, p.3.

⁴⁴ John Dean, "*Why a Special Prosecutor's Investigation is Needed*," published at the Yurica Report, July 2003.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, John Dean also examines these lies in his book, *Worse Than Watergate*, Little Brown and Company, 2004, p. 136.

With the Bush-Cheney presidency, it appears that mendacity has become policy. Their lying relates to matters large and small. Lies are told to hide, to mislead, and to gain political advantage. Their pervasive lying is remarkably well documented and that documentation has been ongoing.⁴⁷

What is both appalling and frightening is that both the educated and uneducated, the “holy” and not so holy believe him. Who weeps for men, women and children killed in Iraq? Who weeps for all the American lives lost in Iraq? Who weeps as the rights of the needy are taken away? Who weeps as selected segments of society are made scapegoats and denied constitutional freedoms and civil liberties? While the people sleep, critics weep!

Critics continued to weep at the implications when, following the September 11 attack, Bush’s message remained consistent – the United States is good. Those who pose a threat, current or future, are evil and must be destroyed.⁴⁸ In his January 29, 2002, State of the Union Address the President went so far as to single out nations that pose a threat: i.e., Iraq Syria, Iran and North Korea as the “axis of evil.” In May 2002 then Under Secretary of State John Bolton delivered an address to the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think-tank, entitled *Beyond the Axis of Evil*. In it he added Cuba, Libya and Syria to the axis of evil, compromising relations with these countries as well. Bolton remains a close ally to Bush and in April 2005 was nominated to serve as U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations. The seven countries named in the Pentagon’s Nuclear Posture Review in the March 10, 2002 Los Angeles Times were the so called “axis of evil” included Iran, Iraq, North Korea, Syria, Libya, Russia and China. Bush’s announcement to wage war against any country suspected of harboring terrorists or deemed a threat to the United States further alienated and isolated the U.S.. To believe that your own nation is “the greatest force for good in history,” as President George W. Bush proclaimed from his Texas ranch in August 2002 and that those who oppose us are “evil” is indeed a dangerous religion for the world. Yet this is exactly the course the White House has chosen.⁴⁹

What specifically is the appeal of Christian Fundamentalism to the conservative element of the Republican Party? For one thing, it provides a political and unifying framework for the preponderance of conspiracy theories that developed after September 11th. R. J. Rushdoony, whose writings are the source of many of the core ideas of the Christian Right said, “The view of

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ David Frum and Richard Perle, *An End to Evil: How to Win the War on Terrorism*, (New York: Random House) 2003. David Frum is a former speech writer for George W. Bush and is credited with coining the phrase “axis of evil.”

⁴⁹ Jim Wallis, *God’s Politics*, San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 2005, p. 188

history as conspiracy . . . is a basic aspect of the perspective of orthodox Christianity. A conspiratorial view of history is a consistent ingredient of Christian Right ideology in the United States.”⁵⁰

In examining Bush’s second Inaugural Address, Domke credits R. Scott Appleby with the perception that Bush has devised “a theological version of Manifest Destiny.”⁵¹ Dan Smith, a military affairs analyst for *Foreign Policy in Focus*, states, “What comes through in the 2005 inaugural is a sense that a second four-year Bush term will try to wield the same ‘flawed missionary’ ideology of the first term.”⁵² Critics seem to agree that the President was speaking in code to the politically active religious right across America and around the world. Yurica summarizes by saying, “Mr. Bush was making perfect sense to the religious adherents of Dominionism (the belief that Christians must take control and dominate and rule in all civil and governmental affairs in America and in every nation of the world).”⁵³ Yurica further contends that Bush, as evidenced in his second Inaugural Address, speaks in religious code. He, “repeatedly wraps himself in the cloak of biblical expressions that are very well known to evangelical Christians in general and to Dominionists specifically.”⁵⁴ This technique appears to generally fly over the heads of the masses, but certainly not his religious base. Thus, while the people sleep, critics weep!

So significant and consistent is this view of “conspiracy,” real or contrived, among followers of Christian Fundamentalism and the conservative element of the Republican Party that they have sought to seek control and seize power in all three branches of government with the goal of converting their “beliefs” into law. Their arguments, though not particularly sound, seem to persuade the uninformed. What is so disturbing is that the result, if achieved, could be felt far from the American shores. “Bush promised us a foreign policy of humility and a domestic policy of compassion,” Joe Klein wrote in *Time Magazine*. “He has given us a foreign policy of arrogance and a domestic policy that is cynical, myopic and cruel. What happened?”⁵⁵

What are the dangers when Dominionists have power and influence? Perhaps the first place to look is the United States Supreme Court. Bush has

⁵⁰ Frederick Clarkson, “Theocratic Dominionism Gains Influence,” *The Public Eye Magazine*, Vol. VIII, No. 1 & 2, March/June 1994, p. 3.

⁵¹ Katherine Yurica, “What Did Mr. Bush’s 2nd Inaugural Address Really Mean?” February, 21, 2005, p. 2.

⁵² Daniel Smith, “The 2005 Inaugural Speech: Play it Again George,” *Foreign Policy in Focus*, January 2005.

⁵³ Op. Cit., Yurica, “What Did Mr. Bush’s Inaugural Really Mean?”, p.2.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Joe Klein, “Blessed are the Poor – They Don’t Get Tax Cuts,” *Time Magazine*, June 2, 2003.

voiced on several occasions in speeches and to the media that he is looking for judges who fit the profile of Antonin Scalia, a known extreme conservative. What is Bush saying in this pronouncement? An examination of Scalia's opinions regarding the death penalty, when he addressed the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, may shed some light. Scalia began his remarks by reiterating his view that the Constitution is not a living document but "dead." This means that he interprets the Constitution according to "what it meant when it was adopted" unless Congress has legislated otherwise.⁵⁶ Scalia asserts that capital punishment is clearly permitted today since it was permitted in 1791 when the Eighth Amendment was adopted and not, merely for murder for all felonies including, for example, 'horse thieving.'⁵⁷ Interpreting the law so literally according to eighteenth century parameters implies that Scalia would disregard much law enacted since that time.

Another flagrant example is the United States Supreme Court's issuing of a ruling allowing government funding of religious schools under certain conditions. Tax money must first be given to a parent who then uses it to pay for tuition. This decision is alarming in that it ignores what has been a central principle of American life for more than 200 years, the idea that no one will be forced to pay a church tax or anything like it.⁵⁸ The ruling of the Court is tantamount to forcing people to pay taxes to support religious schools that teach doctrines many do not support and which are offensive:

Catholics are supporting Protestant fundamentalist schools that may teach Catholics are going to Hell. Gay people are supporting schools that condemn homosexuality. Women who advocate equality between the sexes are supporting schools that maintain that women should in all cases be subordinate to men.⁵⁹

Infiltration of the judiciary is but one example of Bush's efforts to implement policies initiated by Dominionists. Bush advocates giving religious organizations billions in taxpayer dollars with the intent of solving a myriad of social issues that have plagued our nation for many years. His over simplifying of these problems has been couched in his "when in doubt go to church" philosophy. Under the Bush plan,

⁵⁶ Patricia J. Williams, "Infallible Justice" from *Diary of a Mad Law Professor*, The Nation, October 7, 2002.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ "In the Shadow of Thomas Jefferson," The Free Inquiry Forum, National News Letter, Sarasota, Fl.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

...alcoholics and drug addicts can end their dependency through religious conversion. Local churches can help the unemployed find jobs. Teenagers learn to forgo sexual activity through church-run programs that teach nothing about contraceptives but stress that God wants you to remain pure. Poor people will be partnered with local churches that will help them get back on their feet. Prison inmates will be rehabilitated once they find God. Under Bush's grand scheme, all this religious activity will be paid for with tax funds.⁶⁰

As part of George Bush's belief that he was called by God to run for office, he has launched a faith-based initiative. The politicization of this initiative has resulted in the bulk of support going to the most conservative evangelical groups that politically support the administration rather than to the most effective faith-based initiatives regardless of political affiliation.⁶¹ Although he initially remarked that it didn't matter "if there is a rabbi on the board, or a cross on the wall or a crescent on the wall," evidence suggests that every penny of those religious funds has gone to Christian organizations.⁶²

To Bush's primary constituency, Christian Fundamentalism is the only true faith. He has attempted to block potentially lifesaving research and endorsed religious discrimination. His attorney general repeatedly has intervened to tear down the separation of church and state.⁶³

The administration's "faith-based initiative" deviates markedly from what has traditionally been perceived as the role of government. Who decides who is to be helped and under what conditions? Just as the founding fathers feared, when one religion is deemed the only one, all who fall outside this set of beliefs are discriminated against. What additional taxes are to be imposed to cover this initiative? Again, whether or not Americans embrace Christian Fundamentalist beliefs, they will be forced to pay additional taxes. The move to implement the faith-based initiative is well under way and most Americans are either unaware or indifferent. While the people sleep, critics weep!

Robert Boston, in his book, *Why the Religious Right is Wrong About Separation of Church and State*, proposes that Christian Fundamentalists have launched a "war of ideas" in America. He begs the question "Is there a legitimate separation of church and state, and what does that mean?"⁶⁴ Boston suggests,

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Jim Wallis, *Immorality of the Bush Budget*, Posted on the Net March 9, 2005.

⁶² Esther Kaplan, *With God on Their Side*, New York: The New Press, 2004, p. 276.

⁶³ Ibid.

The radical religious right has declared war on America. It is a war of ideas; a war of conscience. It is a religious war. This war strikes at the very heart of the Constitution and threatens the freedoms we hold most dear. Freedom to worship as we please and to believe what we want to believe. The freedom to determine for ourselves what religious and moral views our own children are exposed to. The freedom to conduct our lives as we see fit without having our privacy violated. For some time now, the radical religious right has claimed that there is no such thing as church/state separation in our Constitution.⁶⁵

If we read the section on obedience and authority in Romans 13: 1-2 [Let every soul be subject unto higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resists the power, resists the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.] in the context of Machiavelli's discourses on religion and its use by a political leader, the dangers that Dominionism presents to the intent of the Constitution and Declaration of Independence are evident. Followers of Dominionism have interpreted the meaning to be that any lawful government is ordained by God to execute retribution and punishment upon those who challenge or resist unjust policies of a government. Interpreting in this context could have frightening implications indeed. Or, as Yurica proposes,

It can be read to mean that once a new government of the United States has been established under biblical law—then no citizen will have the right to resist it or rebel against its edicts. In other words, the Declaration of Independence will no longer be applicable to the regency established by the Dominionists.⁶⁶

What is disturbing is not that President Bush incorporated biblical passages in his inaugural address as many presidents have done, but the fact that much of his phrasing was notably similar to those cited in a religious-right Dominionist textbook [*America's Providential History*] for home schooled children.⁶⁷ Yurica goes so far as to suggest, "The ideas borrowed are explosive and revolutionary. I would call them bizarre – if they did not represent such a

⁶⁴ Robert Boston, *Why the Religious Right is Wrong About Separation of Church and State*, Buffalo, New York, Prometheus Books, 1993.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Op. Cit.*, Yurica, *The Despoiling of America* p. 25.

⁶⁷ *Op. Cit.*, Yurica, *What Did Mr. Bush's 2nd Inaugural Address Really Mean?* p. 3.

real threat to all Americans and the world.”⁶⁸ Most disturbing is that this text not only advocates the reformation of the U.S. government, it requires changing America into a one party theocracy—with only Dominionist Christians in position of political power, notwithstanding the Constitution, which states, “but no religious test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States.”⁶⁹

The Bush administration’s fundamentalist domestic and world views seem to preclude its ability to seek assistance or be open to criticism. As Domke suggests ...

...better to die on the hill of uncertainty, without considering alternatives, than to countenance a more complex understanding of faith, politics or human relations. Indeed, whether an administration rooted in religious fundamentalism can engage in reasoned, open and public deliberation is doubtful... Such an outlook starts at the top in the Bush administration, which is headed by a president whose communications show a resistance to nuance, a certainty of the rightness of his perspectives, a belief that the administration is on a divine mission, and an expectation that his decisions should not be publicly challenged or crossed. This is a perilous combination⁷⁰

Perhaps the greatest irony and also cause for concern is that Bush’s political fundamentalism looks, sounds and feels remarkably similar to that of the terrorists it is fighting.⁷¹

- Both see the world through a binary lens of good versus evil.
- Both are obsessed with time in two ways: one’s temporal actions are thought to be directly related to one’s relationship with a supreme being; sustenance is derived from the belief that the belief that providence is on their side in this struggle.
- Both worldviews demand unflinching support and exact a sizeable cost from those who dissent....

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 4.

⁷⁰ Op. Cit., Domke, p. 180

⁷¹ Ibid. p. 179.

- Fundamentalism in the White House is a difference in degree, not kind, from fundamentalism exercised in dark, damp caves.⁷²

Admittedly, the line in most countries between religious and secular government interests is very difficult to determine. However, in the United States, the religious clauses of the 1st Amendment dictate a simple but profound injunction: Religion shall have power to persuade: government shall lack the power to compel. The separation of church and state does not require banishing moral and religious values from the public.⁷³ The real question is not “whether” religion and faith should influence a society and its politics but “how?”

Perhaps Jim Wallis, a Washington D. C. based activist, editor of *Sojourners* and evangelical Christian minister, sums it up best.

Those on the religious right are declaring a religious war to give their version of faith religious supremacy in America. And some members of the Republican Party seem ready almost to declare a Christian theocracy in America. It is time to take back both our faith and our Constitution.... A great deal is at stake in this battle for the heart and soul of faith in America and for the nation’s future itself. We will not allow faith to be put into the service of one political agenda. This is a call for the rest of the churches to wake up. This is a call for clear speech and courageous action.⁷⁴

In politics, the best interest of the country is served when the prophetic voice of religion is heard challenging all humanity to be more forthright and serious about their religious beliefs. Real religious values—Buddhist, Christian, Muslim or otherwise—always involve peacefulness, generosity, and a willingness to respect views other than one’s own.⁷⁵ When the masses awaken and begin to define the “religion” all humanity most needs as one that is broad-minded rather than narrow, peaceful rather than warlike, open rather than closed,⁷⁶ the critics will no longer have cause to weep!

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Op. Cit., Wallis, p. 59.

⁷⁴ Jim Wallis, *An Attempt to Hijack Christianity*,” Talk given at Central Presbyterian Church, Louisville, Kentucky, April 2005.

⁷⁵ Norman Fischer, *The Religion of Politics*, *The Politics of Religion*, *The Sun*, May 2005, p. 17.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

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