



ROBERT ANDREW PARKER

THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN TEXAS

THINGS ARE WORSE THAN YOU THINK

BY JOE BAGEANT

It helps to understand that everything is literal in the fundamentalist voter universe.

Personally, I've lived with the Rapture as the psychologically imprinted backdrop of my entire life. In fact, my own father believed in it until the day he died, and the last time I saw him alive we talked about the Rapture. When he asked me, "Will you be saved? Will you be there with me on Canaan's shore after the Rapture?" I was forced to feign belief to give a dying man inner solace. But that is the spiritual stuff of families and living and dying, religion in its rightful place, the way it is supposed to be, personal and intimate — not political. Until recently, I had never heard the Rapture spoken about in the context of a Texan being selected by God to prepare its way.

Now, however, this apocalyptic belief, yearning really, drives an American Christian polity in the service of a grave and unnerving agenda. The pseudo-scriptural has become an apocalyptic game plan for earthly political action: To wit, the Messiah can only return to Earth after an apocalypse in Israel called Armageddon, which the fundamentalists are promoting with all their power so that the Rapture can take place. The first requirement was the establishment of the state of Israel. Done. The next is Israel's occupation of the Middle East as a return of its "Biblical lands," which, in the reconstructionist scheme of things, means more wars. These Christian conservatives do not believe that peace can lead to the Rapture; indeed, they think it impedes the 1000-year Reign of Christ. So anyone promoting peace is an enemy, a tool of Satan, hence the fundamentalist support of any and all wars Middle Eastern, in which their own children die in what is often viewed by Christian parents as a holy martyrdom of its own kind. "He (or she) died protecting this country's Christian values." One hears it over and over from parents of those killed.

If we are lucky as a nation, this period in American history will be remembered as just another very dark time we managed to get through. Otherwise, one shudders to think of the logical outcome. Tens of millions of hardworking, earnest American Christians see it as a war against all that is un-Biblical, the goal of which is complete world conquest or, put in Christian terminology, *dominion*. They will have no less than the "inevitable victory God has promised his new chosen people." Screw the Jews, they blew their chance. If perpetual war is what it will take, then let it be perpetual. After all, perpetual war is exactly what the Bible promised.

Like it or not, this is the reality (or prevailing unreality) with which we are faced. The 2004 election, whatever its outcome might have been, would not have changed that. Nor will it necessarily bring ever-tolerant liberals to openly acknowledge what is truly happening in this country, the thing that has been building for a long, long time — a holy war, a covert Christian *jihad* for control of America and the entire world. Millions of Americans are under the spell of an extraordinarily dangerous mass psychosis.

Pardon me, but religious tolerance be damned. Somebody had to say it.

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Not long ago I pulled my car up alongside a tiny wooden church in the woods, a stark, white frame box my family built in 1840. From the wide-open front door, the Pentecostal preacher's message echoed from within the plain wooden walls:

"Thank you, Gawd, for giving us strawng leaders like President Bush during this creeeesis. Praise you, Lord, and guide him in this battle with Satan's Muslim armies."

If I had chosen to go back down the road a mile or so to the sprawling new Bible Baptist church — complete with school facilities, professional sound system and in-house television production — I could have heard approximately the same exhortation. Usually offered at the end of a prayer for sons and daughters of members in the congregation who are serving in Iraq, it can be heard in any of the thousands upon thousands of praise temples across our republic.

After a lifetime of identity conflict, I have come to accept that, blood-wise, if not politically or spiritually, these are my people. And, as a leftist, it is very clear to me these days why urban liberals not only fail to understand these people but do not even know they exist other than as some general lump of ignorant, intolerant voters called "the religious Right" or the "Christian Right" or "neo-con Christians." But until progressives come to understand what these people read, hear, are told, and deeply believe, we cannot understand American politics, much less be effective. Given fundamentalist Christianity's inherent cultural isolation, it is nearly impossible for most enlightened Americans to imagine, in honest human terms, what fundamentalist Americans believe, let alone understand why we should all care.

For liberals, to examine the current fundamentalist phenomenon in America is to accept some hard truths. For starters, we liberals are even more embattled than most of us choose to believe. Any significant liberal and progressive support is limited to a few urban pockets on each coast and along the upper edge of the Midwestern tier states. Most of the rest of the nation, the much-vaunted heartland, is the dominion of the conservative and charismatic Christian. Turf-wise, it's pretty much their country, which is to say it presently belongs to George W. Bush for some valid reasons.

Remember: He did not have to steal the entire election in 2000, just a little piece of it in Florida. Evangelical born-again Christians of one stripe or another were then, and are now, 40% of the electorate, and they supported Bush 3-to-1 in 2004. And as long as their clergy and their worst instincts tell them to, they will keep on voting for him, or someone like him, regardless of what we liberals and progressives view as his arrogant folly and sub-intelligence.

Forget about changing their minds. These Christians do not read the same books liberals do, they do not get their information from anything remotely resembling reasonably balanced sources and, in fact, consider even CBS and NBC super-liberal networks of porn and the devil's lies: Given how fundamentalists see the modern world, they may as well be living in Iraq or Syria, with which they share the same Bronze Age religious tenets. They believe in God, Rumsfeld's holy war, and their absolute duty as God's chosen to kick Muslim ass up one side and down the other. In other words, just because millions of Christians appear to be dangerously nuts does not mean they are marginal.

Having been born into a Southern Pentecostal/Baptist family of many generations and living in this fundamentalist social landscape means that I gaze into the maw of neo-con Christianity daily. Hell, sometimes hourly. My brother is a fundamentalist preacher, as are a couple of my nephews, as were many of my ancestors going back to God-knows-where. My entire family is born-again; their lives are completely focused inside their own religious community and on the time when Jesus returns to Earth — Armageddon and the Rapture.

Only another liberal born into a fundamentalist clan can understand what a strange, sometimes downright hellish family circumstance it is — how such a family can love you deeply yet despise everything you believe in. see you as a humanist instrument of Satan and still be right there for you when your back goes out or a divorce shatters your life.

Between such times, I wait rather anxiously and strive for change, for relief, beauty, art, and self-realization in America. They wait in spooky calmness for Jesus. They believe that until Jesus does arrive, our "satanic humanist state and federal legal systems" should be replaced with pure "Biblical law."

As much as liberals screech in protest, few understand the depth and breadth of the rightist Christian takeover that is underway. They catch the scent but never behold the beast itself. The other day I heard a liberal Washington-based political pundit on National Public Radio say the radical Christian Right's local and regional political action peak was a past fixture of the Reagan era. I laughed out loud (it was a bitter laugh) and wondered if that pundit had ever driven twenty miles eastward on U.S. Route 50 or into the suburbs of Maryland, Virginia, or West Virginia. The fellow on NPR was a perfect example of the need for liberal pundits to get their heads out of the sand, get outside the city, quit cruising the Internet, and meet some Americans who do not mirror their own humanist educations and backgrounds. If they did, they would grasp the importance the Rapture has taken on in American national and international politics.

Despite media's shallow interpretation of the Rapture's significance, it is a hell of a lot more than just a couple hundred million *Left Behind* books sold. The most significant thing about the *Left Behind* books is that, although they are classified as "fiction," most fundamentalist readers I know accept the series as an absolute reality soon coming to a godless planet near you.

HIDDEN PASSAGES

BY MATTHEW ROTHSCHILD

Bush's inaugural address contained several explicit references to God, but there were even more masked references to the Bible that may have been lost on many of his audience, as they were on me. Then I did some research, with help from Dan Barker of the Freedom From Religion Foundation and the Internet website BibleGateway.com, and I discovered a subtext of his speech.

Here are a few of the hidden passages.

When Bush thanked the American people for granting him patience in "good measure," he was echoing Luke 6:38, "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure..."

When Bush talked of the "ideals of justice and conduct that are the same yesterday, today, and forever," he was echoing Hebrews 13:8, which says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever."

When Bush talked about the "untamed fire of freedom" in a passage that included the phrase "hope kindles hope," he was echoing passages from Jeremiah. For instance, Jeremiah 17:27 says, "I will kindle an unquenchable fire in the gates of Jerusalem." And Jeremiah 50:32 says: "I will kindle a fire in her towns that will consume all who are around her."

There are many other passages in the Bible that have a raging fire in them. For instance, Isaiah 33:14: "The sinners of Zion are terrified; trembling grips the godless: 'Who of us can dwell with everlasting burning?'"

When Bush talked about the day when "the captives are set free," he was echoing a common Christian phrase that "Jesus set the captives free." And specifically he was alluding to Isaiah 61:1 and Luke 4:18, which talk about Jesus liberating "captives."

When Bush said, "History also has a visible direction, set by liberty and the Author of Liberty," he was being none too

subtle. But he was also cribbing from Acts 3:15 ("You killed the author of life") and Hebrews 12:2 ("Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith").

Toward the end, when Bush said, "Freedom is the permanent hope of mankind, the hunger in dark places, the longing of the soul," he was echoing Psalm 107: "For He satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness. Such as sit in darkness..."

In these passages, Bush may have been intent on sending a coded thank you note to his evangelical base. But Bush is also a true believer.

As Bill Moyers noted in a recent powerful speech, "The delusional is no longer marginal. It has come in from the fringe, to sit at the seat of power on the Oval Office and in Congress. For the first time in our history, ideology and theology hold a monopoly of power in Washington."

If you follow Bush's metaphors and allusions to their logical ends, you realize that Bush was cloaking our secular values of freedom and liberty and justice in distinctly Christian garb.

"The Author of Liberty" is "the Author... of our faith," and that author is Jesus. The "ideals of justice and conduct" equate with Jesus, since both are "the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow."

Both freedom and Jesus satisfy the hunger and the longing of the soul. For Bush, they are one and the same. In his America, there is no distinction between our public, secular values and his private, religious faith.

For those who don't share his faith — and for those who do but also appreciate the need to separate church from state — America is becoming an increasingly inhospitable place.

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