

Killing for Christ

The Destructive Power of Faith

by WILLIAM A. COOK

A pall hangs over this election, a shroud of darkness that oppresses the heart because its outcome guarantees no change, only the certainty of continued chaos if Bush should win and the unknown direction a Kerry victory might take, a direction that could continue the chaos America's mired in, a darkness, then, to appall. I read each day the crippling accounts of soldiers caught in a maelstrom of unseen death lurking on roof tops, in narrow alleys, behind cement walls and black windows, beneath tires littering the streets. I see pictures of burned out buses, sidewalks and curbs bathed with blood, faces twisted in pain, bits and pieces of flesh scattered about like fallen leaves, blown helter-skelter by the wind. Faces, I see suffering on so many faces, mothers weeping over their dying children, old women and men huddled in the debris left of their bulldozed home, medics carrying the lifeless body of a man whose hand rests beside his face held there by the torn shred of his sleeve, his arm gone, his body black with grime.

This is a world gone mad, a madness on all sides, the madness of greed that sees in oil the riches of Sultans and Kings, the madness of arrogant pseudo-philosophers who conjure beliefs of personal superiority that gives them license to conquer and enslave, the madness of ancient minds that dreamt of power and glory in covenants with gods, the madness of fanatics that fabricate fantasy out of indecipherable images lodged in pages of metaphors, the madness of little minds that grab onto faith as the golden ring that will bring them salvation, the madness of those born again to the child's world of impossible dreams forgoing in their new world the reality of this.

Today I read of depleted uranium, 1000 metric tons made from the deadly U238 isotope dropped on America's killing fields, that wafts on the wind like aerosol spray, a toxic death that sticks in human lungs, bringing a slow and painful death. I saw pictures of new born children bloated and bruised by scars, eyes missing, a nose of scar tissue and nostrils, no lips, the detritus of our advanced civilization scattered on hospital beds in Baghdad. I read of soldiers twisted in mind and spirit by no visible symptom except the phantom of our cursed nuclear waste that encircles them in their tank and haunts them the remainder of their lives. Our young return from this nightmare of devastation devastated themselves courtesy of our Commander in Chief.

And I read today that 24,010 Americans have been evacuated with wounds and injuries from our "war" zones that 37,000 innocent men, women, and children in Afghanistan and Iraq have died and more than 500,000 have suffered wounds. And I hear the silence, the deafening silence of indifference that our compassionate conservative leader offers to those who suffer the consequence of his acts, and feel with them the utter helplessness of their plight. And I wait for a word from Kerry that he, too, hears their

pain, that he will stop the slaughter in Afghanistan and Iraq and Palestine ... and I wait in vain; there is no condemnation, no plan to end the conflicts, no recognition that states terrorize, no acceptance of the right of people to fight the oppressor, no confession of wrong waged against the innocent that had not the intention or the means to threaten America.

I have heard these men, both Bush and Kerry, attest to their deep rooted religious principles, the depth of their faith in the teachings of Jesus, comforting the citizenry that they are fit for the White House because they believe. But I see nothing of Jesus in their behavior, nothing of the compassion that attended his ministry, nothing of the inclusiveness of his teachings, nothing of the love he proffered as the binding source of peace throughout the world.

I look in vain for this Christ in the Christianity practiced by the right wing, fanatical sects that preach the Book of Revelation, reveling in the glory they perceive to be their reward if they destroy the enemies they identify as the enemies of God. I wonder where in this acclaimed Christian land of TV Evangelists and literalist ministers is there a man who acts as Christ would act? I see none. I see only a God forsaken Tele-Evangelist land of vitriol and bigotry where none could say I "love the Lord my God with my whole heart and mind and soul, and my neighbor as myself." They have buried the teachings of Jesus in the quagmire of a malevolent and malicious God of the Old Testament, a God that would order one Semitic tribe to exterminate another. We have not moved beyond the racist hatred that blotted the landscape 2500 years ago.

I would have thought the founding fathers' voices would have turned us against such barbarity, for they knew that such religions were anathema to the rights of the people and to the fledgling Democracy they desired to create. They expunged such organized zealots of religion from civil discourse precisely because they knew its inherent destructive nature. But, no, we have the airwaves turned into streams of venom that flow from the mouths of the heralded self-worshippers whose mantra is hatred for their fellow man, the likes of Pat Robertson, Pastor John Hagee, Franklin Graham, Hal Lindsey, and, now, even our blessed generals who defile the houses of worship not with coins but with cursed bigotry in the person of General Boykin.

I wonder how any person can stand against the tribes that follow these accursed men? What voice can reach the soul of men, if soul they still have after their life of crime, that has been lodged deep in their bloody wallets made fat with their racist hatred for their fellows whose only sin is their belief in a God different from their own? They mount their campaigns on fear, fear lodged in a word that defies definition because it slips and slides, nay, it slithers through meaning like molten lava over rock burying it beneath layers of hot and passionate rhetoric, a word without substance or sense, a word seething with diffidence, anxiety, suspicion, even horror, the word is faith. No word

evokes more fear and mistrust; no word has caused more chaos and wanton destruction, as the Crusades and the Conquistadors, rampaging through Central America, attest; no word can put people in such a state of doubt that they acquiesce to prophets of doom century after century; no word has been and continues to be more destructive in the mouths of fanatics. That is the destructive power of blind faith!

Fanatics have a way, whether they be the Imams guiding Hamas or the robed ministers of Robertson's TV Club or the ultra right Zionists in Israel, with those who abdicate responsibility to think for themselves, those who hand over their minds and conscience to them as they thunder their prophetic curses in dramatic tirades, bathing their flocks in fear and loathing. These fanatics in America, who exist through the courtesy of a democratic secular system that tolerates their presence if not their message, fetter the minds of their laity with absolute truths generated out of myths, negating thereby the very semblance of democratic thought that is premised on individual responsibility; and the lambs they lead to slaughter do not know it. These fanatics defy the laws of the secular state by determining for their congregations what political party they must support, what candidates they must vote for, and what policies they must accept. And for this defiance they pay no taxes!

But it's worse than that. These same fanatics literally compel their congregants, on fear of eternal damnation in Hell's fire, to strap themselves in the swaddling clothes of death and bring that gift to all around them, to support terrorists in the occupied territories of Palestine, to proclaim an enemy identified in the Book of Revelation, an Arab enemy who worships in the Islamic faith. And for this incitement to murder they pay no taxes and suffer no incarceration. What else do we call it but killing for Christ, killing for Allah, killing for Yahweh!

This is our dilemma. We Americans pay the bill; they act in our name. How can we, who speak with the conviction of our conscience, hope to remove the hatred a Hagee or a Robertson breeds against God's creatures? The pictures I saw today of dead and dying children in Iraq, pictures too horrific to be put in main stream newspapers or shown on TV, pictures that cry to the human soul that the pain and suffering must stop also cry out to every true Christian that Jesus' teachings never allowed for such wanton slaughter. Yet these are the innocent victims of our fanatical dependence on the preaching of these men who sit safely ensconced on their splendid chairs amidst tall vases of flowers, smiling beatifically for the cameras.

How can we witness Bush's acceptance, indeed his encouragement, of Ariel Sharon's savagery and not condemn his acts as anathema to the teachings of the Christ he proclaims as his God? How can we suffer in silence the ferociousness of Sharon as he spreads his hatred and nihilism over the bloodied landscape of the unholy lands of ancient Palestine? Our indifference, our silence blessed the rape of Rafah in May, God's

month of renewal; our indifference and our silence blessed a summer of slaughter in the season of God's increase; and today, our indifference and our silence acquiesce to a season of harvest that gathers in the dead and maimed in Gaza.

Where is the voice of America that should cry against these killing fields, these American supported killing fields, these murderous rampages that defile the love Jesus begged we have for our neighbor, a love equal to that we have for ourselves?

Where are the Priests, the Rabbis, the Imams, the quiet Buddha monks, all who claim to love humankind? Why does silence reign? Whose voice are we afraid of? Where are the voices of our leaders, where is Kerry, where is Dean, where is Edwards? Why do we hear words of condemnation when we witness the wanton slaughter in Beslan of children in school yet hear not a word when the IDF slaughters the children in the kindergarten in Jabaliya or our missiles miss their intended target and destroy the lives of innocent people? Does one mother's weeping reach our ear and another goes unheard? I would that every mother's cry would reach our ears as it rents the sky that we might know what Christ meant when he said, "Love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and mind and soul, and thy neighbor as thyself."

William Cook is a professor of English at the University of La Verne in southern California. His new book, [Psalms for the 21st Century](#), was published by Mellen Press. He can be reached at: cookb@ULV.EDU