JOE BAGEANT If liberal society is to survive the rise of the Godwacks, we need to start by calling them what they are

JOE BAGEANT

Hung Over In The End Times

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SINCE GEORGE BUSH'S REELECTION, the

Christian nutjobs have mounted an assault on my block. In the five years I've lived in this neighborhood I've never had so much as one Jehovah's Witness knock at the door.

But last Saturday morning my neighbor Tinka-thewool-weaver called to warn of approaching Bible thumpers working the doorbells on my side of the

street. Sure enough, out the window were two women in long skirts with bad Bible hairdos headed my way. "Incoming Jesus freaks at nine o'clock high!" I yelled to my wife. We jumped back into bed and let 'em pound on the door and drop tracts in the mailbox while Barb read the *Washington Post* and I caught anther 20 zees. That, we thought, was the end the end of it. But next day while walking my dog Bingo — a black pisshound of dubious origin — a white van cruised alongside us slowly, as if confused about directions. I asked if I could help, and BAM! I should have know better. It was evangelist sucker

bait. The Christian church logo on the driver's baseball cap (any time you see a cross, flames and a sword in a logo, run) told me I'd stepped into a fundamentalist ambush. The driver had one of those delirious smiles only a fundie can muster, and that glint of mad zeal that gives one the heebie jeebies. I yanked Bingo away from a good piss and we wheeled off. "Jesus wants you to have a nice day," I heard over my shoulder, thinking to myself, "Then why inna hell don't you make like Jesus and let me have one." Somehow I suspect we've not seen the last of these god-crazed bastards and that Bingo and I will have to start taking our walks in the alleys instead of the streets. And maybe move the weekend cocktail hour up to 3 PM just to spite the fundies.

As the elections proved for once and for all, Christian fanatics are plenty thick in the good ole U S of A these days and can no longer be written off as Dogpatch religionists. Historically, they have always been around and in about the same numbers too, just less visible. But currently they are hopped up about god giving them their own president and even their own political party. Of course in a country limited to two parties — the Republican Party of Heavy Imperialism and Democratic Imperialism Lite — this spells trouble for those of us who do not handle snakes or wash other people's feet during church services. It is one thing for them to have it in for their enemies, and quite another to have their own president, cabinet, Supreme Court, and newly established Department of Fatherland Surveillance backing them up. Not since the days of Andrew Jackson's populist hog and hominy presidency have these people seen one of their own farting at the Oval Room desk. And as usual, the fundies have blood in their eye, this time for liberal humanism, free thought, Trojan rubber products and the number 666.

Given the near-fascist nature of U.S. governmental behavior lately, I do not

think it is overstating the case to observe that we liberals seem to have become, at least to some degree, the new Jews of the rising Republican Reich. You remember the old German theme about a certain kind of people being responsible for everything wrong with an otherwise perfect white Christian society. It took a Republican mind to figure out that "elite" liberals constituted exactly such a threat to our national way of life. Remember that the German public saw the Jews as being against its "values" too, and that they had declared cultural and legal war on the Jews long before Hitler came along to galvanize the most nationalistic elements among the German people. Just as the Jews were used in Nazi Germany to rally Christian Germans, American liberals were used in the last election by the ultra-right to rouse Fundamentalist Christians - people who were previously uninterested in the GOP political agenda but got quite excited when it was pointed out to them that their anti-Christ was, lo and beshit! right among them. A godless homo-loving stem cell sucking liberal elite right here in Riverdale! The fact that we are at least one half of the population prevents us from being an "elite" somehow escaped everyone in the excitement.

In Germany it came down to jealousy of the Jews' success in capitalist society by a group of Christian white people who believed they had been excluded. In America it came down to supposedly being culturally excluded by the liberal elite, plus the voting rights of fetuses and allowing gay people to wear wedding rings. We can safely assume the fetuses don't really care one way or another. The gays are still pissed. In both cases however, the German and the American, Christianity is a form of political ideology masquerading as religious faith, deploying the ultimate force of government to root out the "evil" and dominate with its own particular delusion.

Meanwhile, it's hard to tell who is controlling whom. Do the Christian Fundamentalists in this country now have significant control of the Republican Party? Or were they simply duped into backing the latest U.S. capitalist imperialist grab for empire and exploitation of ordinary working Americans. My guess is that the big Republican capitalists do not give a fuck, so long as they can grab the money and run when the lights are shot out, and that the Christians don't care as long as they get a shot at swapping the Constitution with the Bible.

On one hand the Republicans want to own the world. On the other the godwacks want to dominate it, or destroy it if they can't: "Ya bow to my god buddy, or we blow this whole pop stand off the map...take everybody out...startin with the Middle East." As near as I can tell, fundamentalists in every religion have this in common – destroying the world to bring on their brand of paradise. The majority of Americans disagree with Christian or Jewish fundamentalist ideas, but there is no way to call the fundies on it because their agenda is couched in religious language and symbols. And we all know for crap sake that America stands for religious freedom. Even fruitcake religious freedom. So we do not challenge the Christian or right wing Zionist freaks among us (It's open season on Muslims however.) We few who do challenge religion are declared satanic secular humanists, anti-Semitic or anti-Islamic. All of which works well for only one group – the rightwing political crazies who, in their quest for oil, capital, territory, or whatever, use god rhetoric to drive these zealots like a pack of blind slobbering dogs. This story is so old that it is sometimes hard to have much faith in the human race at all, isn't it?

The Sacred Screwjob

It was recently pointed out to me by a psychotherapist that each of the three major Middle Eastern Bronze Age religions, Christianity, Judaism and Islam, has a screwjob that is central to its narrative — a messiah, or prophet who got the schnickle while here on earth. He is symbolic of the travails in our own graceless, uninspired lives. But as luck would have it, those prophets and messiahs left a divine promise of redemption from this earthly life of car payments, bitchy wives, kids on dope, or in the case of the Christian fundies, the utter boredom of being a religious zealot. It is called Faith. The faithful can identify with the founding patriarchs, and be redeemed by surrender to Jesus, a *jihad*, or a covenant, a *b'rith*. A redemption fulfilled, unfortunately, at the end of the world. So the best hope is the end of all life on earth. (You never catch a break from these people.) But it is the only deal on the table for most of poor suffering humanity.

Freud would have said this magical thinking and heavenly spook stuff is our cultural ideal, the glue that gives us a common identity and holds us together as a people. Our mythology. Which would have been just fine with most of us if the fundamentalists could leave it at that. But ignorant mouth breathing fundamentalists who cannot read without moving their lips take it all literally as a reading of history, one that harkens them to political action. Myth as charter. When your mythology happily calls for the end of the world to bring on a paradise no one has ever seen, well, it makes for some piss poor politics. I think we can all agree on that. And as if that weren't enough of a headache for the rest of us, it calls for *our* conversion to *their* delusion, elsewise be destroyed as infidels. You are either with them or against them. Most of us would rather be *away* from them, but the world

is too small to run from these days.

At the same time, the faithful presume themselves to be aggrieved holy victims, every last damned one of them. And when you are a victim, whether it be of the removal of the Ten Commandments from your white cracker court house by onanist liberal heathens "frum up nawth," or the refusal of the Great Satan Kansas School board to add humus and sheep's eyes to the school lunch program, you are entitled to revenge in the form of taking down the entire world. What the hell? God is gonna do it anyway at the end time, which anybody who reads the Good Book knows is any day now. Just look around at the amount of thigh showing these days, or the lesbians jumping little school girls in the Oklahoma high school restrooms (according to republican Senate candidate Tom Coburn.) Sure signs of the end times. About the only thing all three gods agree on is that exposed belly buttons and young folks having too much fun leads to the end of the world. So blow it the fuck up now. Start a nuclear war, then watch Jesus return to earth and turn feckless liberal eyeballs to jelly. Just like in the Left Behind series. And even if these turn out not to be the end times (again) what the hell good is a religion if you don't get to kill somebody or at least have a certified infidel to make miserable?

None of this would be possible without religious ecstasy — otherwise known as psychotic hysteria. Always there is a hysterical conversion in which you get taken up in jihadist frenzy, or born again and never have to take responsibility for your own life or happiness, never have to think — which I must admit is halfway attractive to me, but I'd rather get drunk to do it. Once you succumb to religious delusion, thinking is replaced by incomprehensible texts, magical images and exhor-

tations. Best of all, you do not have to die. Not really. When the Rapture comes, you go floating right up out of your car, sailing heavenward naked as a jaybird and bathed in that Cecil B. Demille lighting (When the Rapture comes, I'm getting a brand new Volvo from one of these floaters. Hey buddy, leave the keys in the ignition.) Or you pop right up out of the grave looking like you did when you were twenty one. Or wake up with Allah and a couple dozen virgins with you-knowwhat on their minds.

Christian dialogue my sweet ass!

But to be more serious for a moment, and a damned brief one I promise... You cannot talk to these people and you cannot reach them with words or language. Not unless it is Biblical or Koranic or otherwise scriptural. Dialogue is impossible even though, publicly at least, they claim to want dialogue. (Take it from me. What they want is to convert you. I've wasted years on that dialogue gig.) Their only language is religious rhetoric and that's damned narrow stuff. Combined with the emotionalism of the born-again consciousness state, it reduces them to incomprehensible psychotics, especially when they feel threatened, which is constantly. Calm psychotics, but delusional and unreachable people nevertheless. I have hundreds of emails from liberals who were born into fundamentalism whose parents have cast them out of the family, so be assured they will have no trouble persecuting secular humanist strangers, given the chance.

As a life long student of human consciousness through both the literature of consciousness plus countless homegrown experiments with every kind of mind bending dope I could get my hands on, let me say this: Religious fundamentalists

experience archaic states of liminal consciousness of a type long atrophied or lost to most of us. Vestigial ecstatic states such as adoration, and ecstatic rapture, states that probably still reside down inside human hardwiring, but are little accessed by modern humans. States that lie outside reason and logic, and are indeed antithetical to them. Thus, there can be no dialogue because that which is not born of reason cannot be reasoned with. These people not only do not negotiate, they cannot even hear you. Most liberals have yet to figure this out.

But most liberals will never figure it out because they will never set foot in a fundamentalist church. It's one of those things you have to experience to understand, maybe even be born into. For example, having been raised in fundamentalism, I am still prone to those states, which is why I do not go to church with relatives of friends here. Given enough of that electrifying overamped spiritual group think fervor, I'm as likely as anyone there to speak in tongues. My heart always pounds and I always break into tears. You probably would too, given enough exposure, though I'm sure you don't believe it. It is some primitive social submersion thing and you are not as strong as you might think. Something ancient and primary happens when one is "seized by the holy spirit," a group psychosis that over time cannot be resisted. And it has nothing to do with how smart you think you are, which is why so many reasonably educated people seem to fall under its spell. There is a powerful sense of emotional and spiritual release, beautiful anxious joy and well-being, and yes, love. The fundamentalists of course attribute this to the spirit of god. But I have also experienced it on LSD in settings that permitted self-examination of the phenomenon, and I would have to say there is a cultish element of mob psychology involved in the Christian fundamentalist man-

ifestation of this state. Cultish especially in the sense that you have to stay with the cult (congregation) to sustain the fundamentalist consciousness state. Otherwise it wears off – you "fall away from God's church." Each fundamentalist church is its own cult, (which is why there are so many fractious doctrinal disagreements between them) and the benefits are sustainable only as long as one is a cult member. This is also why each church perceives itself as being outnumbered, stranded in the secular world around them. They are. However, in their cultural isolation – and by culture, I mean real culture, not the culture industry crap – they perceive themselves as threatened, so they go on the offensive. The only thing threatening them is the ordinary changing world, which they see as evil because A—it does not adhere to a 2000 year old world view, and B—everything is reduced to good and evil, period.

My friend, Scott Ross, talk show host on Pat Robertsons's Christian Broadcasting Network, (don't laugh, he's got 50 million viewers, knows Eric Clapton and Bob Dylan and is married to one of the Ronettes) recently proved to me once again that not all fundamentalists are bent on world domination (called dominionism in fundie speak.) It is only fair to say that fundamentalists fall along a spectrum, and not every fundamentalist, as the milder ones are quick to point out, is spoiling for a world war to bring on Armageddon. However, the same nihilistic eschatological theme runs throughout fundamentalism (you are born shit in the eyes of god and unless you cop to His program, you will remain shit, after which you will become a sack of burning shit in hell.) binding their outlook and, as we have seen, their political agenda. Their differences with us are the difference between the blackest Old Testament doomsday thinking and that of the

Great Enlightenment, with which began the unraveling of these ancient hardassed religious regimes (in Europe at least.) Maybe I should put it more simply: Old Testament Christianity is an essentially blood worshipping, war making religion (whose symbol is a bloody man on a wooden pole) and I have seen too many times that when they get anywhere near politics they fuck over anyone who resists seeing things their way. As for the supposedly more moderate fundamentalists, you'll never hear one of them speak up against such outrages. They vote with the mob. (Sorry Scott.)

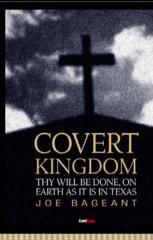
There should be some logical point to this rambling screed, but I cannot think of one, other than this: Don't kid yourself about making peace with these people. And for god's sake don't believe the pundit's horseshit as to it being about "values." It is about a minority among us who want to stamp out all the advances made during the Enlightenment – take us back to Biblical Law, wars and rumors of wars. And it is about a band of dyspeptic, neoconservative money grubbing bastards who knew how to exploit our most ancient and destructive legacy, the war making Calvinist fundamentalism brought here by the Scots Irish and still smoldering across the heartland. By now most of you who live where you can buy a copy of the New York Times without special ordering it, or feel free to walk down the street arm in arm with a lover of another race, are starting to wake up. All I can say is that you have worse enemies than you know, and they will still be around next election. If there is one. And they can crush us if they manage to align themselves with the same kind of oppressive bastards they did this time. Which they will. They never cease, proof of which is that what we saw last November was the culmination of twenty years of organizing. What to do about it is still

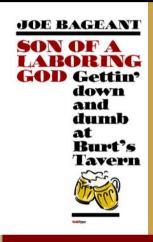
being debated, but to my mind, publicly calling these people what they really are would be a damned good start.

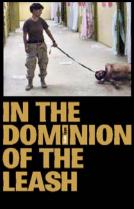
I am often accused of middlebrowing some very complex topics, politics and religion chief among them. I don't deny the charge honey child. But most of the world's big issues are over my head. Yours too, I'm willing to bet. Fortunately though, we can find solutions for the smaller abuses the fundamentalists vest upon us. Take those Pentecostal door thumpers intruding upon my Saturday morning hangover. It seems my dog Bingo has a bladder problem and excitedly pisses on the shoes of visitors at my door. I just can't wait until the next fundie comes a knocking.

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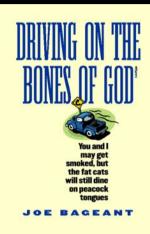
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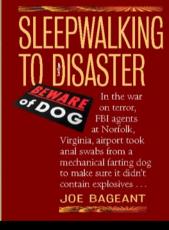




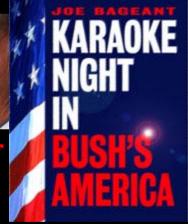












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