

The Rise of Christian Fundamentalism

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If Christian fundamentalists are to be believed, America's invasion of Iraq and the consequent brutal slaughter of thousands of innocent civilians in that country are all part of a grand divine plan that will finally culminate in the 'second coming' of Jesus Christ. Establishing an empire that will extend all over the globe, Christ will rule like a powerful monarch, saving those who believe in him and dispatching non-believers, all non-Christians and non-conformist Christians, to everlasting perdition in hell. This is no childish nonsense for millions of Christian fundamentalists, who sincerely believe this to be predicted in the Bible. Not surprisingly, American Christian fundamentalists are today among the most fanatic supporters of Bush's global imperialist wars, in Iraq and elsewhere, which they see as in keeping with the divine mandate. They are no eccentric or lunatic fringe elements, for today Christian fundamentalists exercise a powerful influence in American politics. Among them is George Bush himself, who insists that the American invasion of Iraq has been sanctioned by God, with whom he claims to be in personal communication.

While the Western press is awash with stories, real and exaggerated, about 'Islamic fundamentalists', rarely is mention made about Christian fundamentalists, who, with their vast resources and close links with the current American administration, are a potentially more menacing threat than their Muslim counterparts. According to newspaper reports more than a third of Americans are associated with one or the other Christian fundamentalist outfit, most of which are fiercely anti-communist, anti-Muslim and are passionate advocates of free-market capitalism, global American hegemony and the myth of the civilizing mission of white America. In recent years, these fundamentalist groups have been engaged in aggressive missionary work in other countries as well, including in the so-called 'Third World'. Fired by a passionate hatred for other religions, which they dismiss as 'false' and even 'Satanic', they are today among the most well-funded missionary groups in large parts of Asia and Africa. Crusading for Christ, these fundamentalist groups are not simply out fishing for souls. Rather, for them Christianity is only part of the agenda, which also includes aggressively promoting American and Zionist interests. Today, these groups preach not only Christ but also Pax Americana and even American-led imperialist wars, which they bless as holy causes to usher in the final arrival of Jesus.

Texas-based author and preacher Michael Evans is one of the most notorious American Christian fundamentalist preachers today, a passionate advocate of war in the name of Christ. In a recently published book, titled *Beyond Iraq : The Next Move-Ancient Prophecy and Modern-Day Conspiracy Collide* (Whitestone Books, Florida, 2003), he spells out a grand design for American global hegemony, blessed in the guise of a holy global war. Key players in this 'divine' plot include the CIA, the American government and army, and Israel, besides various Christian fundamentalist outfits. The book is dedicated, among others, to what Evans describes as 'two old friends', Ehud Olmert, former Israeli Vice President, and the former Israeli Prime Minister,

Benjamin Netanyahu. Equally revealingly, the book begins with a quotation which graces the lobby of the original headquarters of the CIA.

The jacket of the book describes Evans as a 'TIME magazine best-selling author', who has appeared on the BBC and on American television channels and who has written for such papers as the *Wall Street Journal* and the *Jerusalem Post*. He hobnobs with the highest of American and Israeli politicians and religious leaders, and is evidently taken very seriously in Christian fundamentalist circles. That Evans is also a passionate Bush-backer is amply evident in his claim that, 'I know, from a first hand, personal interview with him that Bush is a man of faith who believes in the Bible'.

Evans is the founder of the 'Jerusalem Prayer Team', which, he says, he established after having been visited by God in a vision. Among those who participated in the inauguration of his outfit were such names as Franklin Graham, Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell, all American Christian fundamentalist leaders, Governor Dick Perry and Representative Dick Armey, and Benjamin Netanyahu, former Israeli Prime Minister. Thousands of others in America and elsewhere, so he claims, have joined his movement in the aftermath of 11 September, 2001. His ultimate aim, he writes, is to have one million 'intercessors praying daily for the peace of Jesus and God's protection for Israel' so that 'demonic powers will be defeated by holy angels in a battle that cannot be seen with the natural eye'.

A fierce Christian Zionist, Evans has close links with the Israeli establishment. The book's jacket states that he received the 'Ambassador Award' from the government of Israel and relates that he has been 'a confidante to most of Israel's prime ministers and to both of Jerusalem's mayors'. The jacket quotes Benjamin Netanyahu as praising Evans for having 'consistently demonstrated the moral clarity that is necessary to defend Israel from the lies and distortions of its enemies'. This is no empty boast: the book contains pictures of Evans with Menachem Begin endorsing his first book, 'Israel: America's Key To Survival', praying with Shimon Peres, comforting Jewish victims of a bomb blast in Israel, launching the 'Jerusalem Prayer Team' along with Jerusalem's mayor, pledging support to Israel before Yitzhak Shamir along with half a million signatures of fellow Christians, championing Israel's cause at the royal palace in Madrid and keeping company with American soldiers in Lebanon and Somalia.

For Evans, and numerous other rabid Christian fundamentalist preachers of hate like him, one of the most crucial purposes of America's invasion of Iraq is the 'defence' of Israel, which he regards as a solemn Christian duty. If till recently Jews were routinely reviled by the Church as 'Christ-killers', and, accordingly, hounded by Christian authorities, many of today's Christian fundamentalists, like Evans, are passionate advocates of the state of Israel. This does not, however, represent any shift in their fervent belief, intrinsic to mainstream Christianity, that non-Christians, Jews included, are destined for Hell. Rather, it is part of a wider conversion agenda. Jesus, they believe, will return to the world to rule only once the Jews have 'returned' to Palestine and have rebuilt the temple of David that was destroyed almost two thousand years ago. After this momentous event, many Jews will convert to Christianity and those who refuse to will be sent to hell. Till then, Christian fundamentalists argue, the Jews and their state must be passionately defended from their 'enemies', who are invariably identified as Arabs and Muslims.

The 'defence' of Israel, a central point in the Christian fundamentalist agenda, is typically argued in racist terms. Israel, Christian fundamentalists believe, are God's 'chosen people', and they quote the Bible as making this claim, suggesting, therefore, that non-Jewish peoples are somehow lesser beings. Evans, too, makes this point and argues that according to the Bible 'God will bless those who bless Israel' and will 'curse those who curse it'. 'History records', he says, 'that God deals with nations in accordance with how those nations deal with Israel'. Hence, in the 'defence' of Israel, Christians, Evans argues, have no choice. If they are true to their faith, he says, they must join hands with America in its war for 'defending' Israel, and must 'support Israel in every possible way'. 'We must either choose Mount Zion [Jerusalem] and be among those who obey the voice of the Spirit of the Lord', he writes, 'or we will be left to the passions of our flesh, drinking the wine of her [Babylon's or Iraq's] fornication'.

The invasion of Iraq, and the broader American 'war on terror', is, Evans says, is akin to 'divine light [...] proclaiming like a trumpet a spiritual battle of monumental proportions', pitting Babylon, the Biblical Iraq, the 'spiritual centre of darkness', against Jerusalem or contemporary Israel, the 'spiritual centre of light'. But so that this 'divine light' should spread beyond the confines of Babylon, Evans pleads for America to extend its war all over the globe, to every country that dares to challenge American supremacy and the state of Israel. This war, he says, should aim at the elimination of all 'terrorists', defined as those who refuse to support Israeli and American interests. In this, the invasion and occupation of Iraq is of vital importance, Evans says, because it will 'become a US base' to destroy 'terrorist' networks elsewhere in the Middle East and eventually to usher in what he calls 'the apocalyptic battle' of Armageddon, 'the final battles of the ages' as allegedly 'prophesied in Daniel, Jeremiah and Revelations', chapters of the Bible.

Christian fundamentalists are ardent advocates of free-market capitalism, having played a key role in America's war against communism during the Cold War. Christ, capitalism and American supremacy go together, Evans believes, and so, while announcing that an American-spearheaded global war is precisely what Christ mandates, he approvingly quotes Isser Harel, founder of the Israeli secret services' organization Mossad, who speaks of the 'terror' threat to America's 'freedom', 'capitalism' and 'power', and exhorts America to take appropriate defence measures. Evans goes so far as to advise the America to capture all the oil wealth in Arab lands in order to prevent 'terrorists' from using oil wealth to target Israel, home to God's supposedly 'special people'. A more ingenuous excuse to justify American greed could hardly be devised!

Since Muslims, especially the Arabs, are branded virtually as agents of the Devil, Evans argues that America, as self-appointed agent of Christ, should have no qualms about invading oil-rich Arab lands. This would, he says, break America's dependence on Muslim countries for oil. If America seizes all Arab oil-fields, it would, he says, sharply reduce oil prices, forcing Muslim countries 'to their knees', giving them only two options : 'cooperate with the war on terror or go bankrupt'. At the same time as he exhorts America to invade and occupy all the countries, no matter what the human cost, Evans warns that it should not be serious about its rhetoric of exporting 'democracy' to the Middle East, for, he argues, it would lead to anti-American and anti-Israeli Islamists taking over. □□□

