

## CHAPTER 8

# The Religious Wrong

### *Creating the Neo-Jesus—Pro-Rich and Pro-War*

*When Fascism comes to America, it will be wrapped in the flag and carrying a cross.*

—Sinclair Lewis (1885-1951)

### **One World Government and Other Bush League Fantasies**

The central purpose of the Bush League of Nations was to provide Bush and the GOP neocons with a veneer of political cover both in the short term—in their unilateral decision to invade and occupy Iraq—and also in the longer term—in whatever additional military campaigns they raged in pursuit of their broader imperial goal of expanding American supremacy in the world. In the eyes of the world, the neocons desired a modern American version of the Roman Empire, but much bigger geographically, and much more intrusive, exploitive and dictatorial. A vast majority of rightwing Christians fell for the coalition charade hook, line and sinker.

The Bush League of Nations is a subterfuge intended to make rightwing Christians and other gullible American voters believe that most of the world was with us in a willing coalition of nations to share the mission and the load in Iraq. But as the war dragged on, increasing numbers of Christians slowly awakened to the reality of the Big Lie.

The subterfuge was a necessary inconvenience for the Bush warmongers only because America still conducts elections, more or less. The vast majority of the rest of the world saw the Bush League for what it was and still is, and they yearned for America to come to its senses, restore integrity to the White House and Congress, and return to its traditional values.

In the run-up to the Iraq war, Bush took the worst proposed foreign policy that was slithering around the GOP dumpster—The Project for the New American Century—and then foolishly decorated it with “Jesus Kills” cloth while donning his new crusader cap. The world after 9/11 wanted to be led by America, but Bush gave them his Bush League brand of American imperialism cloaked in America’s new national religion.

The Taliban wing of the Republican Party had entered the White House. A virulent strain of Christianity had become the religion of empire. America had lost its marbles.

Incredibly, millions of rightwing American Christians supported Bush because they believed God communicates with him, supports him, and directs his decisions and policies. Bush and his handlers encouraged such misguided beliefs. While campaigning in Pennsylvania in July 2004 Bush said, “I trust God speaks through me. Without that, I couldn’t do my job.” This amazes America’s allies and repulses the Islamic world. It also costs the lives of thousands of American soldiers in Iraq and elsewhere.

#### **SIDEBAR: A 9/11 in Iraq Every 11 Hours**

As for the number of Iraqis who died because of Bush’s illegal unjust war on Iraq, neither the Bush regime nor the Iraqi regime is really counting. Neither is America’s Christian right. In Chapter 4 we discussed the comprehensive independent *Lancet* survey that estimated, through July 2006, that 655,000 Iraqis had died as a consequence of the Iraq war. The estimate range was 943,000 at the high end and 393,000 at the low end. The middle figure of 655,000 Iraqi dead is more than 200 times the number of U.S. soldiers killed in Iraq, and equal to about 218 9/11s during the 40-month period of the study.

Taking into account that America’s population is about 12 times that of Iraq, we conclude that Iraq on a per capita basis has been experiencing the equivalent of one 9/11 every *11 hours*—around the clock, 24 hours a day.

As indicated in Chapter 4, Iraq has suffered, on average on a per capita basis, the equivalent of 5,952 Virginia Tech massacres per month, or one Virginia Tech massacre every *7 minutes and 30 seconds*—around the clock, 24 hours a day.

Whatever estimate of Iraq’s dead you choose—even the lowball estimates begudgingly offered by the Bush regime—the suffering in Iraq is staggering and incomprehensible to Americans.

Every church in America should be angered and outraged by the horror that was unleashed in Iraq in America’s name and in Christ’s name.

As for those Christians who supported Bush’s war so proudly and eagerly, one would hope to see some tears some day. Even a few crocodile tears would be a start.

Whether or not Bush has a hotline to God, the Bush League charade appeals to many conservative Christians caught up in various rightwing prophecies of the end of the world—the “End Times”—including the Second Coming of Christ, the rapture and the Battle of Armageddon, which religious speculation we will discuss in the next chapter. The Bush League foray into the heart of the Islamic world also gives comfort to rightwing Christian evangelicals and fundamentalists who believe America should lead a militant Christian Crusade against the dark evil forces of the world, primarily Islam.

At the same time, many conservative Americans have no use for *any* international coalition, whether Bush League or not, and want America to unilaterally set and pursue its own global agenda as it sees fit, free of any international taint, espe-

cially that of the United Nations. This is appealing to many Americans on the extreme right who believe various *conspiracy* theories such as *one world government* and *new world order*.

According to most variations of these theories, a powerful group of individuals is intent on obtaining complete control over every person on Earth, an Earth that would no longer have national or political boundaries. Fearing an ongoing assault upon the sovereignty and freedom of America, these conspiracy believers vociferously oppose the United Nations and other international organizations.

If you are not very familiar with these conspiracy theories, you should Google terms such as “Black Nobility,” “Committee of 300,” and “illuminati,” in addition to “one world government” and “new world order.” You will be shocked by the creative lunacy you find, especially its biblical flavor.

Ironically, America itself has far more power and influence in the world than all of these real or imagined conspiracy organizations put together, and thus America, especially under Bush and his neocons, is, or rather was, the closest thing on Earth to the “feared” one world government or new world order.

Any rightwing American who is truly fearful of such *one world government* or *new world order* should empathize and role play for a moment—by stepping into the shoes of non-Americans who might be similarly concerned about concentrated power, and considering how these foreigners might reasonably view imperial America in these early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which the neocons themselves call “The New American Century.” Foreigners—say, for example, Brazilians, Iranians, or Canadians—have much more reason to be fearful of such a new world order than Americans. Indeed, Bush’s War Party created such fear abroad where none previously existed, and where it did already exist it dumped gasoline on the flames.

Before the Bush regime assumed power, the disease of such paranoia had been largely confined to rightwing America, where it has been nurtured by many fundamentalist biblical interpretations that are both recent and peculiar to America. Oddly, many of the supporters of this new, made-in-America Christianity—one might say “evolving” Christianity—are anti-science folk who don’t believe in evolution.

### **The Religious Wrong and the Separation of Church and State**

The de facto religion of the Bush League of Nations is rightwing political Christianity, as exploited by the rightwing political cabal known as the Religious Right,<sup>55</sup> a term that is Orwellian doublespeak, since the vast majority of the Religious Right’s political agenda is an insult to Christ’s message of peace on Earth and compassion for the poor. So when you hear the term “Religious Right,” you should mentally translate it into something more accurate, such as the “Religious Reich,” the “Religious Wrong” or the “Unchristian Right.” Another accurate label for the Religious Right is “Extreme Religious Right,” or “ERR,” as in “to ERR is human, and definitely not divine.”

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<sup>55</sup> The terms Religious Right and Christian Right are often used interchangeably.

**SIDEBAR: To ERR is Human, and Definitely Not Divine**

The core agenda of the Religious Right is political, and not particularly religious, unless you count as religious the idolatrous worship of wealth, the wealthy, power, the powerful, war and weapons of mass destruction. In the case of any conflict between Christ's message and rightwing politics, the latter *always* prevails. Rightwing politics trump the Bible. War is good. Follow the money. Cronyism and corruption crush Christ.

The "religious" tag used by the Religious Right serves the purpose of maintaining the knee-jerk support of religious voters for rightwing policies no matter how extreme, including especially the secular schemes of the Super Rich and powerful. The so-called Religious Right has moved so far to the right that it should be called the Extreme Religious Right, or "ERR," as in: "to support the GOP is to ERR."

The noun in the term "Religious Right" is "Right"—specifically an extreme rightwing political constituency—and the word "Religious" is merely an adjective that puts gloss on it. The ratio is at least 95%-to-5% in favor of extreme rightwing politics, with the 5% "religious" part consisting of divisive social issues cherry picked from the Bible, or simply picked out of thin air, so as to achieve extreme rightwing political goals, which are primarily economic.

The Religious Right began to gel in the late 1960s and early 1970s, partly as a response to liberal, progressive Christians—Jesus would say "true Christians," I believe—who pushed for civil rights and opposed America's war in Vietnam. Political action groups on the right such as the Moral Majority—led by Rev. Jerry Falwell during its lifespan, 1979-87—became powerbrokers and money magnets. Recognizing the potential in grafting religion onto rightwing politics, many political and religious leaders who previously had believed in the constitutional separation of church and state did a flip-flop, and rightwing politics became their main passion. They made a Faustian pact with the Devil, and America has been paying the Devil's price ever since.

The exclusionary Religious Right is dominated by white males, and, with the exception of its opposition to abortion rights and same-sex marriage, its agenda is that of the Super Rich and Big Business, for whom Christ has become a lobbyist. Because the Religious Right is deeply rooted in rightwing political goals and not particularly religious values, it has no difficulty turning Christianity on its head whenever Christ's message is inconsistent with rightwing political objectives, which is most of the time. This is why so many policies of the Religious Right bear no resemblance to Christ or Christ's ministry.

The Extreme Religious Right is an extreme political faction that effectively controls the Republican Party. It backs its man Bush in whatever madness he may engage in—such as the invasion of Iraq and the Bush League of Nations charade—and helps convince Christians that Bush can do no wrong because God is acting through him. Bishop Bush, in return, recklessly and relentlessly pursues the ERR's corporate agenda: "of the Super Rich, by the Super Rich, and for the Super Rich."

Until a few decades ago all Christian denominations in America, including all Baptist branches, strongly believed, as a matter of theology and common sense, in the separation of church and state, which separation is intended to ensure freedom of religion and freedom from religion. In short, virtually all Christians supported the U.S. Constitution. However in the late 1970s an unfortunate blending of Christian fundamentalism and the Republican Party began, leading to the erosion of the separation of church and state, and to the rewriting and shredding of the Constitution.

Ultraconservative Senator Barry Goldwater (R-AZ), the GOP candidate for president in 1964, presciently saw the dangerous religious writing on the wall by the early 1980s (long before your author did), and he condemned uncompromising pulpit politicians for using religion as a weapon to force government leaders to follow their God-determined positions 100%, and threatening to withhold votes and money.

I'm frankly sick and tired of the political preachers across this country telling me as a citizen that if I want to be a moral person, I must believe in A, B, C and D. Just who do they think they are? And from where do they presume to claim the right to dictate their moral beliefs to me? And I am even more angry as a legislator who must endure the threats of every religious group who thinks it has some God-granted right to control my vote on every roll call in the Senate. I am warning them today: I will fight them every step of the way if they try to dictate their moral convictions to all Americans in the name of conservatism.

—Goldwater's speech to the U.S. Senate on September 16, 1981

Bush has taken the Religious Right's misguided un-American efforts to new extremes, with little regard for the Constitution or their negative impact on all religions, including his own. Oddly, he shows no glimmer of curiosity as to why our founding fathers wisely separated church from state. Perhaps the most curious thing about Bush is his lack of curiosity.

Religious fundamentalism by itself is generally not bad, when kept securely in the private realm and outside government. But fundamentalism transformed into theocracy is dangerous and frequently deadly. Americans who believe religious fundamentalists should run their government would be at home in Saudi Arabia or Iran or Bush's Iraq, although they wouldn't care for the particular flavor of toxic religious Kool-Aid being served.

#### **SIDEBAR: Thomas Jefferson and the Separation of Church and State**

*"I am for freedom of religion and against all maneuvers to bring about a legal ascendancy of one sect over another."*

—**Thomas Jefferson**

*“I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibit the free exercise thereof, thus building a wall of separation between church and state.”*

—**Thomas Jefferson**

Oblivious to the irony, Bush works to meld religion and state in America, while he prays that the two will be separated in Iraq. But separating religion and state in a predominantly Islamic nation is much more difficult than in the predominantly Christian nation of America, a nation that from its founding in the 18<sup>th</sup> century recognized the wisdom of such separation. Bush and the GOP are thus on a fool’s errand—the Devil’s errand—in *both* Iraq and the United States.

In sharp contrast to the Bible, the Koran strongly interweaves Islam and the state, and this structure is reflected by centuries of tradition in the Islamic world. On the other hand, Jesus is frequently given credit for inventing the separation of church and state, when he said, “Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s.” Matthew 22:21, Mark 12:17.

The unholy marriage of Christian fundamentalism and rightwing economic politics, together with their joint assault on religious freedom and the separation of church and state, are peculiar to America. We should praise God that no other predominantly Christian nation suffers from this disease of the mind and the heart.

Unfortunately, there are several extreme rightwing Islamic nations, including Iran and Prince George’s princely Saudi Arabia, where Islam is coupled to a rightwing, exclusionary, elitist, dictatorial regime run by and for men. They are Islamic analogues to Bush’s vision of a Religious Right America. Just imagine the repressive toilet America would become if zealots like Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell and James Dobson made up 51% of America’s population.

Religion will simply not work in this small world unless the vast majority of believers of all faiths respect the religious freedom of others *at least as much* as they respect their own religion.

As for the future of America itself, the memorable words of Abraham Lincoln spoken on June 16, 1858, in Springfield, Illinois, echo to this day: “*A house divided against itself cannot stand.*” Just as an America divided on slavery could not stand, an America divided by religious fundamentalism cannot stand.

The neocons in effect are hoping and praying that the huge Islamic majority in Iraq—more than 95% of the population—and the large Shiite majority in particular—about 60% of the population—will behave much more liberally, democratically and justly in ruling Iraq than the Bush regime and his Confederate GOP have in ruling the United States. Iraq’s new rulers, without the benefit of democratic traditions, are expected, miraculously, to represent *all* Iraqis and to eschew Bush’s favorite tools: militarism, greed, corruption, bigotry, the misuse of religion, cronyism, politics by division, lying, and eye gouging. Now that would be a miracle.

Ironically, largely below the radar of the American public, Bush’s blunder in Iraq spawned countless tragedies for Iraqi Christians and other Christians in the Islamic

world. For example, approximately 40,000 Christians left Iraq in a period of less than 18 months following the American invasion in March 2003, according to an August 2004 report of the Migration Ministry of Iraq. The Bush League incompetence fueled religious fundamentalism and violence, which frequently targets Christians.

The funneling of taxpayer money to favored religious groups is one of Bush's most infamous attacks on the separation of church and state in America. Upon assuming office Bush pushed Congress to approve his so-called *faith-based initiatives*, intended to break down the constitutional barrier between church and state and use U.S. tax dollars to fund tax-exempt religious organizations that provide social and other services. Because of obvious First Amendment concerns, Congress correctly refused to pass the legislation Bush wanted, even though Republicans controlled *both* houses of Congress. More than a few Republicans saw the unconstitutional evil afoot. So Bush circumvented Congress and implemented his faith-based initiatives by executive order.

The result, notwithstanding the Constitution, is that federal funds flow to religious service providers from the newly created Compassion Capital Fund. This effort is directly and politically controlled by the White House Office, which steers faith-based *centers* in seven federal agencies (expanded to ten in May 2004), and the government bureaucrats now in charge are people who meet Bush's litmus test for appropriate religiosity. Of the first \$1 billion in tax dollars distributed from the Compassion Capital Fund, *virtually all* of it went to Christian groups. Jewish and Muslim groups received little or nothing.

Also troublesome is the fact that the selected religious service providers, even though they receive federal funds, can discriminate in ways that other organizations receiving federal funds cannot. For example, the taxpayer-funded religious service providers can refuse to hire people of other faiths. Jews and Muslims need not apply.

Also problematic for the Bush administration are the revelations of a former White House official—a deeply religious person who sincerely wanted to help the poor—that Bush's inner circle privately made fun of evangelical supporters who visited the White House, calling them “goofy,” “nuts” and worse, while embracing them in public in order to win elections. The revelations appear in the book, *Tempting Faith: An Inside Story of Political Seduction*, by David Kuo, the former Deputy Director of Bush's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. Kuo describes how rightwing evangelicals were taken for granted and co-opted by the Republican Party, losing their influence and respect along the way.

Bush bragged about, while underfunding, his faith-based initiatives at the same time he worked hard to cut funding for various social services. Here is a small sampling of his favorite cuts, most of which are from his 2005 budget proposal:

- massive cuts (largest ever) in loans for needy college students, together with increased interest rates
- cuts in funding for energy and natural resources programs intended to reduce America's dependence on foreign oil
- cuts in incentives for developers to build affordable housing for the working poor
- cuts in child care assistance for needy mothers who work

- caps on Section 8 rent subsidies for the poor, which are paid primarily to below-poverty-level families that include the elderly, the disabled, or children
- cuts in funding for mass transit, highways, bridges, and other essential elements of America's infrastructure
- cuts in community development
- cuts in funding for rural education intended to meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind law
- cuts in the FAA budget, which will compromise aviation safety

Let's remember the context in which Bush worked so hard to make these cuts and screw America's most needy and America's middle class. Let's remember for whom Bush works and that his priorities are the GOP's priorities. Bush proposed his first round of massive tax cuts for the Super Rich because there was a budget *surplus* (thanks to Clinton.) Bush proposed his second round of massive tax cuts for the Super Rich because there was a budget *deficit* (which Bush created.) Bush then wanted to make these and other massive tax cuts for the Super Rich permanent even though there persists a *massive deficit* (which he created.)

From a Christian perspective, all of Bush's and the GOP's budgets are immoral, as they victimize America's middle- and lower-income Americans by cutting programs to benefit them, while at the same time enriching the Super Rich through tax reductions, tax exemptions, reduced IRS enforcement, earmarks, government contracts, and public-trough crony capitalism.

Voting for Bush and the GOP is like dropping off your kids—again and again—at the home of a babysitter known to be a child molester.

During the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections, as well as during the 2002 and 2006 midterm elections, there were countless disturbing Republican Party campaign tactics that abused religion and the Constitution. Here are just a few examples from the run-up to the 2004 presidential election:

- Republican leaders supported amending the tax laws to increase the power of religious leaders to engage in partisan politics, notwithstanding constitutional limitations. These politically motivated amendments were intended to placate congressmen such as Representative Walter Jones, Jr. (R-NC), who for years had wanted a law allowing religious leaders to endorse political candidates from the pulpit.
- The Republican Party ran a campaign to enlist 1,600 so-called "friendly" congregations in Pennsylvania—as well as thousands of congregations in other battleground states—to register voters and distribute Republican Party campaign literature.
- The Bush/Cheney campaign later distributed a list of 22 *duties* for church volunteers, including forwarding the church's membership roster to GOP party headquarters so that church members could be solicited for campaign contributions and votes.
- The GOP pushed legislation in Congress that would expand the ability of houses of worship to preach politics from the pulpit and otherwise engage in partisan politics.

- Jerry Falwell endorsed the reelection of Bush in 2004 in a newsletter sent from Jerry Falwell Ministries, his tax-exempt foundation.<sup>56</sup> He also urged his readers to give up to \$5,000 to Campaign For Working Families, a political action committee headed by Gary Bauer. Tax exempt as a Section 501(c)(3) organization, Jerry Falwell Ministries is prohibited by federal law from endorsing political candidates or engaging in political lobbying.

The Religious Right has effectively turned many churches into Republican Party mouthpieces and partisan political headquarters. Your personal political beliefs are now a measure of your Christian faith.

Without adequate regard for the Constitution, Christian fundamentalists are working hard to project their particular religious beliefs into many areas that must remain secular:

- Faith-based education. Public education is under attack. An increasing number of rightwing Christians want private education, including religious education, to be paid for by taxpayers, at the expense of public education, which has been a bedrock valued institution in America for more than a century.
- Faith-based textbooks. Grass roots fundamentalist activists have lobbied hard to have evolution replaced by *creation science*—an oxymoron—in science textbooks used in America’s public schools. Unfortunately, textbook publishers frequently dummy down their textbooks to avoid religious controversy and to appeal to a large dummy subset of Republican voters. Fundamentalists strive to censor anything that conflicts with their religious views, at the expense of the constitutional rights and personal freedoms of everyone else.
- Anti-science policies. Any aspect of science that conflicts with the fundamentalists’ literal reading—or *creative* reading—of the Bible is subject to rejection and attack. Science is being mugged by rightwing religious bigotry, and an amazed world laughs at America. The Religious Right wants its *interpretation* and *rewriting* of the Bible—a form of *New Age* spiritualism—to control everything, everybody, everywhere. The extreme Young Earth Creationists (YEC), who believe the entire universe was divinely created only 6,000 to 8,000 years ago, want their unverifiable supernatural views to be taught in science classes in public schools. In doing so, YEC gives “YUK” a bad name. Muslims, even extreme rightwing Muslims, are more respectful of science than America’s rightwing Christianists.
- The Age of Endarkenment. America was built on the principles of the Age of Reason and the Age of Enlightenment, but the Bush regime has opened the door to the Age of Endarkenment.
- Junk science. The Bush administration suppresses and ignores facts and widely accepted scientific principles that displease favored large corporations and donors to the Republican Party. When it cannot successfully suppress the unwelcome truth, including in many cases extensive multiple stud-

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<sup>56</sup> Falwell wrote, “voting for principle this year means voting for the re-election of George W. Bush. The alternative, in my mind, is simply unthinkable.”

ies by the government itself, the Bush team readily accepts as gospel whatever junk science its corporate paymasters fabricate.

- Rewriting of science. Numerous rightwing political appointees without scientific credentials or training, such as Phillip Cooney whom we will discuss later, edit scientific reports to make them fit GOP ideology.
- Anti-conservation and anti-environment. Notwithstanding biblical mandates to respect and preserve God's World, large polluters and exploiters are loved and protected by Bush and his rightwing Christianists. Many on the extreme right oppose the environmental movement because it smacks of one world government.

Early in his presidency Bush went out of his way to publicly project his own religiosity and promote his own religion, giving a skeptical world good reason to distrust him. It should have been no surprise that so many predominantly Muslim nations refused to join his Bush League of Nations in Iraq.

### **The GOP and Upside Down Christianity**

In addition to eroding the separation of church and state, the marriage of the Republican Party to religious fundamentalism and the Religious Right has caused central truths of Christianity to be discarded along the way.

What are these discarded Christian truths? One is *Christ's compassion* for women, the poor, the sick, the diseased, the suffering, the scorned, the destitute, the forgotten, and the downtrodden. As for possibly helping these poor people of Christ, the policy of the Religious Right and the Bush Administration is that government must help rich people first in every way possible, and then perhaps some benefits will filter down to the poor. This approach contradicts not only the teachings and ministry of Jesus Christ, but also the teachings of the world's other great religions, including Islam whose faithful we should be trying to influence positively.

Christ's compassion is also missing from America's foreign policy, which is defined best by the "Of the Rich, By the Rich, and For the Rich" banner carried by America's Prince of War, George W. Bush. The world looks on in horror.

In Bush's America and in Bush's World, the Super Rich and large corporations grab as much as they can at the public trough—with the eager assistance of the Republican Party and an army of lobbyists that has doubled in size since the start of Bush's administration—and if anything filters down to the poor and hungry, it is not by design but only because the nets of the greedy missed a few crumbs.

**SIDEBAR: The Rich Ruler**

Luke 18: 18-25: “George W. Bush<sup>57</sup> asked him [Jesus], ‘Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ ... ‘You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.’ When W heard this, he became very sad, because he was a man of great wealth. Jesus looked at him and said, ‘How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.’”

Bush, born into a life of inherited wealth and class bigotry, has totally rejected the letter and spirit of this scripture, and his example makes it easy for other rich Christians to also turn their backs on Jesus’ teaching. Bush implemented multiple humongous tax cuts for the Super Rich, the largest tax cuts in history, with the lion’s share going to the top one percent, and he shafted poor people at every turn.

Another Christian truth discarded by the blending of the Religious Right and fundamentalism with the Republican Party is Christ’s role as the *Prince of Peace*. With his deeds, George Bush anointed himself the Prince of War and profited enormously at the polls.

Every tenet of the Beatitudes from Christ’s Sermon on the Mount has been turned on its head and rewritten. The new GOP rendition is now entitled, “Blessed are the Warmakers.”

In addition to the rejection of compassion for the less fortunate and Christ’s role as Prince of Peace, the merger of the Religious Wrong and the Republican Party also has subverted many traditional American values, including:

- Fiscal responsibility—GONE; SCREW THE UNBORN
- Balanced budgets—GONE
- A fair taxation system—GONE
- Separation of church and state—GOING, GOING ...
- Respect for other nations and cultures—SCREW YOU
- Respect for other religions—YOU ARE GOING TO HELL
- Cooperation with allies and institutions such as NATO and the United Nations—GONE
- War only if just—THE EMPIRE STRIKES FIRST
- Isolationism (formerly valued in some GOP quarters)—DITTO. SEE YOU AT ARMAGEDDON
- Respect for human life—THOU SHALL KILL
- If war, then shared sacrifice—WAR PROFITEERING; TAX CUTS FOR THE WEALTHY

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<sup>57</sup> Some manuscripts say, “A certain ruler.”

- Truthful leaders and integrity in government—GONE; THOU SHALL LIE AND STEAL
- Accountability in government—GONE
- Fair elections / one person, one vote—STOLEN ELECTIONS; ONE DOLLAR, ONE VOTE; “MONEY BUYS US.”
- A general sense of fair play—GONE
- Compassion for the less fortunate—BLESSED ARE THE RICH
- Respect for parents, the disabled, the elderly—“HEY, HEY, HO, HO, SOCIAL SECURITY’S GOT TO GO”<sup>58</sup>
- Respect for unborn generations of Americans—GONE. THEY DON’T VOTE.
- Respect for God’s Earth—GONE.
- Respect for God—SHOW ME THE MONEY

For many decades both major political parties by and large agreed with the above list of values, and their policy differences were usually debated in the middle in an honest manner. However, the Republican Party, kidnapped by neocons and theocons, abandoned *all* of these values, and massively corrupted the political process in Washington.

The above list of values reflects not only secular values but also spiritual and religious values. Almost all of these values are endorsed by the mainstreams of the world’s great religions. However, starting with Reagan in the early 1980s the GOP replaced these Christ-centered values with a “show-me-the-money” Culture of Corruption—a Culture of Cha-Ching.

When covering “religious matters,” America’s media docilely use the slogans of the Religious Right to narrowly frame the issues and mislead. For example, in a shameful display of self censorship, the media love the phrase “culture of life,” limiting it to abortion and stem cell research while ignoring a host of unchristian GOP policies with life-or-death consequences that make “culture of death” a more apt moniker for the GOP. Bush’s immoral war on Iraq alone has caused the deaths of thousands of American troops and hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, *not one* of whom had any responsibility for 9/11. This is the GOP’s work, not God’s work.

By cutting out so much Scripture—the heart and soul of Christ’s message—the Religious Right turned the Holy Bible into its *Holey* Bible. Its slimmed down, unchristian version is used to support extreme rightwing causes and doublespeak, such as: “War is Peace,” “Enriching the Rich is Compassionate,” and “Deficits Don’t Matter.”

The *Holey* Bible thumpers on the Religious Right even support the GOP urinating on the U.S. Constitution. In Bush-speak, it is: “The Constitution Don’t Matter.”

How did rightwing religion, including Christian fundamentalism, help transform and damage the Republican Party? At the core of religious fundamentalism is a bed-rock, black-and-white, religious belief that “I am right, and anyone who doesn’t share my religious beliefs is wrong.” In the fundamentalist’s eyes, God blesses those

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<sup>58</sup> When Republican Senator Rick Santorum met with his supporters, he was encouraged by chants of, “Hey hey, ho ho, Social Security’s got to go.” Make no mistake about the GOP’s intentions regarding Social Security. They’ll be back.

who profess his or her particular *correct* beliefs, and all others are not blessed—in fact, they are all literally going to Hell. In the words of Eric Hoffer, “absolute faith corrupts as absolutely as absolute power.”

Here’s the truth. In God’s entire world, there is no living person who knows the specifics of Heaven and Hell—where and what they are exactly, or whether they even exist—and no one knows who will go where. Nevertheless, many fundamentalists claim *they* know, and they have a long list of categories of people who will go to Hell. One recently created category of the Hell-bound is for Americans who don’t vote Republican.

How about other people of faith, say Muslims? Christian fundamentalists know with certitude that all Muslims are destined for Hell. This makes “winning their hearts and minds” a little tricky.

How about Mormons? Fundamentalists believe the Mormon religion is a *cult* and that all Mormons will go to Hell (unless they convert to the *right brand* of Christianity, in which case, of course, they would no longer be Mormon.) At the same time, because most Mormons vote Republican, the political apparatus known as the Religious Right embraces them.

But Muslims and Mormons shouldn’t feel they are the only ones picked on by Christian elitists. After all, there are many other categories of people on the Christians’ long list of people going to Hell, including Jews and Catholics, and probably you too, dear reader, simply because you are reading this book.

This *infallibility* of America’s fundamentalists carries over to the actions of their chosen and blessed leader, Bush, and their chosen and blessed party, the Republican Party. Since blessed Bush and the blessed Republican Party can do no wrong, they, along with the Super Rich and large corporations sustaining them, are free to commit whatever wrongs they wish. Even if it sometimes appears they are doing something wrong and immoral, they really aren’t, because God moves in mysterious ways.

The GOP has morphed from that formerly respected “Grand Old Party” into the “Gang of Pharisees.” The GOP has been taken over by its Taliban Wing.

Anyone who believes the Earth and the entire universe were created in seven days and are only about 7,000 years old is capable of believing anything, including the claim that God directs Bush and that Bush is a “compassionate conservative.”<sup>59</sup>

#### **SIDEBAR: God Should Speak More Clearly**

It’s a mystery why God gives conflicting advice to various rightwing leaders about issues as important as war. Consider his directions to Bush and Pat Robertson, two leaders who claim hotlines to Heaven.

<sup>59</sup> Likewise, regarding Islamic fundamentalism, anyone who believes he gets to copulate with lots of virgins by dying for Allah is subject to believing anything.

On one hand, as discussed later in this chapter, Bush said God had instructed him “to strike Saddam, which I did,” and Bush believed that things were going to go well in Iraq. On the other hand, Pat Robertson related a different message from God during an interview with CNN reporter Paula Zahn on October 19, 2004, in which he recounted his pre-invasion conversation with Bush. Robertson, who also had spoken with God about the upcoming invasion of Iraq, warned Bush in advance about the war. “I mean, the Lord told me it was going to be (a), a disaster, and (b), messy.” “I was trying to say, ‘Mr. President, you had better prepare the American people for casualties.’” Robertson said Bush replied, “Oh, no, we’re not going to have any casualties.”

Another costly result of the unholy marriage between fundamentalism and the Republican Party relates specifically to *how* policy decisions are made. Since God directs the decision making process, there is no need to think too much about complex issues, or to solicit diverse perspectives and expert advice before deciding.

With God on your side, there’s no reason to be concerned about one million Iraqi dead. Rev. Falwell—a staunch supporter of the Iraq war who died in 2007 at age 73—summed it up nicely when he described how terrorists should be killed—“blow them all away in the name of the Lord.”

With God on your side, there is no reason to be concerned about science or inconvenient facts or people who get in the way. There is no need to debate or explore alternatives. To do so would violate God’s will. Knowing that God is on his side, Bush prides himself in decisions based on “his gut.” This characterization is better than admitting that Bush is intellectually lazy, and unable to think clearly or deeply. A myriad of Bush’s decisions, especially his decision to invade Iraq, gave new meaning to the expression, “It’s a no brainer.”

The only debate permitted by God-directed Bush and the GOP-dominated Congress was between extreme far right and wacko far right. “Do we need 12 permanent military bases in Iraq, or is 18 the right number?”

## **Bush and God**

For political correctness, Bush generally moderates his religious comments when speaking in secular forums and to the outside world, even going so far as to articulate policies of religious freedom and tolerance. However, when appearing before friendly handpicked rightwing Christian audiences, this politician frequently wears rightwing religiosity on his sleeve. His speechwriters frequently used biblical words and phrases that have specific reassuring meaning to rightwing Christians, but which are not well understood by broader audiences.

Bush works hard to appear different to different religious groups. When he spoke during the 2004 campaign to thousands of conservative Catholics at a Knights of Columbus gathering in Dallas, he repeatedly referred to a “culture of life,” one of Pope John Paul II’s favorite phrases. Bush kissed up to the Pope, calling him a “true hero,” when in fact the Pope strongly opposed Bush’s war on Iraq and was intensely disliked by the Bush neocons.

Bush has avoided saying exactly what he believes on certain basic questions of faith. Does he believe in evolution?<sup>60</sup> Does he believe gays and lesbians will all go to Hell? His closest advisors say they don't know. It is possible that Bush himself does not know what he believes.

Political expediency dictates Bush's vagueness. He learned early that he could suffer politically if he were too specific and truthful. In the 1990s Bush held the view that Heaven was open only to people who accepted Jesus. Although this exclusivity claim is a basic belief of most of his Christian backers, Bush apologized in writing to the Jewish Anti-Defamation League prior to the 2000 campaign, denying that he ever made such an exclusivity claim. Bush knew that the truth would present difficulties when he ran for president, so he took a softer position publicly. However, his right-wing religious followers know what he believes, and they are satisfied with his winks and nods.

#### **SIDEBAR: Matthew 6:5-6**

*“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. ... But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”*

—Matthew 6:5-6.

Bush distorts the Bible and good theology whenever it serves his political purposes. He believes God chose America to lead the war against evil in the world, and he believes God chose George W. Bush to lead America in this faith-based war. In referring to America and himself, Bush completely turns John 1:5 on its head. John 1:5 reads: “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness shall not overcome it.” This passage refers to *Christ* as the light. However, in Bush-speak, *Bush* and *America* are the light, not Christ. In addition to being deceitful, this is simply bad theology.

Following 9/11 Bush increased his use of strident, militaristic, moralistic text cherry-picked from the Bible. He assured us that God is not a neutral party, but is on *our* side in the battle between good and evil. Bush tried unsuccessfully to force everyone to pick sides in this battle. In his simplistic black-and-white world, “either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.” This had the unintended consequence—some would say *intended* consequence—of uniting America's enemies, while dividing America's friends.

Many GOP leaders used the same simplistic, black-and-white, either-or “logic” to label dissenting Democrats as terrorists and unpatriotic. But let's follow the

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<sup>60</sup> Bush suggested in 2000 that evolution and creationism should be taught side by side in public schools, noting that “religion has been around a lot longer than Darwinism.” Of course, under this “reasoning,” the world would still be flat, and American blacks would still be slaves.

“logic.” To the GOP’s dismay, a majority of Americans by 2006 had finally concluded Bush’s Iraq war was a mistake, and they wanted America out of Iraq.<sup>61</sup> This means, following such GOP logic, that a majority of Americans must now be terrorists and unpatriotic.

Fortunately, the rest of the world does not view the world through Bush’s faith-based, reality-deprived, unchristian, black-and-white glasses. The rest of the world looks at reality and sees a complex world quite unlike the fantasy known as Bush World.

If Bush wants to know the number one reason why his Bush League of Nations is such a failure, he can simply look in a mirror. Nothing would please the world more, and do more to improve America’s standing in the world, than the impeachment and removal from office of George W. Bush and his chief puppeteer, Dick Shooter Cheney.

#### **SIDEBAR: God Should Receive Bush’s Salary**

“God told me to strike Al Qaeda and I struck, and then he instructed me to strike Saddam, which I did,” said Bush. (According to the Israeli paper *Ha’aretz*, this is how Bush explained things to Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian Prime Minister.)

Bush—America’s Mr. Teflon when it comes to personal responsibility—in effect blames God for the Iraq disaster. This is slander of the Highest.

Don’t expect any apologies. Bush must be certain that God does not want Bush to apologize for God’s mistakes—well, something like that.

Here’s a message from Heaven that Bush ignored: A Host of Heavenly Angels thus chastised Bush: “You never listen! Mouthing faith in Jesus is not enough. Expecting God to do your job disappoints God, in addition to raising questions about what exactly it is that you do, and why you are even paid. Jesus wants his followers to get their noses out of their Bibles and their neighbor’s bedroom and, based on the reality of the world around them, work with others, including Jews and Muslims, to create peace and justice in the world. He wants his followers to use their hearts and God-given gray matter, and not be eye pokers and dividers. God does not favor ‘gut feeling’ over an active brain and a caring heart. If She did, She would have given man a Ouija board between his ears, which is all you appear to have.”

When Christ returns in the Second Coming, it’s a pretty good bet that Bush will be among the first to get a good “whopping.” Yes, “W” also stands for “whopping.”

Thanks to Bush’s telepathic pipeline to God, the invasion and occupation of Iraq was divinely conceived and blessed, even though Iraq had absolutely nothing to do with 9/11. Because Bush/God said, “it is good,” we don’t need to shed any tears for,

<sup>61</sup> A February 2006 Le Moyne College/Zogby International survey showed that an overwhelming majority (72%) of American troops in Iraq believe the United States should exit within 12 months. That 12-month milestone passed long ago.

or even count, the multitudes of innocent Iraqis injured, tortured and killed. At the end of the day, all the non-Christian Iraqis are going to Hell anyway, and Bush is doing them a big favor by reducing their days of suffering on Earth, in that new Hell-on-Earth known as *Bush's Iraq*.

Americans traditionally preferred a president of faith, but most Americans do not want a president who:

- when deciding whether to invade Iraq, says he seeks the advice of his Father in Heaven, rather than the advice of human experts, including his earthly father who had more relevant experience than anyone regarding the formation of a successful coalition to invade Iraq,
- believes that God is directing his actions in all matters,
- believes that God favors America over all other nations,
- believes that God favors Christianity, or a particular Christian denomination, over all other religions, and
- wishes to impose his religious views on the rest of the world

Any person of faith who allows his religion to short-circuit his God-given brain and heart discredits both himself and God. Such a person is prone to manipulation by others who misuse his religion to achieve their purposes, and such a person is also more likely to slip into self-deception, the hallmark of the Bush administration. When that person is an average citizen, the prospects for damage to the society are not great, but when that person is the President of the United States—say, a lazy shallow man who puts his religion first, ahead of his brain and heart, and avoids shouldering the hard work demanded by his oath of office—he deserves impeachment and removal from office.

The world recognizes the countless moral ironies in Bush's World, such as Bush finding no WMDs in Iraq, while at the same time driving the United States to make more and better WMDs. Is there any sane Christian who believes God is telling Bush to build more and better WMDs?

Especially regarding crucial matters like waging war on Iraq, why haven't journalists asked Bush if he writes down or, better yet, electronically records God's instructions? "Mr. President, could you please give us an official recording or written copy of God's instructions to you regarding Iraq?" Just for fun, you might want to send a request for this to the White House under the Freedom of Information Act. You might also ask if God sent Bush a written plan for post-invasion Iraq. If God never sent Bush a plan, then the civil war and genocide in Iraq cannot be Bush's fault.

Suppose Bush's language-impaired brain misfired while he was transcribing God's command. Suppose, for example, Bush asked God, "Hey, Big Guy, should I continue invading Gulf Coast countries like Iraq to get their oil?"—and God replied: "Stop! Don't! Stop! Don't! Stop! Don't! Stop!"—but Bush mistakenly heard this as, "Don't Stop! Don't Stop! Don't Stop!" Who knows? This could have happened. It's certainly as plausible as any of the many justifications offered by Bush and the GOP for their Iraq war.

Unfortunately, it is politically incorrect in America's Big Media to question the sincerity and depth of Bush's stated religious beliefs—even though he shoved the issue into play through his speeches and policy decisions and by claiming that he

talks with God for direction. It is simply off limits for Big Media to explore whether Bush is the Great Pretender when it comes to religion, and whether his religious posturing before trusting Christian voters is simply the means to an end, i.e., grabbing enough votes to attain the power to deliver Big Goodies to Big Business and the Super Rich.

To be clear, Americans should have the freedom to hold whatever personal religious beliefs they wish, including believing that their religion is the only true religion and that their God is *infallible*. This progressive right—freedom of religion, freedom from religion—is worth protecting, even though the world continues to struggle with the tremendous costs of wars and discrimination caused or fueled by this or that exclusionary religion, each one of which has too many followers who believe their particular religion is the only true religion.

However, religious *infallibility* becomes Hell on Earth when individuals go beyond their personal religious beliefs and attribute infallibility to their political leaders. Individual Americans certainly have the constitutional right to believe that God is infallibly directing Bush, and when they do so, they are merely being gullible and foolish. However, when an American president—Bush in this case—asserts that God is infallibly directing him, the line has been crossed, and he deserves impeachment, plus confinement in a mental institution.

Once fundamentalists, whether Christian or Muslim, arrive at the point of infallibility, it's an easy slippery slope into a dangerous abyss. The Bushians and the bin Ladenians exploit that abyss, where the respective nonbelievers deserve and get whatever punishment the true believers choose to inflict upon them. War anyone?

Whenever leaders, whether Christian or Muslim, claim they converse with God or quote scripture while making the case for war, it's a safe bet that evil is afoot.

#### **SIDEBAR: A Prayer for Christians**

*“Dear God, if Heaven is reserved only for those who profess one particular flavor of Christianity, then please count me out. If it pleases you, I prefer to take my chances in whatever place you have reserved for all your good people, of whatever faith, including Christians, Muslims, and Jews, who endeavor to lead just lives here on your Earth, faithfully striving to make life better for all, especially the poor, the dispossessed, the sick, the lame, and the discarded.”*

The central problem with America in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is that an extreme rightwing political faction—many of whom are much more rich than religious—has set an extreme rightwing agenda, and too many voters rubber stamped it,

thinking the agenda has its roots in a correct religion. In effect, countless pews have been marked, “For Republicans Only.” And “Jesus wept.”<sup>62</sup>

The neo-GOP ignores the Bible’s most important political issue—the poor—and uses a distorted Christianity as a subterfuge to wage class warfare. The neo-GOP wants you to believe that the Bible is their ultimate oracle, but “through a glass darkly” they intentionally misread and misuse the Good Book to justify whatever schemes they brew. Yes, even Satan can quote the Bible.

In an American tragedy, Christianity has been reduced to rightwing economic politics, and this enables the mischief of Bush and the GOP. When the chips are down, Bush and the GOP do the rightwing thing, not the right thing.

Like atheist bank robbers who for cover ride the church bus to their next bank heist, rightwing GOP kleptomaniacs have hijacked Christianity in order to loot the national treasury.

Angry white fundamentalist males find it especially easy to justify discrimination and hatred against people who practice other religions or no religion, against other races, against immigrants, against women, against gays and lesbians, against foreigners—well, against anyone who is perceived to be different or doesn’t share their particular brand of religion or other bigotry.

Fundamentalists love to dominate women and keep them in their place. Whether it’s Christian fundamentalism or Islamic fundamentalism, fundamentalism is *always men, and always mean*.

Republican Party leadership cleverly promotes such discrimination and hatred while it pretends to be compassionate. Although religious bigotry is sometimes an unfortunate byproduct of religious freedom, it is irresponsible and blasphemous for Christian and political leaders to promote it.

Quintessential dividers, Bush and the neo-GOP created and exploited several wedge issues. But if and when Jesus returns to Earth, he will give Bush the mother of all wedgies. Yes, “W” stands for both “wedge issue” and “wedgies.”

The prophets of the Bible frequently *spoke to* the rulers and kings of nations, admonishing them that the powerful are called to greater responsibility and accountability. At the same time, the biblical prophets *spoke for* the hungry, the homeless, the helpless—the least, the last, and the lost. They effectively spoke about a nation’s priorities and how it spends its limited resources.

The biblical prophets knew that power corrupts, and that absolute power corrupts absolutely. And thus, two millennia after Christ, with Bush’s Confederate Party in absolute control of the U.S. government, America lost its way financially and morally, and found itself going to Hell in a handbasket.

In Bush’s White House there is no room at the dining table for the least, the last, and the lost. Jesus asks all Christians to feed his sheep, but Bush fleeced the sheep before feeding them to his Wolves.

Every GOP budget during Bush’s reign has been an immoral, anti-Christian tool of the rich, by the rich, and for the rich. During every war in America’s history, all

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<sup>62</sup> John 11:35. Yes, you are quite right—I am using the verse out of context. However, this is much fairer than Bush and Cheney using “Iraq” and “9/11” in the same sentence, which is criminally devious. Besides, whenever they do that, I know in my heart of hearts that *Jesus weeps*.

Americans—including the rich and powerful—were called upon to make sacrifices. That is, until Bush’s elective war on Iraq. When Bush and neo-GOP wage war, the rich get richer without personal sacrifice, while America’s soldiers are sacrificed.

In addition to using war as a distraction for domestic plundering, the GOP uses many other tricks to sell its extreme rightwing economic policies to middle- and low-income Christians, virtually all of whom are directly harmed by those very economic policies.

One such trick is to remind low- and middle-income Christians that they should *exalt* in their poverty and misfortune. Blessed are the poor. Compassionate Bush is really doing you a favor when he makes the rich richer and you poorer. Praise the Lord!

### **Oppressors as Victims**

Another trick of the Confederate Party and the Religious Right—which is related to the “wedgies” trick—is to create and play the “victim card,” casting *themselves* as *victims* of the many evil forces that control and pollute America.

These evil ones are everywhere. They include: liberals; progressives; Hollywood; libertarians and librarians; video games and television; commies; East Coast; Left Coast; city dwellers; Christians who don’t blindly vote for witless warmongers; illegal immigrants; lots of legal immigrants too; The New World Order; evolutionists; Jews; foreigners; New Age Religion nuts (but excluding the Religious Right themselves); queers; secularists; children once they leave their Mom’s womb and need food and health care; Catholics (but not if they vote Republican and believe transferring pedophiles to another diocese solves *that* problem); Harry Potter; perverts; the United Nations; Islamofascists; people who think women are people too and that middle-aged rightwing men obsessed with sex should stop telling women how to live and love; scientists; left-handed Norwegians; Democrats; blacks and Chicanos; the entire State of Massachusetts; intellectuals; anyone caught reading this book; Mexicans; Canadians too because some of them speak French; anyone else who speaks French; anyone “who don’t speak English real good;” professors; union workers; France; lawyers (excepting the hundreds of thousands of lawyers who work for Big Business and the Religious Right); abortionists; environmentalists; women who don’t know their place (“If you don’t know where it is, we’ll tell you”); and Hillary.<sup>63</sup> Whew! Yes, “W” stands for “Whew!”

Life is just a battle of good and evil forces. It’s us versus them. Rightwing Christians just can’t let their guard down. Whatever problem they have—poverty, loss of job, those secret urges, no health insurance—they can blame it on some evil doer, some poor bastard who had nothing to do with it. Welcome to Bush World. Welcome to the new GOP.

Rightwing Christians should look in the mirror. America is in the toilet precisely because it is the Confederate Party—in league with the Religious Right and Big Business—that grabbed control of America for too many years. Their almost absolute control included all of the federal government—the Presidency, the U.S. Senate, the U.S. House of Representatives, the Supreme Court (with 7 of 9 justices having

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<sup>63</sup> A woman’s place is in the house ... and the Senate ... and the White House.

been appointed by Republicans), and all federal agencies including the FCC—as well as America’s Big Media and a large majority of state governorships and legislatures. But the Religious Right claims *they* are the victims. What nonsense from an alternate universe!

In the GOP’s 21<sup>st</sup> century version of the *Passion Play*, all of the actors playing “the heavies” are found in the Bush administration—the Roman Emperor, Pontius Pilate, the moneychangers, Judas Iscariot, the Roman soldiers and the Pharisees—and *their* number one victim is Christ and his message, just as it was two millennia ago. And it is the Religious Right that made the difference and put these thugs and nitwits on America’s main stage—and cheered them on.

### **America’s President Who *Really Is* a Christian**

Among all American presidents of the last century, former President Jimmy Carter stands out head and shoulders above the rest in living a Christian life, one devoted to helping the less fortunate in the world, and one that Jesus would applaud. He is respected and trusted throughout the world.

Since leaving the presidency, Carter has devoted his life to promoting freedom, peace and health in the world. Among his many activities is Habitat For Humanity International ([www.habitat.org](http://www.habitat.org)) a nonprofit ecumenical Christian housing ministry that has built more than 175,000 houses for families in the United States and around the world. Carter began volunteering with Habitat in 1984, and each year he and Rosalynn spend a week constructing houses. And he still makes time to teach Sunday school at his Baptist church in Plains, Georgia.

Carter’s love for his country and all the peoples of the world is legendary. But he regrets that the United States, a “great country with great potential,” is not doing more to promote peace, freedom and health in the third world. “The problem lies among the people of the U.S. ... It’s time to assess what the government is doing, and shape and influence it appropriately.”

The Atlanta-based Carter Center ([www.cartercenter.org](http://www.cartercenter.org)), founded in 1982 by Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter, wages peace, fights disease, and builds hope around the world. In more than 65 countries it has engaged and challenged governments while at the same time working side by side with poor people to help improve their lives.

In promoting democracy throughout Africa, Asia and Latin America, Carter is frequently called upon to mediate international disputes. In August 2004 Carter, along with Carter Center staff members and other respected international officials, spent many days in Venezuela to help ensure the fairness and peacefulness of the national referendum election to decide whether President Hugo Chavez should remain in office. Their credibility and actions gave authenticity to the election results, and bloodshed was avoided.

Unlike America, Venezuela uses a system of electronic voting that: (1) includes a paper ballot backup, and (2) records voters’ thumbprints electronically, transmits the thumbprints by satellite, and then checks them almost instantaneously to prevent people from voting more than once.

The States of Florida and Ohio should hire Venezuela to install honest voting systems in those two states and to provide election monitors to prevent the Republican Party from suppressing the black vote and committing other election

fraud. Fidel Castro offered to send election monitors to Florida prior to the 2004 election, but Governor Jeb Bush did not accept his kind offer.

Thanks to the Religious Right's clout, a large majority of southern white evangelicals voted against Jimmy Carter, America's first evangelical president and a southern white evangelical like them, because he was not of the *right* political party. Carter did not satisfy the Religious Right's most important "religious" test—that you have to be a Republican.

Jimmy Carter truly is a compassionate Christian. He remains actively engaged in the world and walks his faith everyday.

Carter calls upon America to do more to promote peace, democracy and social justice in the world. One of his central concerns for years has been the AIDS epidemic in Africa, and a growing number of evangelicals have joined this moral fight.

Perhaps hearing the growing number of passionate voices from across the political spectrum, Bush in his 2003 inaugural address pledged \$15 billion over five years to fight AIDS in Africa. Bush deserves great credit for this initiative named PEPFAR (the President's Emergency Program for AIDS Relief.)

Although \$15 billion is less than what Bush wastes in one month on the Iraq war, it *is* a lot of money, and it is saving countless lives in Africa. Nevertheless, many on the right saw a number of "sins" imbedded in the program. How could the GOP use taxpayer money (sin #1) to help destitute foreigners (sin #2) living in Africa (sin #3) who had brought the AIDS problem on themselves (sin #4) and were black (sin #5) and mostly women and children (sin #6.)

The GOP Congress, which rubberstamped ever madness of Bush, somehow let this flawed but definitely compassionate "75% good" program slip though. The fact that a Republican president launched this program will make it difficult for other Republicans to stop the Democratic leadership and progressives of all stripes from expanding the program and correcting some of its literally *fatal* flaws, i.e., the "25% bad" part, which is killing countless people, and which includes the expenditure of funds to push abstinence over condoms, other contraceptives and family planning. Bush opposes the use of condoms (except for his family), and opposes comprehensive women's rights and reproductive choices in family planning (except for his family).

Upward to 3.5 million people die from AIDS in the world each year, according to a UN estimate.

All things considered, PEPFAR is a major step forward and a hopeful sign.

## Other Hopeful Signs

Mainstream Christians must not give up hope, as there are numerous hopeful signs emerging from Christians on the right. A rapidly growing number of Bush and GOP supporters have had it with the GOP's agenda of warmongering and doing everything possible for the Super Rich. Many have already rejected those phony "Christian" banners carried by "Christian" Bush.

The support of white evangelicals for Bush and the GOP appears to have peaked, temporarily at least, sometime after the 2004 presidential election, in which Bush carried the white evangelical vote by about 4-to-1 over Kerry. By the 2006 midterm elections, a growing number of white evangelical Bush supporters had come to their

senses, which contributed to the GOP losing control of Congress. Many Christians abandoned their blind trust in Bush and the GOP upon realizing they had been lied to, manipulated, and taken for granted. Extensive GOP corruption and incompetence both in Iraq and at home also helped end the GOP reign of error, in Congress at least.

There are many, many hopeful signs. Here are just three examples:

- In November 2006 Rev. Joel Hunter quit as president-elect of the Christian Coalition of America because the organization would not let him expand the Coalition's narrow agenda beyond the issues of gay marriage and abortion. Hunter said he quit because the coalition was unwilling to part with its partisan Republican roots. "To tell you the truth, I feel like there are literally millions of evangelical Christians that don't have a home right now," he said. Earlier in the year, Hunter had joined a coalition of several evangelical groups to help fight global warming. He wanted to help save the environment and also reduce poverty. "These are issues that Jesus would want us to care about," he said. But these are issues that the Christian Coalition does not want to address. According to Hunter, "they began to think this might threaten their base or evaporate some of their support, and they said they just couldn't go there."
- Shortly after the 2006 midterm elections, Rick Warren, pastor of the Saddleback Valley Community Church in Lake Forest, California, and author of the best-selling book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, withstood rightwing pressure and invited Barack Obama to speak at a church gathering to discuss the AIDS crisis. Warren joined a growing number of socially conservative Christian leaders who decided to put space between themselves and the GOP political machine and agenda. Because Obama is pro-choice and believes condoms have a place in the prevention of AIDS, many conservative evangelical leaders publicly criticized Warren's decision to invite him. Although socially and religiously conservative—Warren is anti-abortion and opposes same-sex marriage—he and his wife are committed to fighting the AIDS epidemic in Africa. "I'm a pastor, not a politician," he told ABC News. "People always say, 'Rick, are you right wing or left wing?' I say, 'I'm for the whole bird.'"
- An increasing number of young evangelicals are questioning the hard right agenda of the Christian right. Rove thought he had picked a safe "bubble" location for Bush when he arranged for the president to give the commencement address in May 2005 at Calvin College, a conservative Christian liberal arts college in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in the heart of Republican country. Bush was greeted by a letter of protest that appeared as a full-page advertisement in the local newspaper. The respectful letter, signed by more than 800 students, faculty members and alumni, stated, "Your deeds, Mr. President—neglecting the needy to coddle the rich, desecrating the environment and misleading the country into war—do not exemplify the faith we live by." Although a majority of the Calvin community probably still favored Bush and his GOP policies, the protest was remarkable. Even at theologically conservative Calvin there is a growing Christian left.

Well, these are just a few of many hopeful signs among religious conservatives. In the next section we return to two of the hopeless on the Religious Right—bin Laden and Bush.

### **Bin Laden and Bush**

The parallels between Bush and bin Laden are striking. Although of different faiths, Bush and bin Laden both followed the same handbook of dirty religious politics:

- Move to the extreme religious right;
- Use rightwing religion to drive policy and stifle dissenting views;
- Imply or claim that you are correct because God is directing you;
- Seize exclusive ownership of your book of faith through grand displays of religiosity;
- Divide at every opportunity;
- Spread fear;
- Label dissenters unpatriotic cowards or apostates;
- Act outside the law because you are special, a Chosen One;
- Couple your religion as tightly as possible with yourself and your renegade organization.

Bin Laden and Bush are the heads of two symbiotic warmongering movements, and their shotgun marriage created a two-headed, out-of-control monster that leaves a path of death and destruction wherever it slithers. Bush and his bumbling Christian party needed rightwing Muslim terrorists to fuel the GOP fear machine and divert attention from the GOP's shameless kleptomaniac policies at home, and bin Laden and a multitude of independent Muslim terrorist groups around the world needed Bush and the GOP to breath life into their evil causes and provide an endless lethal stream of martyrs. Although each side claims divine inspiration, their marriage is definitely *not* made in Heaven.

#### **SIDEBAR: Bush and bin Laden—Two Peas in a Pod**

*“Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from a religious conviction.”*

—Blaise Pascal (1623-62)

*“With or without religion, you would have good people doing good things and evil people doing evil things. But for good people to do evil things, that takes religion.”*

—Steven Weinberg

A comparison of bin Laden and Bush is instructive. They share many character traits, including a lust for power. Each preaches his particular brand of religion—rightwing militant fundamentalism in the case of Bush, and rightwing militant fundamentalism in the case of bin Laden. Both could be called militant “evangelicals.”

Bin Laden is a militant Islamist, and Bush a militant Christianist. Both are theo-conservatives, or theocons for short. Both are cons. Both are wacko.

Are there any differences between the religious banners they carry? Yes—although their respective victims, especially the dead, may not appreciate the differences. Bin Laden carries the militant banner of a peculiar strain of Islam, one that is inconsistent with the Koran as followed by most Muslims. Bush carries the militant banner of a strained interpretation of Christianity, one that is inconsistent with the Bible as followed by most Christians in the world.

We know both are *true believers* because they and their rightwing propaganda machines tell us so.

To his credit, bin Laden was a scholar of Islam during his formative years. Bush's beliefs, however, were AWOL during the first two-thirds of his life, and his sins, crimes and corruption during that long period of extended adolescence were conveniently wiped clean when he was *reborn*, thus giving him a clean blank slate to pursue a political career—with more sins, crimes and corruption.

Each professes to feel the spirit of God and claims that God supports and guides his decisions. Each uses and exploits God and a wonderful religion for political expediency and personal power. Each uses his religion to kill innocent people.

Each was born into a wealthy life of privilege and wealth, devoid of any anchor of social and personal responsibility. Their two families—the House of Bush and the House of bin Laden—are cut from the same gold cloth.

Each family hobnobbed with the House of Saud, which runs Saudi Arabia, frequently engaging in crony public-trough capitalistic schemes, without regard to the impact on their respective nations. Each family “dined” at the same Saudi public troughs, drank the same fine wines, and coveted the same fine oils. It would be nice to report that true love connected their families, but “what happens in Riyadh stays in Riyadh.” After all, what is life without love? Don't the countless parties, sleepovers and season's greeting cards mean anything? Or was it really only about money and power?

It is rumored<sup>64</sup> that the directors of “*Brokeback Mountain*” tried to recruit Bush and bin Laden as the movie's co-stars, but bin Laden unfortunately could not be reached, although Bush made half-hearted attempts to locate him.

Bush is tall, and bin Laden is taller. At 6-feet, 5-inches, bin Laden stands out in any crowd, which makes Bush's failure to locate him all the more remarkable.

There are other differences. For example, Bush loves the Saudi princes and supports their crony capitalism, welfare for the wealthy, and terrorist-supporting Islamic state. On the other hand, bin Laden hates the Saudi princes and wants to destroy their anti-American, anti-West, anti-democratic, anti-religious-freedom government and replace it with his own anti-American, anti-West, anti-democratic, anti-religious-freedom government.

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<sup>64</sup> which rumor I started

Thanks to family connections, Bush attended Yale as a rich fraternity boy and prancing cheerleader and was selected for Skull and Bones Society. Bin Laden also was a rich prince who enjoyed many of the debaucheries available in the West to a man of substance and family connections. Both loved to get hammered and hammer as many females as possible.

The randomness of birth separates them. Bin Laden was born into a Muslim family of kings and princes, and Bush was born into a Christian family of kings and princes. Their respective faiths were determined simply by chance, by an accident of geography as to place of birth.

If Bush had been born in Riyadh, his oil DNA would have been the same, but, as for religion, he probably would have become a prancing cheerleader for the extreme rightwing Wahhabi sect of Islam. This raises at least two questions: (1) Can you imagine Bush trying to speak Arabic, especially while prancing? (2) Does “W” really stand for “Wahhabi Wannabe?”

Bush was born an Episcopalian, but a later switch to the *Texas Pretend-Rancher* sect of Pseudo Christianity offered two bankable interlinked advantages: (1) a new inexhaustible supply of Bush Family Passes, and (2) lots of votes, if he could play the Religionist Card right and learn how to ride a horse.<sup>65</sup>

There is a rumor<sup>66</sup> that bin Laden greatly admires Bush’s profitable misuse of Christianity and would like to cash in on it too by following in Bush’s footsteps. Specifically, bin Laden wants to convert to the Texas Pretend-Rancher sect, get forgiven for all his sins and crimes, buy himself a ranchette just over the fence from Bush’s, and become U.S. president just like Bush.<sup>67</sup> If that happens, it will be tough to tell the difference in the White House, other than the fact that bin Laden reportedly actually has some compassion for the oppressed and the poor—you know, Christ’s people.

Perhaps this rumor about bin Laden strikes you as a little farfetched, but it is not as farfetched as GOP propaganda that Bush is compassionate, or as farfetched as the GOP tales about Iraq and Saddam being behind 9/11. In any case, bin Laden’s conversion and relocation to Texas *would* take care of Bush’s *Number One Mission Unaccomplished*—tracking down the master criminal behind 9/11.

The fact that bin Laden and Bush League have the same initials could be a sign from God. Who can say with certainty that it is not?

<sup>65</sup> Bush never learned how to ride a horse, but rightwing Texans overlooked that requirement.

<sup>66</sup> which I am hereby starting.

<sup>67</sup> If you see bin Laden, please don’t tell him U.S. presidents must be native-born Americans. If you do, he may not relocate voluntarily to Texas. After all, we really do need to kill or capture him.

Bin Laden would likely be a much better American president than Bush, since Bush is by far the worst American president ever.<sup>68</sup> It would be difficult to do worse. Bush has created more terrorists and killed more innocent people than bin Laden, so there would probably be some improvement there. Bush has done more damage to America's reputation and military power than bin Laden ever dreamed of achieving, so there could be some improvement there too.

Putting bin Laden in Bush's chair in the White House would also cause, at last, *all* Americans to finally realize and agree upon something extremely important—something they *all* should have known since 2001—that America has a dangerous nut case in the White House.

Even though lots of Republican voters think an American president really doesn't need to know where Europe and Asia are located, bin Laden does know much more about the world and Christianity than Bush ever will know about the world and Islam.

Bin Laden speaks Arabic better than Bush speaks English. Bin Laden also speaks English better than Bush speaks English.

Then there's that weird codependency, that symbiosis, between bin Laden and Bush. By slaughtering thousands of innocents on 9/11, bin Laden gave Bush a chance to resurrect his faltering image and failing presidency. Returning the favor, Bush invaded Iraq and gave enormous legitimacy to bin Laden and his Grand Old Party of Terrorists, just when they needed a jumpstart. Although each now supposedly hates the other, each continues to promote the other's career. Maybe we will see them together at last in *Brokeback Mountain II*. Two peas in a pod.

The rumors that bin Laden contributed lots of cash to Bush's reelection campaign are probably false, although there's the possibility that Halliburton tried to broker a deal. A sticky point in negotiations might have been whether bin Laden would agree to be captured shortly before America's 2004 presidential election. (Here's a partial transcript of the negotiations actually obtained during a *legal*<sup>69</sup> wiretap: bin Laden asks, "But how can I trust your promise to let me live with 50 virgins during my life of luxurious, leisurely captivity in your Club Med in Midland, Texas?" Bush replies, "Trust *me*? Dude, that's stupid—I don't even trust myself!" And the deal fell through.)

On a more serious note, here is the sad reality. Thanks to Bush, bin Laden would do well in a free, fair, democratic election for high office in many Islamic countries, while Bush would be sent to prison or the looney bin at the first opportunity.

Bush gives reassuring messages to his rightwing religious base without regard to his moral responsibility to represent all Americans. His numerous gaffes include him holding up the Bible and saying it is the "universal handbook" for our government. Stunts of that sort play really well in the Islamic world. Bush is his own worst enemy, as well as America's worst president. He, not bin Laden, is the principal reason

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<sup>68</sup> Yes, "W" also stands for "Worst."

<sup>69</sup> but fictitious

why the United States is losing the hearts and minds of Muslims in Iraq and throughout the world.

The vast majority of the Muslim world sees Bush as a “my-God-is-stronger-than-your-god” Christian crusader who knows in his heart that their religion, Islam, is inferior and false. Bush is unable to separate his religious sectarianism and bigotry from his broader moral and constitutional responsibilities as president. Many incompetent appointees were cherry-picked for his administration precisely because of their narrow religious beliefs and willingness to exploit their new powers for sectarian purposes. Sometimes their bigoted babbling goes beyond the pale.

One prominent example is Lt. Gen. William Boykin, Bush’s deputy undersecretary of defense for intelligence, who headed the Pentagon office charged with finding targets such as Osama bin Laden. Notwithstanding his high level position and the fact that he set critical policy, Lt. Gen. Boykin appeared in full uniform before dozens of church audiences to preach politics and assert the superiority of Christianity over Islam. On numerous occasions he slammed Muslims and Islam. When referring to an enemy warlord in Somalia, he preached, “I knew my God was bigger than his. I knew that my God was a real God and his was an idol.”

Boykin also declared that Bush “is in the White House because God put him there,” not because of an election.<sup>70</sup> While commenting on the war against terrorism, Boykin remarked, “we in the army of God, in the house of God, kingdom of God have been raised for such a time as this.” He believes “our spiritual enemy will only be defeated if we come against them in the name of Jesus.” Identifying Satan as the mastermind of terrorists, Boykin said Satan “wants to destroy us as a Christian army.”

Bigoted Christianist fools like Boykin play into the hand of Osama bin Laden and others who *want* to create a broader religious war. Boykin’s bombastic declarations also violate official White House statements and policies intended to placate moderate Muslims and reduce the distrust and hatred of Muslims towards the United States.

When publicity finally caught up with him, Boykin apologized for his remarks, and Bush later stated that he disagreed with what Boykin had said. However, rather than being demoted or sacked, Boykin only received a mild hand slap, because appropriate punishment would have upset Bush’s rightwing base. Sadly, Boykin’s anti-Islam bigotry reflects the beliefs of numerous other senior officials in Bush’s administration. The Islamic world knows that Bush League crusaders are alive and well in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Bin Laden must be smiling.

In the next chapter we turn our attention to the important topic of the *End Times* prophecies rooted in the Bible’s Book of Revelation, which are important to millions of Christian fundamentalists. Unfortunately, End Times malarkey has helped dummy down, misinform and misdirect U.S. foreign policy in the greater Middle East, with disastrous consequences for the Bush League of Nations in Iraq, and for America’s stated goal of winning the hearts and minds of Muslims.

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<sup>70</sup> Fact: Bush was put in the White House not by God, but by five Republican politicians on the U.S. Supreme Court.