

Ring of Reaction

Nobody believes President Bush. His continuing hysteria about 'war on terror' does not make him more convincing. Nor does his plan to pour more troops into Iraq get easy passage. But Christian Right continues to be his solid base to promote 'American world order'. Religious Right has many faces but not much is heard about christian fundamentalism in this part of the globe. American expansionism is a threat to world peace and national liberation movement is all that is urgently required for most third world countries to regain their right to exist as sovereign and independent states. With the Christian Right remaining a deciding factor in shaping American foreign policy, no struggle against American hegemonism can succeed without challenging Christian fundamentalism.

Right-wing evangelical American Christian groups in America are among the most vociferous supporters of Bush's global 'war on terror'. As they see it, all religions other than (their version of) Christianity are nothing less than inventions of the Devil. Their followers, they insist, are doomed to eternal perdition in hell. For them America's current 'war on terror' is nothing less than a divine mandate to America under Bush to break down the walls of heathendom, paving the way for them to pursue what they call their global commission to spread the 'good news' of Christianity.

The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) is one of the several American evangelical groups strongly backing Bush's imperialist offensives in Iraq and elsewhere. Established in 1845, the SBC is the largest and most powerful ultra-conservative Protestant Christian organisation in the country. It has a membership of some 16 million in America, with some 42,000 churches. In a statement of its beliefs it insists that salvation is possible only through belief in Jesus Christ and his death on the Cross, and is predicated on baptism in the Christian church. Non-Christians, no matter if they have led morally upright lives, 'become transgressors' and 'are under condemnation, that is, they are lost'. It insists that those 'without a personal commitment to Jesus Christ will be consigned to a literal hell. The SBC, like other evangelicals, sees as its primary task the conversion of the entire world to Christianity. Bush, for his part, has made no bones about his sympathies for the SBC.

As an ultra-right wing church, the SBC's political stance has consistently been pro-establishment, and one of its principal functions has been to provide suitable theological sanction to American hegemonism. In the heydays of the Soviet Union, the SBC was regarded as a bulwark against what was seen as the menacing threat of communism. It lent full support to the American state's war on communism, which it equated, in its own words, with 'cancer'. The 'Christian faith', it declared, 'is incompatible with communism'.

In one of its resolutions, otherwise notoriously reactionary in content insisted that the 'proper and only adequate response to the challenge of communism is to be thoroughly Christian, and to seek to establish and support New Testament churches at home and abroad'. This, of course, tied in comfortably with the American policy of sponsoring right-wing Christian groups in the so-called 'Third World' to counter 'red menace'.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, American Christian evangelicals have been among the most forceful champions of the Huntingtonian thesis of a 'clash of civilisations' pitting the 'Christian' West against Islam. Leading evangelicals have

issued statements that clearly indicate that they see America as engaged in nothing less than a crusade against the Muslim world. No sooner had Bush announced America's latest imperialist offensive in Iraq (which he termed as a 'crusade') than the SBC rallied behind him to provide his declaration with religious sanction. At its annual meeting in 2002 the SBC passed a lengthy resolution on the 'war on terrorism', exhorting Christians to rally behind Bush. It enthusiastically blessed American imperialist aggression against Iraq by arguing that the Christian scriptures explicitly 'command civil authorities to restrain evil and to punish evildoers through the power of the sword'. It fervently appealed to Christians to 'pray for those in authority', and applauded what it called the 'moral clarity' of Bush in his denunciation of 'terrorist' groups as 'evildoers'. It resolved to 'wholeheartedly support the United States government, its intelligence agencies and its military' in what it called the 'just war' against the 'terrorist networks'. But, as SBC saw it, the war, while necessary, was not the final solution to the problem of 'terrorism', which could only come about through the global spread of Christianity. Hence, it concluded its resolution by insisting that the 'conversion of the people of all nations to salvation through belief in the Lord Jesus Christ' was 'the only ultimate answer to all forms of terrorism'.

The SBC is just one of a vast number of well-heeled American fundamentalist Christian organisations that are today major players in American domestic politics and exercise a powerful influence in shaping American foreign policies. The silence of the Western media, by and large, on their pernicious theology and their backing for American expansionism is surprising. If at all the 'clash of civilisations' thesis is to be prevented from coming true and leading the world to the brink of Armageddon, Christian Right cannot be left unchallenged politically in most third world countries.

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