

The Covert Kingdom

GS readers, it is important to realize that the Neo-Conservative movement in the U.S. and its sychphant organizations and governments abroad do not represent just "another political movement," as we may tend to think, nor a passing trend. They represent as serious a Medieval turn against the advances of the modern world and toward a Dark Age of ignorance and induced misery as did the Ayatollah Khomeni's fundamentalist Islamic regime in Iran. A worse aspect of the Christian Reconstructionists is the power of Uncle Saul's military and economy to push their twisted doctrine into every corner of the world, which is, by the way, part of their chilling agenda. These people are not a marginal bunch of kooks, but are a growing mainstream within the Christian Conservative plurality in this country.

1. "Christian Reconstruction is blunt stuff, hard and unforgiving as a gravestone. Capital punishment, central to the Reconstructionist ideal, calls for the death penalty in a wide range of crimes, including abandonment of the faith, blasphemy, heresy, witchcraft, astrology, adultery, sodomy, homosexuality, striking a parent, and "unchastity before marriage" (but for women only). Biblically correct methods of execution include stoning, the sword, hanging, and burning. Stoning is preferred, according to Gary North, the self-styled Reconstructionist economist, because stones are plentiful and cheap. Biblical Law would also eliminate labor unions, civil rights laws, and public schools." (This movement claims 40% of American voters. No wonder things are so screwed up!) They took over the GOP in early '90's.

The Covert Kingdom: Thy Will be done, on earth as it is in Texas

by Joe Bageant

www.dissidentvoice.org

May 18, 2004

Not long ago I pulled my car up alongside a tiny wooden church in the woods, a stark white frame box my family built in 1840. And as always, an honest-to-god chill went through me, for the ancestral ghosts presumably hovering over the graves there. From the wide open front door the Pentecostal preacher's message echoed from within the plain wooden walls: "Thank you Gawd for giving us strawng leaders like President Bush during this crieeesis. Praise you Lord and guide him in this battle with Satan's Muslim armies." If I had chosen to go back down the road a mile or so to the sprawling new Bible Baptist church -- complete with school facilities, professional sound system and in-house television production -- I could have heard approximately the same exhortation. Usually offered at the end of a prayer for sons and daughters of members in the congregation serving in Iraq, it can be heard in any of the thousands upon thousands of praise temples across our republic.

After a lifetime of identity conflict, I have come to accept that, blood-wise, if not politically or spiritually, these are my people. And as a leftist it is very clear to me these days why urban liberals not only fail to understand these people, but do not even know they exist, other than as some general lump of ignorant, intolerant voters called "the religious right," or the "Christian Right," or "neocon Christians." But until progressives come to understand what these people read, hear, are told and deeply believe, we cannot understand American politics, much less be effective. Given fundamentalist Christianity's inherent cultural isolation, it is nearly impossible for most enlightened Americans to imagine, in honest human terms, what fundamentalist Americans believe, let alone understand why we should all care.

For liberals to examine the current fundamentalist phenomenon in America is to accept some hard truths. For starters, we libs are even more embattled than most of us choose to believe. Any significant liberal and progressive support is limited to a few urban pockets on each coast and along the upper edge of the Midwestern tier states. Most of the rest of the nation, the much vaunted heartland, is the dominion of the conservative and charismatic Christian. Turf-wise, it's pretty much their country, which is to say it presently belongs to George W. Bush for some valid reasons. Remember: He did not have to steal the entire election, just a little piece of it in Florida. Evangelical born-again Christians of one stripe or another were then, and are now, 40% of the electorate, and they support Bush 3-1. And as long as their clergy and their worst instincts tell them to, they will keep on voting for him, or someone like him, regardless of what we view as his arrogant folly and sub-intelligence. Forget about changing their minds. These Christians do not read the same books we do, they do not get their information from anything remotely resembling reasonably balanced sources, and in fact, consider even CBS and NBC super-liberal networks of porn and the

Devil's lies. Given how fundamentalists see the modern world, they may as well be living in Iraq or Syria, with whom they share approximately the same Bronze Age religious tenets. They believe in God, Rumsfeld's Holy War and their absolute duty as God's chosen nation to kick Muslim ass up one side and down the other. In other words, just because millions of Christians appear to be dangerously nuts does not mean they are marginal.

Having been born into a Southern Pentecostal/Baptist family of many generations, and living in this fundamentalist social landscape means that I gaze into the maw of neocon Christianity daily. Hell, sometimes hourly. My brother is a fundamentalist preacher, as are a couple of my nephews, as were many of my ancestors going back to god-knows-when. My entire family is born-again; their lives are completely focused inside their own religious community, and on the time when Jesus returns to earth -- Armageddon and The Rapture.

Only another liberal born into a fundamentalist clan can understand what a strange, sometimes downright hellish family circumstance it is -- how such a family can love you deeply, yet despise everything you believe in, see you as a humanist instrument of Satan, and still be right there for you when your back goes out or a divorce shatters your life. As a socialist and a half-assed leftist activist, obviously I do not find much conversational fat to chew around the Thanksgiving table. Politically and spiritually, we may be said to be dire enemies. Love and loathing coexist side by side. There is talk, but no communication. In fact, there are times when it all has science fiction overtones...times when it seems we are speaking to one another through an unearthly veil, wherein each party knows it is speaking to an alien. There is a sort of high eerie mental whine in the air. This is the sound of mutually incomprehensible worlds hurtling toward destiny, passing with great psychological friction, obvious to all, yet acknowledged by none.

Between such times, I wait rather anxiously and strive for change, for relief from what feels like an increased stifling of personal liberty, beauty, art, and self-realization in America. They wait in spooky calmness for Jesus. They believe that, until Jesus does arrive, our "satanic humanist state and federal legal systems" should be replaced with pure "Biblical Law." This belief is called Christian Reconstructionism. Though it has always been around in some form, it began expanding rapidly about 1973, with the publication of R. J. Rushdoony's, *Institutes of Biblical Law* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1982).

Time out please... In a nod toward fairness and tolerance -- begging the question of whether liberals are required to tolerate the intolerant -- I will say this: Fundamentalists are "good people." In daily life, they are warm-hearted and generous to a fault. They live with feet on the ground (albeit with eyes cast heavenward) and with genuine love and concern for their neighbors. After spending 30 years in progressive western cities such as Boulder, Colorado and Eugene, Oregon, I would have to say that conservative Christians actually do what liberals usually only talk about. They visit the sick and the elderly, give generously of their time and money to help those in need, and put unimaginable amounts of love and energy into their families, even as Pat Robertson and Rush Limbaugh blare in the background. Their good works extend internationally -- were it not for American Christians, there would be little health care on the African continent and other similar places. OK, that's the best I can do in showing due respect for the extreme Christian Right. Now to get back to the Christian Reconstructionists...

Christian Reconstruction: Establishing a Savage Eden

Christian Reconstruction is blunt stuff, hard and unforgiving as a gravestone. Capital punishment, central to the Reconstructionist ideal, calls for the death penalty in a wide range of crimes, including abandonment of the faith, blasphemy, heresy, witchcraft, astrology, adultery, sodomy, homosexuality, striking a parent, and "unchastity before marriage" (but for women only). Biblically correct methods of execution include stoning, the sword, hanging, and burning. Stoning is preferred, according to Gary North, the self-styled Reconstructionist economist, because stones are plentiful and cheap. Biblical Law would also eliminate labor unions, civil rights laws, and public schools. Leading Reconstruction theologian David Chilton declares, "The Christian goal for the world is the universal development of Biblical theocratic republics..." Incidentally, said Republic of Jesus would not only be a legal hell, but an ecological one as well -- Reconstructionist doctrine calls for the scrapping of environmental protection of all kinds, because there will be no need for this planet earth once The Rapture occurs. You may not have heard of Rushdoony or Chilton or North, but taken either separately or together, they have influenced far more contemporary American minds than Noam Chomsky, Gore Vidal and Howard Zinn combined.

A moreover covert movement, although slightly more public of late, Christian Reconstructionism has for decades exerted one hell of an influence through its scores of books, publications and classes taught in colleges and universities. Over the past 30 years, Reconstructionist doctrine has permeated not only the religious right, but mainstream churches as well, via the charismatic movement. Its impact on politics and religion in this nation have been massive, with many mainstream churches pushed rightward by pervasive Reconstructionism, without even knowing it. Clearly the Methodist church down the street from my house does not understand what it has become. Other mainstream churches with more progressive leadership, simply flinch and bow to the Reconstructionists at every turn. They have to, if they want to retain members these days. Further complicating matters is that leading Reconstruction thinkers, along with their fellow travelers, the Dominionists, are all but invisible to non-fundamentalist

America. (I will spare you the agony of the endless doctrinal hair-splitting that comes with making fundamentalist distinctions of any sort -- I would not do that to a dog. But if you are disposed toward self-punishment, you can take it upon yourself to learn the differences between Dominionism, Pretribulationism, Midtribulationism, and Posttribulationism, Premillennialism, Millennialism... I recommend the writings of the British author and scholar George Monbiot, who has put the entire maddening scheme of it all together -- corporate implications, governmental and psychological meaning -- in a couple of excellent books.)

Fundamentalists such as my family have no idea how thoroughly they have been orchestrated by Reconstructionist-driven Christian media and other innovations of the past few decades. They probably would not care now, even if they knew. Like most of their tribe (dare we say class, in a nation that so vehemently denies it has a class system?) they want to embrace some simple foundational truth that will rationalize all the conflict and confusion of a postmodern world. Some handbook that will neatly explain everything, make all their difficult decisions for them. And among these classic American citizens, prone toward religious zealotry since the Great Awakening of the 18th Century, what rock could appear more dependable upon which to cling than the infallible Holy Bible? From there it was a short step for Christian Reconstructionist leaders to conclude that such magnificent infallibility should be enforced upon all other people, in the same spirit as the Catholic Spanish Conquistadors or the Arab Muslim Moors before them. It's an old, old story, a brutal one mankind cannot seem to shake.

Christian Reconstruction strategists make clear in their writings that homeschooling and Christian academies have been and continue to create the Rightist Christian cadres of the future, enabling them to place ever-increasing numbers of believers in positions of governmental influence. The training of Christian cadres is far more sophisticated than the average liberal realizes. There now stretches a network of dozens of campuses across the nation, each with its strange cultish atmosphere of smiling Christian pod people, most of them clones of Jerry Falwell's Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia. But how many outsiders know the depth and specificity of Reconstructionist political indoctrination in these schools? For example, Patrick Henry College in Purcellville, Virginia, a college exclusively for Christian homeschoolers, offers programs in strategic government intelligence, legal training and foreign policy, all with a strict, Bible-based "Christian worldview." Patrick Henry is so heavily funded by the Christian right it can offer classes below cost. In the Bush administration, seven percent of all internships are handed out to Patrick Henry students, along with many others distributed among similar religious rightist colleges. The Bush administration also recruits from the faculties of these schools, i.e. the appointments of right-wing Christian activist Kay Coles James, former dean of the Pat Robertson School of government, as director of the U.S. office of personnel. What better position than the personnel office from which to recruit more fundamentalists? Scratch any of these supposed academics and you will find a Christian Reconstructionist. I know because I have made the mistake of inviting a few of these folks to cocktail parties. One university department head told me he is moving to rural Mississippi where he can better recreate the lifestyle of the antebellum South, and its "Confederate Christian values." It gets real strange real quick.

Lest the Christian Reconstructionists be underestimated, remember that it was Reconstructionist strategists whose "stealth ideology" managed the takeover of the Republican Party in the early 1990s. That takeover now looks mild in light of today's neocon Christian implantations in the White House, the Pentagon and the Supreme Court and other federal entities. As much as liberals screech in protest, few understand the depth and breadth of the Rightist Christian takeover underway. They catch the scent but never behold the beast itself. Yesterday I heard a liberal Washington-based political pundit on NPR say the Radical Christian right's local and regional political action peak was a past fixture of the Reagan era. I laughed out loud (it was a bitter laugh) and wondered if he had ever driven 20 miles eastward on U.S. Route 50 into the suburbs of Maryland, Virginia or West Virginia. The fellow on NPR was a perfect example of the need for liberal pundits to get their heads out of their asses, get outside the city, quit cruising the Internet and meet some Americans who do not mirror their own humanist educations and backgrounds. If they did, they would grasp the importance The Rapture has taken on in American national and international politics. Despite the media's shallow interpretation of The Rapture's significance, it is a hell of a lot more than just a couple hundred million Left Behind books sold. The most significant thing about the Left Behind series is that, although they are classified as "fiction," most fundamentalist readers I know accept the series as an absolute reality soon coming to a godless planet near you. It helps to understand that everything is literal in the Fundamentalist voter universe.

I'll Fly Away, Oh Lordy (But you won't)

Yes, when The Rapture comes Christians with the right credentials will fly away. But you and I, dear reader, will probably be among those who suffer a thousand-year plague of boils. So stock up on antibiotics, because according to the "Rapture Index" it is damned near here. See for yourself at <http://www.raptureready.com>. Part gimmick, part fanatical obsession, the index is a compilation of such things as floods, interest rates, oil prices, global turmoil... As I write this the index stands at 144, just one point below critical mass, when people like us will be smitten under a sky filled with deliriously happy naked flying Christians.

But to blow The Rapture off as amusing-if-scary fantasy is not being honest on my part. Cheap glibness has always

been my vice, so I must say this: Personally, I've lived with The Rapture as the psychologically imprinted backdrop of my entire life. In fact, my own father believed in it until the day he died, and the last time I saw him alive we talked about The Rapture. And when he asked me, "Will you be saved?" Will you be there with me on Canaan's shore after The Rapture?" I was forced to feign belief in it to give a dying man inner solace. But that was the spiritual stuff of families, and living and dying, religion in its rightful place, the way it is supposed to be, personal and intimate -- not political. Thus, until the advent of the Reconstructionist Christian influence, I'd certainly never heard The Rapture spoken about in the context of a Texan being selected by God to prepare its way.

Now however, this apocalyptic belief, yearning really, drives an American Christian polity in the service of a grave and unnerving agenda. The pseudo-scriptural has become an apocalyptic game plan for earthly political action: To wit, the messiah can only return to earth after an apocalypse in Israel called Armageddon, which the fundamentalists are promoting with all their power so that The Rapture can take place. The first requirement was establishment of the state of Israel. Done. The next is Israel's occupation of the Middle East as a return of its "Biblical lands," which in the Reconstructionist scheme of things, means more wars. These Christian conservatives believe peace cannot ever lead to The Rapture, and indeed impedes the 1,000 year Reign of Christ. So anyone promoting peace is an enemy, a tool of Satan, hence the fundamentalist support for any and all wars Middle Eastern, in which their own kids die a death often viewed by Christian parents as a holy martyrdom of its own kind. "He (or she) died protecting this country's Christian values." One hears it over and over from parents of those killed.

The final scenario of the Rapture has the "saved" Christians settling onto a cloud after the long float upward, from whence they watch a Rambo Jesus wipe out the remnants of the human race. Then in a mop-up operation by God, the Jews are also annihilated, excepting a few who convert to Christianity. The Messiah returns to earth. End of story. Incidentally, the Muslim version, I was surprised to learn recently, is almost exactly the same, but with Muslims doing the cloud-sitting.

If we are lucky as a nation, this period in American history will be remembered as just another very dark time we managed to get through. Otherwise, one shudders to think of the logical outcome. No wonder the left is depressed. Meanwhile, our best thinkers on the left ask us to consider our perpetual U.S. imperial war as a fascist, military/corporate war, and indeed it is that too. But tens of millions of hardworking, earnest American Christians see it as far more than that. They see a war against all that is un-Biblical, the goal of which is complete world conquest, or put in Christian terminology, "dominion." They will have no less than the "inevitable victory God has promised his new chosen people," according to the Recon masters of the covert kingdom. Screw the Jews, they blew their chance. If perpetual war is what it will take, then let it be perpetual. After all, perpetual war is exactly what the Bible promised. Like it or not, this is the reality (or prevailing unreality) with which we are faced. The 2004 elections, regardless of outcome, will not change that. Nor will it necessarily bring ever-tolerant liberals to openly acknowledge what is truly happening in this country, the thing that has been building for a long, long time -- a holy war, a covert Christian jihad for control of America and the entire world. Millions of Americans are under the spell of an extraordinarily dangerous mass psychosis.

Pardon me, but religious tolerance be damned. Somebody had to say it.

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