

Armageddon Anxiety

Evil on the Way

by WILLIAM COOK

Bob Woodward's deferent, perhaps even obeisant homage to "Dubya" in his recent book, *Bush at War*, contains this troubling observation: "The President was casting his mission and that of the country in the grand vision of God's Master Plan." This frightening perception followed the President's declamation, "We will export death and violence to the four corners of the earth in defense of this great country and rid the world of evil."

Considering how Bush Jr. grew up beneath the Reagan/Bush baldacchino and then helped guide his father's ascension to the throne, his connections with the Christian Right has a long and deep history, including familiarity with the pseudo-prophet, Hal Lindsey, a frequent visitor to the Reagan White House.

Lindsey, the New York Times "Best Selling Author" of the past three decades, author of at least 20 books like *The Late Great Planet Earth*, and influential Father of Christian Zionism, foresees the imminent and unavoidable great battle of Armageddon, the fulfillment of John's prophecy in the Book of Revelation, the cataclysmic conflict between the forces of Good against the forces of Evil, climaxing in our lifetime. Jesus Christ, King of the Jews, will return to rule the world from the rebuilt temple in the reclaimed nation of Israel according to the prophecies, and we will witness the inevitable suffering and global holocaust. Lindsey proclaims deliverance from Armageddon depends on understanding God's purposes for the Jews including the restoration of Israel as a nation in the land of Judea and Samaria.

Lindsey also proclaims that he purposefully writes these books to shock people into believing in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. And like any good insurance salesman, he instills fear as he threatens his customers with the plagues revealed in the Acts of the Apostles and the Book of Revelation: "... The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood...With Justice he judges and makes war ... He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood and his name is the word of God ... Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down nations. .so you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great" The Messiah slays the Antichrist and "creates a new heaven and a new earth" and He judges the dead, saves the Christians, and casts the rest into eternal perdition.

Lindsey accepts as reality that his interpretations of the prophecies come directly to him from God, "I believe that the Spirit of God gave me a special insight, not only into how John described what he actually experienced, but also into how this whole phenomenon encoded the prophecies so that they could be fully

understood only when their fulfillment drew near ... I prayerfully sought for a confirmation for my apocalypse code theory..." This self-proclaimed, God inspired interpreter of the Bible has had a profound influence on American and British Christians and Jews. Since Ronald Reagan's Christian based regime of the '80s which included access to the President by not only Lindsey, but Jerry Falwell and the Christian Zionist televangelist Mike Evans, the interests of Zionism as an integral component of prophetic lure have been central in policy formation toward Israel in particular and the mid-east generally in both America and the United Kingdom. The current administration, even more so than Reagan's, is rife with right-wing reliance on the coming revival predicted in the Book of Revelation.

Consider observations made by Paul Krugman of the New York Times December 18, 2002: "Tom DeLay soon to be House majority leader, told a church group that: 'Only Christianity offers a way to live in response to the realities that we find in this world only Christianity.' He also said he was on a mission from God to promote a 'biblical worldview' in American politics." This from the most powerful man in the Congress! And he is not alone. According to Krugman, many leading Congressional Republicans belong to the "secretive" Council for National Policy, an organization founded by Tim LaHaye, co-author of the apocalyptic "Left Behind" novels. Members include Pat Robertson, Ralph Reed, Sen. Jesse Helms, Congressman Dick Armey and Tom DeLay of Texas, Howard Phillips, and many, many others. This fundamentalist group listens, in private, to none other than the self-proclaimed "Born Again" Christian, George W. Bush. Consider also the appointment of John Ashcroft to the position of Attorney General, a vocal Christian fundamentalist who "gives every appearance of placing his biblical worldview above secular concerns..." Add to this the neo-cons in the administration like Rumsfeld, Cheney, Wolfowitz, Pearle, Feith, and many others, and one understands that the ties that bind the neocon Christian right, read Christian Zionists, to the Zionist orthodox Jew cement mentalities that embrace myths as truth and behavior directed by superstitious beliefs, regardless of those who do not share their zeal.

I believe that the views expressed by Hal Lindsey as they are reflective of beliefs held by "Dominionists," including Dr. Tony Evans, founder of Promise Keepers, Dr. Martin Hawkins, Assistant to Evans, James Ryle of the Vineyard Movement among others, permeate the Bush administration's major figures, most especially the President, guide their approach to foreign policy, and transform their perception of themselves as executors of God's will. The potential destructive power inherent in this mentality, that accepts as truth interpretations of mythological stories or willingly uses those interpretations to exhort others to action, can be understood and can be thwarted before such devastation occurs. That conclusion we can draw from history should we consider the destructive power of myth as it was wielded by Urban II as he inaugurated the Crusades to liberate Jerusalem, Innocent III when he exterminated the Cathar sect in the 12th and 13th centuries, the Puritan divines when they slaughtered the Pequot Indians in 1636-37, and the elimination of the beliefs extant in northern Europe before the

onslaught of Christianity in the middle ages, to offer a few examples. When the elite few who gain power in a country or over a group of people accept myths as truth, or when they insidiously and ruthlessly use the beliefs people hold to affect their ends, devastation follows. An enlightened American public can thwart the myth driven elite.

Michael Ortiz Hill, author of *Dreaming the End of the World*, characterizes Bush, in his essay in *CounterPunch* January 4, 2003, as "...delusional and the shape of his delusion is specifically apocalyptic in belief and intent." By apocalyptic Hill means that "All systems are supposed to go down so the Messiah can come and Bush, seemingly, has taken on the role of the one who brings this to pass." "God sovereignly controls all aspects of life" according to this view, and that understanding is inherent in the teachings of the Promise Keepers Movement and its founder, Dr. Tony Evans, and the perspective of Billy Graham, two of the prominent right-wing Christians who have influenced Bush. Graham is credited with Bush's rebirth in Christ and Dr. Tony Evans is pastor of a large Dallas church where Bush heard a great deal about "how the world should be seen from a divine viewpoint" according to Dr. Martin Hawkins, assistant to Evans. (Hill).

Both the Promise Keepers and the Vineyard Movements according to Gary Gilley in "The Vineyard Movement" accept the doctrine of "end time" or "dominionism" that believes there will be a seizure of earthly power by God's people (read Christians) to restore the earth to God's control. Dominion theology teaches that Christ restored dominion over life to the followers of Christ, but the church now has the obligation of redeeming society in order to bring about the Second Coming. They also contend that the kingdom of God is now and they have the responsibility to manifest God's power before the entire world. Taking control of the earth must happen before Christ will return to usher in the physical kingdom on earth over which He will reign.

But Christian Zionists also believe that, before Christ can return, the Jews must return to Israel. Many evangelical Christians cite Genesis 12 and 13 to demonstrate that "the Jews have title deed to Israel and that the land must not be given back to the Palestinians," according to Thomas Williamson in his article "To Whom Does the Land of Palestine Belong?" Christian Zionists, according to Williamson, "regard God's covenant with Abraham, including the land grant, as an unconditional covenant." More frighteningly, "Every act taken by Israel is orchestrated by God, and should be condoned, supported, and even praised by the rest of us," notes Grace Halsell in her article "Israeli Extremists and Christian Fundamentalists: The Alliance." Not all Christians accept this interpretation, but for those who do, the reestablishment of Israel in 1948 ushered in the conditions necessary to bring about the rapture: Jewish control of Jerusalem and rebuilding the temple. Then and only then can the final, great battle called Armageddon begin. Estimates vary, but Halsell claims "10 to 40 million Americans believe Palestine is God's chosen land for the Jews"(1). Maintenance of Israel as a nation

becomes an obligation on the part of Christian Zionists if Biblical prophecy is to be fulfilled.

That places George W. Bush in a unique position as a leader of the world's mightiest military power: to bring about the fulfillment of God's prophecy. Hill claims that Bush has accepted this eschatology through which he sees himself "as an agent of God who has been called by him to 'restore the earth to God's control'" (2). S.R. Shearer of Antipas Ministries, notes Hill, calls this delusional. Hill refers to Bob Woodward's new book, *Bush at War*, to give substance to this Messianic view of the President. Woodward observes "The president was casting his mission and that of the country in the grand vision of God's Master Plan" (2). Add to these comments the closing sentence of his 2003 State of the Union Speech, "The liberty we prize is not America's gift to the world, it is God's gift to humanity," and we can sense his Messianic fervor as he leads the world against the "man-made" forces of evil.

Unfortunately, the determination of that evil resides in the beliefs of those interpreting the "prophecies" and those who accept those interpretations as truth. For Lindsey and the Vineyard ministers, God's covenant with the Jews is truth and it translates, according to Stephen R. Sizer, into the need for America to "continue military and economic funding of Israel," for Israel to "resist negotiating land for peace," "maintain their apartheid policies," and incite fundamentalist groups to destroy the Dome of the Rock so the new temple can be built. Lindsey accuses those who refuse to accept this eschatology as anti-Semitic. This transition from biblical prophecy to current events translates myth into international policy emphasizing the potential destructive power of mythology. Who are these self-appointed servants of the Almighty who give direction to Israeli and US leaders regarding the establishment of nation states, the conception and determination of evil, and the righteousness of actions taken on behalf of their interpretation of God's word?

Lindsey believes, as we have noted, that the Spirit of God has given him special insight "into how this whole phenomenon encoded the prophecies" Others like James Ryle of Promise Keepers find God giving revelation through dreams and visions; in *Hippo in the Garden*, he notes that he was called to preach through a prophetic word situation (91). In either case, their interpretations come from an indeterminable source, yet a source of vast power and consequence. Lindsey writes "Only now, as mankind approaches the third millennium, do I feel like the Holy Spirit has provided me with the proper perspective the Big Picture, so to speak on the mind blowing experiences of the modern world" (*Planet Earth 2000 A.D.*). And what are those "mind blowing experiences"? "I am certain The Second Advent will occur in the next few years probably in your lifetime." And, "the greatest threat to freedom and world peace today is Islamic fundamentalism" (*The Final Battle*). Acceptance of these modern day prophets and their beliefs by the elite in power portends disaster for American policy in the mid-east in

particular and for American interests generally. But, as we have seen, these ministers of God have the ear of those in power in the current administration.

Two issues arise immediately: why should America determine its future course based on interpretations of God's word as contained in documents 2500 years old, designed and written for civilizations long dead? And, second, what is the evil that these modern day prophets determine as the threat against God's predictions?

Plainly, the Books of Genesis, Daniel, and Revelation, the primary sources for "end-time theology," for "Dominionism," for the Apocalyptic perspective, and for Armageddon, while accepted by literalists as the word of God, are in fact derivatives of stories and ideas from other cultures that anti-date Moses by hundreds of years and John, the purported author of Revelation, by more than 1700 years. How then can they be the word of God? How can Americans take seriously the interpretations of Pseudo-prophets who claim to know the meaning of prophecies when they are only the latest in a series of such claimants that date back to Joachim of Fiore, an Italian monk of the 12th century, Christopher Columbus in the early 1500s, Martin Luther, Thomas Muentzer in the 16th century, the Puritans in America, the interpretations arising out of Nazism and Marxism, William Miller and John Darby to mention a few who appeared before the most recent group headed by Lindsey (PBS).

There can be no doubt that the Book of Revelation has had a searing impact on the American conscience that dates back to the establishment of God's "city on a hill" given to the Puritan's by God Himself. The absolute acceptance of the forces of good and evil as extant and operative in the world, concepts that date back to influences from ancient Greece and Persia in the 5th to 3rd centuries before Christ, existed without question in the Puritan mind. Hope in the eventual victory of the forces of good over evil, however, existed long before the 5th century BCE in the "Enuma and Elish" stories of the struggles between chaos and order that date to 1780 BCE in Mesopotamia. These myths tell of Marduk, the God of light, struggling against Tiamat, the force of evil, to bring order out of chaos and peace to the world (www.gatewaystobabylon.com). The influence of these myths on the Book of Genesis, purportedly written by Moses who was born in 1571, is unmistakable and conveyed directly in Psalm 74:14,15,16. But Marduk is not Yahweh, yet current pseudo-prophets will declare the accuracy of their visions as direct from God who speaks to humankind from the pages of the Old and New Testaments. They fail to account for the origins of God's word that comes from non-Jewish sources. Many ancient myths influenced the Bible: the burning of the world by the Hindu God, Shiva; the Akkadian prophecies from Mesopotamia; the messiah-like king that takes over the world, rewards the just, and rules forever from the Uruk Prophecy; and the judgment of the dead by the Egyptian god Maat for the good and evil they performed in their lifetime. (Patricia Eddy, "The Persian Connection: the End of the World Begins")

Judaism also borrowed "angels, the holy spirit, paradise in heaven, eternal life, Judgment Day, the resurrection of the dead, a fiery hell, a messianic savior, and man's personal responsibility to do God's will" from Persia (www.alsopreview.com). These same concepts exist in Zoroaster's faith that prevailed in the 6th century BCE. He designed a monotheistic God, Ahura Mazda, considered by some as a precursor of the God of the Judaic Bible. Zoroaster's last battle between the forces of good and evil, the biblical Armageddon, is headed by a messiah known as Saoshyant; upon victory, he would herald in a millennium of peace and plenty. An apocalypse preceded that last battle to gain the attention of the people. Indeed, the Book of Revelation enlarges upon Zoroaster's end of the world concepts as do sections in the Dead Sea Scrolls discovered in 1947 at Nag Hammadi and date to the 1st and 2nd centuries CE.

Unfortunately, Christians reading this literature have focused on the necessary and inevitable return of the Jews to Judea-Samaria as conveyed in one source written by a monk in 950 CE, Adso of Montier-En-Der at the request of Queen Gerbera of France as he interpreted biblical passages. He also noted that there would arise "the Last World Emperor" who would unite Christianity and defeat Muslims before the Antichrist arises (PBS). This Christian Zionist focus that requires the fulfillment of the covenant between God and His chosen people arises from two broad predictions in the Old Testament: predictions of a return to Palestine from the Babylonian exile and promises of Palestine as the land given by God to the Jews.

Scholars argue about these predictions, some claiming that God fulfilled His promises when the Jews returned to Palestine, rebuilt the Temple and the Walls of Jerusalem, and restored the religious life of the community under the Maccabees; others disagree (www.users.cloud9.net). Citations of God's promises to "the descendants of Abraham" for land appear in Genesis 12:7, 13:15, 15:18, 28:13-14 among others. The dispute caused by these passages has to do with the "seed" to which God promised the land. Zionists argue that God's promise was to Jews only; others argue that the seed of Abraham includes Arabs (www.mideastfacts.com). Regardless of these indeterminable disputes, "prominent evangelists preach to their followers that God never fulfilled "His promise of giving all the land of Palestine to the Jews" (www.mideastfacts.com) and, consequently, support "whatever action necessary, even nuclear war, to obtain Arab lands in the Middle East and give them to Jews." [emphasis mine] (mideastfacts) Obviously, such interpretations bring the world to the brink of nuclear holocaust and represent to many in the Christian community a backward step in theology.

Is it possible to believe in the 21st century that a God, designed by a small tribe of nomadic Semites 3500 years ago from stories and myths that existed centuries before in the literatures of Mesopotamia, Persia, Egypt, Canaan, and elsewhere, could dictate to Americans how they should conduct foreign policy? Myths after all are stories that explain for a people how they perceive their existence in a world

filled with mystery and awe. They create reference points for the people to see connections between their condition and forces greater than themselves or to understand how they must relate to the society that surrounds them or to grapple with the internal energies that reside within themselves. Yet we have in the union of Christian Zionists and Jewish Zionists mentalities that find absolute truth in these myths and willingly inflict them on the American populace. These beliefs bring ancient prophecies from myths into today's political arena as this comment from Lindsey's Planet makes all too clear: "The dispute to trigger the war of Armageddon will arise between the Arabs and Israelis over the Temple Mount and Old Jerusalem (Zachariah 12:2-3), the most contested and strategic piece of real estate in the world Two religions, Judaism and Islam, thus are on a collision course with global and heavenly repercussions. Islam will never accept Jerusalem as the undivided capital of the Jewish state, and Israel will never agree to give it up"(155).

Consider the comments of Margot Patterson in the National Catholic Reporter last October 11, 2002: "Thousands of Christian Zionists met in Jerusalem for the Jewish holiday of Sukkot to cheer Sharon and to declare their unconditional support for the state of Israel." These people embrace "end-time" theology and are supported in turn by right-wing Israelis who like the economic and political support they bring to the Israeli cause. Christian fundamentalists and Jewish Messianic settlers, according to Patterson, promise formation of a "Greater Israel" that will usher in Armageddon. They, too, see war between Muslims and Jews as bringing about the Second Coming.

Patterson quotes a variety of sources to enforce her perception of the political impact these interpreters of God's word have on America's policies toward Israel and Palestine. James Zogby, President of the Arab American Institute, argues "despite disclaimers to the contrary the US is waging a war on Islam at home and abroad even as it tacitly supports extremist settlers in the occupied territories Israel controls." Lewis Roth, President of Americans for Peace Now, says "You have a number of very conservative Christian groups that support settlements because they see this as a way of strengthening Jewish hold on the land of Israel because in their mind this is important for end-of-time theology and part of hastening the Second Coming and the conversion of the Jews" Since Jews have their own Messianic reading of the biblical sources, different from the Christian Zionists except in the necessity of fulfilling God's covenant to return the Jews to Judea-Samaria, they find support of the Christian Zionists helpful in bringing about the creation of Greater Israel that would include not only the borders of the present state but the entire land of Israel described in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Consider as well Robert Kaiser's February 9, 2003 article "Bush and Sharon Nearly Identical on Mideast Policy" in the Washington Post. Kaiser quotes Richard Pearle, chairman of the Pentagon's Defense Policy Board, "Israel should insist on Arab recognition of its claim to the biblical land of Israel and should focus on removing Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq;" this despite multiple UNSC

resolutions that declare Israel in defiance of international law by holding on to these lands. But there's more! Douglas Feith, undersecretary of defense for policy, has written extensively on Israeli-Arab issues, and argues, according to Kaiser, "that Israel has as legitimate a claim to the West Bank territories seized after the Six-Day War as it has to the land that was part of the U.N. mandated Israel created in 1948." Indeed, Donald Rumsfeld has made the same claim even as he demands that the UN force nations that defy UN resolutions to comply: "There was a war and they (neighboring countries) lost a lot of real estate to Israel because Israel prevailed in that conflict." Here are America's Defense Department spokesmen directly contradicting the UN resolutions demanding that Israel comply with international law and the Geneva Conventions.

Why do these individuals speak for America in this manner? Kaiser quotes a senior official of the first Bush administration as saying "Sharon played the president like a violin: 'I'm fighting your war, terrorism is terrorism,' and so on, Sharon did a masterful job." Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein, also quoted by Kaiser, claims "President Bush's policy stems from his core as a Christian, his perceptions of right and wrong, good and evil, and of the need to stand up and fight against evil personally believe it is very personal, not a political maneuver on his part." Rev. Richard Land of the Southern Baptist Convention echoed those sentiments when he noted how important evangelical support for the president is and claimed, "We need to bless Israel more than America needs Israel's blessing because Israel has a far greater ally than the United States of America, God Almighty." That observation, you will recall, ended the President's State of the Union address as quoted above. In short, America has at its helm a man who understands his role in God's plan and is determined to carry forward regardless of the views of world leaders or the American people. As Dr. Lower points out in *Counterpunch*, "Bush's war version of God 'has two dangerous implications' One is that those who have lost their lives in service to God and country (Astronauts) 'weren't actually taking risks or showing bravery because their fate was in God's hands. The other implication is that tragedies are God's will.' This is in the tradition of Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell who suggested that the September 11th tragedy happened because God had removed his active protection from an immoral United States."

Bush is furthered in his drive to Armageddon by those who surround him, both secular zealots intent on ensuring Israel's expansion to the biblical lands given it by the covenant or by the religious right that supports Sharon and controls great Jewish influence in America. Perhaps the most recent evidence of this control on America's mid-east policy comes in the person of Elliott Abrams, the recently appointed director of Mideast Affairs for the National Security Council. Abrams has stated categorically: "The Palestinian leadership does not want peace with Israel, and there will be no peace." Given his current position, we know the future of American policy in Palestine. Abrams' prophecy of no peace allows the Christian Zionists and the Jewish Zionists to usher in the forces of their perceived good against the forces of their perceived evil, the Muslims. All of which makes possible

the scenario prophesied by Hal Lindsey in The Final Battle, making fiction truth and truth fiction.

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