

HOLY TERROR: AL QAI'DA AND OTHER FUNDAMENTALISMS

Fundamentalism in all religious traditions is impervious to suppression.
The more one tries to squelch it, the stronger it becomes.
Counter it with cruelty, and it gains adherents.
Kill its leaders, and they become martyrs.
Respond with despotism, and it becomes the sole voice of opposition.
Try to control it, and it will turn against you.
Try to appease it, and it will take control.
--Reza Aslan¹
No God but God

Introduction

Religious crime is not like ordinary crime. Religious adherents are not ordinary criminals. They belong to what intrinsically are “cultures of dissent.”² Religion itself is a modern word, unknown to the Greco-Roman world, which recognized such phenomena as superstitions, myth, sacrifice, worship, mystery cults, and gods, but did not separate out religion as an object of contemplation or study. Karen Armstrong divides the history of religion into two epochs, “pre-modern” and “modern.” Fundamentalism, she asserts, is a modern development that partakes of the features of the world it rejects.

Fundamentalism is a paradox. It looks nostalgically to the origins of its faith, wishes to reproduce them in the here and now, but it is an innovation and it regards its sacred texts as both authoritative and “scientific.” In the pre-modern world in which all of the world’s major religions arose, innovation was suspect and religious texts were not interpreted literally. They were symbolic expressions of the otherwise inexpressible and eternal verities of what was ultimately real and beyond a merely human grasp.³ But innovation and science arose during the transition to modernism in Europe during the three great historical upheavals we now refer to as the Protestant Reformation, the Enlightenment, and the

¹ *No God but God: The Origins, Evolution, and Future of Islam*, 2005 (New York: Random House) p. 247.

² Stephen J. Stein, *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism: Volume III*, p. .

³ *The Battle for God: A History of Fundamentalism*, 2000 (New York: Random House) p. .

Scientific Revolution.

How does that make religious crimes and religious adherents who commit them different from ordinary crimes and criminals? What does it mean to call religions “cultures of dissent?” And how are these questions related to religious, or holy, terror? Is there a relationship between holy terror and fundamentalism? Is religion good or bad for us?

The first point I wish to make is that religion is a matter of ultimate concern. Paul Tillich and Robert Baird recognized that Christians professed a truth that mattered more to them than the fulfillment of basic needs often cited by psychologists as fundamental to human motivation—food, drink, sex, self-defense. The ultimate concern of a zealous Christian may even trump the life of oneself or one’s family, as we have seen among so-called “fringe cults” such as the People’s Temple, the Branch Davidians, or the Montana Freeman. The 900-odd suicides and homicides committed at Jonestown in Guyana twenty-seven years ago were not ordinary crimes of passion, greed, or ambition; they were an expression of defiance and despair that the world they had rejected would not let them be. The people of Jonestown were not ordinary criminals; they were, in the words of Jonestown scholar and sister of two Jonestown leaders, Rebecca Moore, “as American as cherry pie.”⁴ Other cases of mass suicide and/or homicide by religious adherents have taught us that a perception of persecution by a society they reject has led such “cultures of dissent” as the Order of the Solar Temple and the Branch Davidians of David Koresh to enact their vision of ultimate reality in a transition to a better world or, millennial kingdom. The people in these intentional communities may be ordinary, but their conceptualization of what is ultimately real and true is different from that of their contemporaries outside the community, such that the concern of the group may take precedence over that of the individual member.

The second point I wish to make is that holy terror is an expression of the religion’s ultimate concern, a means of achieving the ultimately good and beneficial state that the

⁴ “American as Cherry Pie,” in Catherine Wessinger (ed.), *Millennialism, Persecution, and Violence: Historical Cases*, 2000 (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press) pp. 121-137.

religious movement regards as salvation or final wellbeing.⁵ Odd as it may seem, what the victim calls “terrorism,” is regarded as a mandate from a transcendent power by the perpetrator, who experiences a call to act as the hand of his or her god for a more ethical purpose. For most of history, terrorism has been a religious phenomenon. In the past 125 years we have understood terrorism as a political crime, one that exceeds the rules of engagement of ordinary war or perpetrates some spectacular horror far in excess of ordinary crime. Assassinations, airplane hijackings, kidnappings, truck bombs and, most recently, suicide attacks can be construed as crimes committed to achieve a political goal, such as liberation from occupation as the terrorist group defines it, whether it be Irish, Basque, Tamil, Kenyan, or Arab in nationality. However, we can also regard these innovative acts of spectacular violence as attempts to annihilate the corrupt powers of the world and to replace them with a more just world order, one that is incorruptible and, in a word, divine.

My third and last introductory point is that there is not necessarily a relationship between terrorism and fundamentalism, but today we can connect the proverbial dots between the global wave of religious fundamentalisms and acts of holy terror. Fundamentalism is not necessarily a source of violence, although it is a determined claim to a higher truth which is often accompanied by an energetic program to convert the misguided in order to cleanse society of evil, sin, or corruption. It insists on the re-formation of the world in accordance with a divine mandate. Holy terror is only one means of achieving the purification of a hopelessly perverted world.

Fundamentalism, as Resa Aslan, observes reacts paradoxically to aggression, appeasement, control, or any ordinary “rational” game plan to neutralize it. He could as well be talking about “terrorism,” or, for that matter, about religion.

⁵ David C. Rapoport has explored the relationship between terrorism and religion in his body of work, most recently in “The Four Waves of Terror,” Catherine Wessinger has developed a taxonomy of types of millennialism in her study of religions and violence. She writes, “Millennialism is an expression of the human hope for the achievement of permanent well-being, in other words, salvation” in *op.cit.*, p. 6.

Huston Smith put it most succinctly a few years ago in a talk he gave at UCLA on religion and violence when he said that religion has had a greater impact on history than anything else. I would say even more simply that the religion factor is at the root of human behavior, whether that behavior be supremely good or supremely evil.

Al-Qaida, or ‘The Base’

My only purpose is to understand what political scientist David Rapoport calls “holy terror.” To those who are fighting a war or defending a population targeted by terrorists, “understand” may mean something akin to “sympathize.” To a student, a scholar, “understanding” is the foundation of any policy that will produce intended results. Without understanding a disease, a chemical reaction, the laws of physics any action we take relative to these phenomena is like throwing dice and is more likely to produce unintended consequences. We can’t take that chance with holy terror, because the stakes are too high. The foremost questions that counter-terrorism analysts ask are: What is in the mind of a terrorist? How does he or she view the world? What motivates them? Why do they commit themselves to acts so outlandish that they produce trauma far out of proportion to the total numbers of casualties? These are the questions that an understanding of holy terror must attempt to answer.

Al-Qaida burst upon the American consciousness on the date that all agree has changed our world, September 11, 2001, when nineteen fanatical pan-Islamists aimed three airplanes at four targets: the two towers of the World Trade Center in New York City; the Pentagon outside Washington D.C., and the Capitol Building in Washington. The last target was spared by the heroic action of passengers on the fourth plane.

The terrorists led by Mohammad Atta left behind a letter that was probably written by him, which Prof. Juan Cole refers to as the “Doomsday Document.” I prefer to call it the hijackers’ letter. Cole finds traces of Sufi mysticism in the letter, which exhorts the hijackers to take a vow *to* death, as their symbolic *amir*, or commander; to pray together in the early morning hours; to shave and perfume their bodies in preparation for the ritual

of suicide martyrdom; to repeat certain texts from the traditions and the Quran in a meditative ritual called *dhikr*, that was favored by the Hasan al-Banna, the founder of the first modern Islamist organization, the Muslim Brothers.

This document remains our best window into the mind of an Islamic holy terrorist as he prepares to strike. It leaves us with more questions. Why would these ascetic and pious young men spend some of their last nights in bars and casinos drinking and in bed with prostitutes? Doesn't that belie their so-called "religious" motivations? Why are Sufi rituals like *dhikr* recommended in a letter written by a puritanical Sunni believer? It is well known that Sunni puritans, such as Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the leader of al-Qaida in Iraq is committed to cleansing Islam of all Sufi or Shi'ite influences. And, finally, is there anything in particular in this letter that helps us understand al-Qaida itself?

Cole believes that Usama bin Ladin may have allowed the hijackers to consort with prostitutes to increase their guilt and hence their motivation to save their souls by becoming martyrs. Or, perhaps they were allowing themselves a foretaste of the pleasures of Paradise. There is another possibility: in ancient religion the accession of a king was celebrated on New Year's Day, which was preceded by a night of orgiastic celebration. Like our own toned-down New Years Eve, the disordered behavior symbolized an end to the chaos the world had tumbled into before it was replaced by a kingdom of justice and peace. So, the hijackers may have expressed the end of the corrupt world by their behavior and risen the next morning to pray and to initiate the reign of the messianic Caliph to come.

Al-Qaida may have arisen in 1991 in Saudi Arabia with a small group of dissenters who believed that the House of Saud had betrayed its allegiance to Wahhabism, the Sunni fundamentalist movement that massacred any Muslim that did not conform to its teachings or convert.⁶ It is likelier, however, that al-Qaida was born in the more diverse religious universe of Afghanistan under Soviet occupation in the mid-1990s. There a Palestinian teacher who had spent time in Egypt named Abdullah Azzam and his protégé,

⁶ Aslan, *op.cit.*, p. 247.

Usama bin Ladin, established training camps for foreigners who volunteered to fight the Soviets. They called themselves al-Qaida, which means ‘the base’, and which also can be translated ‘the foundation’.

Founding a new world order is a religious act, which is to say that it is the enactment of a vision regarded as more real than the everyday world one lives in. Intense dissatisfaction with, or even hatred of, the ordinary world order drives the religious dissident to act according to a revealed or inspired vision transmitted to him from a sacred source. For Muslims the source is the book of the Holy Quran and the traditions—*ahadith*—that are based upon the revelations of Allah (PBHN) to Mohammad and the life of the Prophet. We find the intense hatred and critique of secularization imposed by Western colonial powers on Egypt from the time of Napoleon’s invasion in 1898 to the present in a book written by Sayyid Qutb, who was executed for writing it by the Nasser regime in 1966. The book, *Milestones*, calls for “setting up the kingdom of God on earth, and eliminating the kingdom of man,” for “taking power from the hands of its human usurpers and restoring it to God alone.”⁷

Qutbism is another name for bin Ladin’s religion, commonly called “jihadism”.⁸ The origins of al-Qaida’s vision of a new world order lie in Egypt, not Saudi Arabia, but they have been spread, along with Qutb’s writings, throughout the Muslim world.⁹ Setting up the kingdom of God on earth is a millennial ultimate concern, one that explains the “holy” in the terrorism of 9/11. Messianic fervor is perhaps one of the most intense experiences human beings can feel.¹⁰ It may explain why parents and children

⁷ Aslan, p. 238.

⁸ Fawaz Gerges notes that this is the term the followers of bin Ladin’s religion use to refer to themselves; *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global*, 2005 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) p. 1.

⁹ I do not mean to diminish the influence of other “modernist” ideologues on the pan-Islamism of al-Qaida. Specifically, pan-Islamism, or the abolishing of Muslim governments and their replacement by one pan-Islamic rule under a Caliph, originated in the writings of another seminal thinker, Maulana Mawdudi of India. Qutb (1906-1966) provided the argument that the existence of Islam was threatened by Western secularism. Mawdudi provided the vision of a universal Caliphate, a kind of millennial kingdom that would embrace the entire Ummah.

¹⁰ Joaquim Wach, Chair in the History of Religions at the University of Chicago, taught that religious feeling was the most intense of human experiences. Of religious experiences, messianic expectation can motivate people to choose death as a means of liberation in expectation of entering a more just and peaceful world beyond the ordinary world. It may be the most intense of intense experiences.

died at Jonestown, members of Heavens Gate chose to die in a collective ritual that they believed would hitch them to a spaceship following a comet, and believers in the Christian apocalypse at Waco preferred to suffocate inside a burning building than expose themselves to the forces of the Antichrist outside their walls. Messianic fervor, the expectation of what the poet called “a hell of a good universe next door,”¹¹ is sufficient explanation for the suicide martyrdom of the nineteen hijackers on September eleventh.

Karen Armstrong notes that religious truths are allegorical and symbolic visions of a perfected order, but that interpreting them literally and expecting or enforcing them in the ordinary human world is a dangerous undertaking that is doomed to failure.¹² Fundamentalism is at its core a fallacy of misplaced concreteness. As children, we all remember our perplexity when adults talked of “catching a bus” or “flying to Houston.” We employ metaphor, simile, hyperbole, and idioms in language everyday. Before the Protestant Reformation, the biblical text was interpreted for the masses by hierarchs in the one true church. The Reformation promulgated two new doctrines, the priesthood of all believers, and the sole, reigning authority of the Bible as infallible truth (*sola scriptura*) that henceforth freed Christians to interpret the text as they willed and to assert their interpretation as absolute truth. Protestant fundamentalists have mined the most intense phantasmagoric visions of the Bible’s allegorical book of *A Revelation of [Jesus to] John*—commonly called the *Apocalypse*—for concrete signs of the end of the world as we know it and the return of the Messiah who will establish his kingdom on earth for a thousand years, his millennial kingdom. The literal interpretation of symbolic myth and the implementation of earthly rule under God’s law are the core features of Protestant, Jewish, and Islamic fundamentalisms. When fundamentalist zealots commit themselves to a violent struggle to change the world we know to a mythical kingdom of God, new rules of engagement for this cosmic war against evil must be found to suit a war to end all wars. It is this dynamic combination of misplaced concreteness and messianic enactment

¹¹ e. e. cummings, *No. 73*: “pity this busy monster, man unkind,” from *One Times One*, 1944 (New York: Grove Press, Inc.) p. 89.

¹² Armstrong, p. .

that may account for the holy terror of al-Qaida and, surprisingly, for the religious response of the United States and its allies in their war on terrorism.

In studying what causes religious groups to turn to violent means to achieve their millennial kingdom, I noticed that nearly all such groups will focus intensely on one or two essential doctrines from their parent religions. They will assert an innovative interpretation of those doctrines and proclaim that their interpretation is the only true one and that all other religious experts are wrong. Thus, when a new violent religious movement rises, I look for that one or few essential doctrines that have undergone a lethal mutation. In the hijackers' letter the innovation derives from a verse from one of the two "war" chapters in the Holy Quran, verse 9.5, which is known as "the verse of the sword." This verse furnishes the necessary reason for the rise of jihadism as a revolutionary millennial movement on the fringe of a much broader and more peaceful Islamic Reformation that is taking place throughout the Muslim world.¹³ The complete verse in one translation reads:

But when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the Pagans wherever ye find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war);
But if they repent, and establish regular prayers and practice regular charity, then open the way for them: for Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.¹⁴

In the hijackers' letter and other jihadist documents, the verse is truncated; only the command to slay is reproduced and the final lines about the option of repentance are omitted. The verse originally applied to the Meccan polytheists and those in Medina who conspired with them to defeat the minority religion of Muhammad's followers, but

¹³ Younger Muslim intellectuals, leaders and writers, especially those exposed to secularization, recognize that a variety of movements and philosophies characterize contemporary Islam, some of which are violent, but the preponderance of which are peaceful, such as the movement for a parliamentary democracy in Iran. See Resa Aslan, *op.cit.*, pp. 247-264. Salam al-Marayati, director of the Muslim Public Affairs Council, argued that what is needed today is not a "reformation of Islam, but a Reformation in Islam" (Forum, UCLA Center for the Study of Religion, 2003). See also the critique of Islamic "puritans" by Khaled Abou El Fadl in *The Place of Tolerance in Islam*, Joshua Cohen and Ian Lague (eds.), 2002 (Boston: Beacon Press) pp. 3-23.

¹⁴ From a translation of the Holy Quran by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, 1992 (Brentwood, MD: Amana Corporation).

contemporary jihadists enlarge the category of “Pagans” to include even Muslim civilians who support those who oppose the jihadists. So exclusivist is the jihadist vision, that al-Qaida members regard only their followers as worthy of salvation at the time of God’s last judgment.

In addition, jihadism, which split off from the popular movement of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt and advocated assassination of government officials, sets its own interpretation of the rules for war against the fatwas of the recognized religious experts based in Cairo.¹⁵ Thus, jihadism was born as a reaction to its modernist parent movement of the Muslim Brothers and to the *ulama*, the hierarchs at al-Azhar University who interpreted questions of Islamic law for any petitioner. In addition to adopting and modifying the verse of the sword, al-Qaida added its narrow interpretation of jihad as a sixth obligatory religious observance for all “true” Muslims. It then elevated the observance of jihad to second place behind only the command to observe the oneness of God. For this reason, I would prefer to call the innovative sectarianism of al-Qaida “sixth-pillar Islam” than the more commonplace, “jihadism,” which implies that their minority interpretation of the soul’s struggle to overcome temptation or societal injustice is the sole authentic interpretation.¹⁶

To recapitulate: messianic fervor for a new world order may furnish a sufficient explanation for the drive to extinguish one’s life for a better outcome, and an innovative interpretation of a core doctrine may furnish a necessary reason to kill on behalf of bringing the millennial kingdom to earth. But how do ordinary human beings—men and women who resist the pressures of their families and peers and the compunctions of their own consciences—bring themselves to commit such heinous acts as assassination, mass murder, subway bombings or poisonings, or self-immolation? As do all of us who belong to any kind of intentional community—whether we join the Marines or are born into the Mormon church or enter a Hasidic community—so recruits to holy terror movements

¹⁵ See Johannes J.G. Jansen, *The Neglected Duty: The Creed of Sadat’s Assassins and Islamic Resurgence in the Middle East*, 1986 (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company).

¹⁶ I was moved to think more deeply about the jihadism label after Salam al-Marayati lamented that al-Qaida had perverted the exemplary and rich meaning of *jihad* in Islamic tradition and after I encountered an Arabic teacher with the name, Jihad.

assume a new identity. As Paul exhorted his Gentile flock in the early Christian church, we “put on the New Man.”¹⁷ A new religious movement always provides a new identity for the individual who sees himself or herself in terms of a vision or myth of the community’s collective role in history. Revolutionary millennial movements that adopt terrorism as their means of destroying the old order and creating a new world order often adopt an identity as heroic defenders of an eternal, true religion, or what John R. Hall calls, the “apocalyptic warring sect.”¹⁸

Egyptian Islamic fundamentalism is called Salafism after the model generation of Muhammad, his Companions in Mecca and Medina, and the first four “rightly-guided Caliphs” of the Muslim world. Salafi fundamentalists believe that they are the only Muslim school or denomination that follows the authentic Islam of these early pious generations. After the fourth Caliph was murdered, they believe, Islam became infected with inauthentic practices and teachings. In 1998 al-Qaida in Afghanistan joined with the outlawed Salafi fundamentalists led by Ayman al-Zawahiri, who fled government persecution in Egypt for temporary sanctuary in Saudi Arabia, or for the liberation jihads in Bosnia, Chechnya, and Afghanistan. Al-Zawahiri became bin Ladin’s co-conspirator after the assassination of his mentor, Abdullah Azzam, in Peshawar, Pakistan. Al-Zawahiri’s organization, Egyptian Jihad, was linked to the murder of Anwar Sadat in 1981 and the implementation of Qutb’s revolutionary program to overthrow the secularist Egyptian government. Salafism is largely a non-violent fundamentalism and identifies with an obscure and legendary group in Islamic tradition called “The Saved Sect.”

Al-Qaida differs from Salafism only in its doctrines of violence. It also identifies with The Saved Sect, but it adds to this particular legend of a community of true believers from the time of Mohammad to the present, its identity also as “The Victorious Group.” According to al-Qaida’s myth of self-identification, there will always be a righteous remnant of Muslims who wage defensive jihad to protect the religion, the land, and the people. These *mujahidin* may come from any part of the Muslim world. They may come

¹⁷ “That ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness,” *Ephesians* 4.24, King James Version.

¹⁸ John R. Hall,

from Sufi, Shi'a, or Sunni communities. They will not be famous or recognized; instead they will be denounced and persecuted by their fellow Muslims, but only they will persist in observing and defending true Islam until Judgment Day, when only their sect will not be consigned to hellfire and will enter Paradise. It is this identification as heroic and self-sacrificing warriors that imbues the suicide bomber and motivates men like bin Ladin and al-Zawahiri, who gave up the comfort and high status of their illustrious families in Saudi Arabia and Egypt, respectively, for endless jihad in foreign lands.

Other Fundamentalisms

Fundamentalism is an American term for a movement to return to the “fundamentals” of Christian faith that arose in the early 20th century. It has been loosely applied to purification movements in Judaism, Hinduism, and Islam, as well. In Gujarat province in northwestern India, for example, a train fire set off riots by majority Hindus against minority Muslims that resulted in more than one-thousand deaths in February and March, 2002. The train was carrying Hindu pilgrims from the site of a mosque that Hindu fundamentalists had destroyed ten years earlier. Believing that Muslims had set fire to the train, Hindu fundamentalist mobs burned and looted houses and killed their inhabitants, while Hindu fundamentalist officials excused the violence. Three years later, a government investigation concluded that the train fire was an accident caused by spilled cooking oil.¹⁹

Gujarat is the homeland of Mahatma Gandhi, a “state known for tolerance, moderation, and non-violence,” according to Professor J. S. Bandukwala, who asks, “How do we explain that a people so identified with...non-violence, can suddenly become so cruel and inhuman?”²⁰ The Hindu-Muslim violence coincided with the rise to power of a governor of Gujarat and an Indian president from an ultra-nationalist political party, the VJP, and with the aiding and abetting of mob violence by local police and judges. Local media

¹⁹ “Muslims and Catholics in Gujarat,” a speech delivered by Dr. Juzar Bandukwala of Baroda University, Gujarat, to a Catholic audience (unpublished paper, courtesy of Dr. Bandukwala); “India: Party Politics and the Gujarat Report,” January 18, 2005, Strategic Forecasting, Inc., <<http://www.stratfor.com>>

²⁰ Ibid.

wrote “highly inflammatory articles to incite more killings” and the organizations charged with overseeing these agencies remained silent.²¹ Muslims suffered an economic boycott as officials continued to blame the minority religion for initiating the violence.

I mention the Gujarat riots to demonstrate that the phenomenon of holy terror can occur where it is least expected. Until the twentieth century, nationalism and intolerance were largely unknown in India, a land of many local religious cults and practices. It is also noteworthy that nationalism in India provided a context for increasing tension between Hindus and Muslims. The largest migration in human history might have consisted of the seventeen million Muslims who crossed into Pakistan after India gained its independence from Britain, and joined their co-religionists in a new Muslim state carved out of India’s traditional lands.

There is not really a clear separation between religion and politics. Religion is a binding force within a nation of people who claim descent from common ancestors, speak one language, and identify themselves with one territory they regard as “homeland.” In fact, religion and nationhood reinforce one another. The “land of one’s ancestors” is inviolable and the community controls its borders. Trespass over a boundary by an uninvited or impure stranger is regarded as illegal and may be punished by expulsion or, in some cases, death. Thus, it is not surprising that colonialism, occupation, invasion, and other types of boundary disputes may set off interminable and intractable wars. One such example is the dangerous conflict between two nuclear powers, Pakistan and India over the disputed territory of Kashmir. When both parties to a conflict claim their cause is the absolute truth, there is no common premise on which to base a pragmatic solution.

Fundamentalism originated as a distinctly American, Protestant innovation that rejected the “higher criticism” of the Bible, which analyzed the sacred book as it would any secular text for its levels of meaning, provenance, authorship, and historical context. It defined the core tenets of Christian faith, which fundamentalists extracted from a complex set of “proof texts” arbitrarily selected from the holy book. These texts became

²¹ Ibid.

the liturgical basis for the conversion process itself, as one is “saved” by “accepting Christ,” being “born again,” and being initiated into the community as an authentic Christian. Proof texts also provide Christian fundamentalists a window into the ultimate reality that lies beyond mere surface events in one’s life and current events. Yet, their meaning may not be accessible to the ordinary reader. Spiritually gifted members of the congregation may interpret biblically validated “signs” of God’s working in the ordinary world by means of their charisms of teaching, prophecy, and understanding, to the entire community.

The final book in the Christian Bible is the *Apocalypse*. It is a story about the catastrophic reign of a satanic figure, the Antichrist, and a seven-year “Tribulation” period of earthquakes, plagues, persecutions, and cosmic prodigies that culminate in the ultimate battle between the legions of Antichrist and the armies of God. In the nineteenth-century an Irish priest, John Nelson Darby, brought his special interpretation of this symbolic text to the United States in a series of six lectures. Darby’s new religious movement, called the Plymouth Brethren (or the Reformed Brethren), remains obscure, but his theology of dispensationalism was adopted by millions of American fundamentalists, who believe according to Darby that if they accept Christ as their Savior, they will be caught up into heaven, or “Raptured,” before the Tribulation occurs. Those who are left behind must endure the horrors of the end times, but they must accept Christ and lead others to do so, or they will all be consigned to the “Pit” when Jesus returns after the final battle to judge souls and initiate his thousand-year reign on earth. A bestselling series of twelve novels by Tim La Haye and Jerry Jenkins has reproduced Darby’s dispensational millennial myth in language accessible to everyone. Their so-called *Left Behind* series has sold over 60,000,000 copies.

There are various definitions of fundamentalism, but across religions and cultures it is characterized by zeal to convert others in their respective religions to one way, the “true” way, of worship. Those who follow the “true” way assert that only they know what God’s plan of salvation is and what it requires of us. Fundamentalists believe that

credentialed religious experts do not know that way as well as those to whom it is revealed through God's holy texts, visions, dreams, and epiphanies. The al-Qaida leadership believes in revelation of truth through dreams. Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins repeatedly invoke the words of Joel that,

‘in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams....And I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth beneath, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the Day of the Lord comes...and it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved’.²²

This text is not found in the book of *Revelation*, but in the book of *Acts*. It is taken out of context as a “proof text” for Darby’s belief that the age of prophecy would return after it had been silenced by the age of the church for almost two thousand years. In effect, like radical Islamists, Christian fundamentalists do not accept the authority of recognized religious scholars and their practice of theology. Both Islamic and Christian fundamentalists believe in what their dreams, visions, and martyrs experience as the Word of God.

Asserting a higher claim to truth, one based on “true” religion as it was handed down from the first generation of Muslims in Medina or Christians in Jerusalem, is the defining feature of fundamentalism. Fundamentalists believe that their co-religionists have departed from the law of God and become polluted by their sinful ways. Only a return to the pure religion of the first believers can redeem human beings and prepare them for the millennial kingdom. For al-Qaida that kingdom is the Caliphate, which will replace the present political disorder of nation-states with one community of believers who will observe the laws of Allah. For dispensationalist Christians that kingdom is the thousand-year kingdom of Christ after the earth is literally leveled and Jesus has defeated the Antichrist.

²² Acts 2.17-21; Joel 2.28-32.

Because fundamentalists believe that ultimate truth is encoded in the Word of God, only the purest believers receive the gift of interpreting it. Bin Ladin has told the story of an old scholar who humbles himself before a young martyr, uneducated in theology, but pure of heart. It is the *shahid*, the martyr, who knows the truth, not the exalted member of the *ulema*, according to al-Qaida. One who martyrs himself or herself in order to destroy a perverted world and restore the *sharia*, the law of Allah, is the one with knowledge of the truth. The ultimate purpose of the fundamentalist is to witness to truth and to bring all other human beings to the same truth.

Dreams, visions, prophecies, myths, and millennial kingdoms are the stuff of feelings, of the heart. Decisions based on the heart, if the heart is pure, will be mediated by the Holy Spirit. Knowing a person's "heart" is thus more important than figuring out his personality index or his intelligence quotient or reading his resume. British journalist Robert Fisk writes about his three interviews of Usama bin Ladin in his forthcoming book.²³ The last interview was held in a cave in Afghanistan on March 19, 1997. Bin Ladin smiled at Fisk and recounted a dream another person had just had:

He dreamed that you came to us one day on a horse, that you had a beard and that you were a spiritual person. You wore a robe like us. This means you are a true Muslim.²⁴

Fisk was terrified, realizing that bin Ladin was stating a truth, not extending an invitation. He quickly countered that he was not a Muslim, but a journalist, one dedicated to telling the truth. Bin Ladin replied with a saving sophism: "If you tell the truth, that means you are a good Muslim."²⁵

I am leading here toward something even more difficult for Americans to understand than al-Qaida and that is the response of our leadership to al-Qaida. I have struggled to determine from the data, not from my feelings or allegiances, how we view our war

²³ *The Great War for civilization: the Conquest of the Middle East*, 2005 (4th Estate www.independentbooksdirect.co.uk); see also "On Finding Osama" by Robert Fisk www.jihadunspun.com September 24, 2005.

²⁴ "On Finding Osama."

²⁵ Ibid.

against terrorism, and I have concluded that our leadership is conducting a holy war based on ultimate truths about a new world order that America hopes to establish in what some call the “new American century” at the end of the second Christian millennium. I call our response to the attack of September 11, 2001, “apocalyptic mirroring.”

The National Association of Evangelical’s leader, Richard Cizik recently claimed that his organization of 30,000,000 members provided about 40% of the current membership of the Republican Party.²⁶ No one really knows the number of Americans who believe that the Apocalypse is coming soon or who read its signs in suicide attacks, earthquakes, hurricanes, or imminent plagues, but 30,000,000 is among the lowest number of estimates I have seen. Let’s assume that Cizik is correct and that to his number we may add ten or twenty million more Christians who are fundamentalists who do not associate with the more inclusive and diverse NAE. All told, it is a likely assumption that the Republican administration of George W. Bush is in power because American fundamentalists who fear that we are entering a time of apocalypse have voted for a “born-again” president.

The use of apocalyptic language has increased since 9/11. The familiar terms, “evildoer” and “axis of evil” denote terrorists and a reign of terror, not unlike that expected by John Nelson Darby, Hal Lindsey, Pat Robertson, and Tim LaHaye, among others. Americans elected a president in 2000 who testified to the nation that Christ was his favorite philosopher because, he said, “he changed my heart.”²⁷ His father, President George H.W. Bush, conversely incited the conspiracy theories of right-wing Christians when he announced that he was dedicated to a “new world order” under the “rule of law” as it was established by the “United Nations.”²⁸ His son and American fundamentalists must be sensitive to the date of President George H.W. Bush’s new world order speech on September 11, 1990, eleven years to the day on which al-Qaida’s nineteen suicide martyrs destroyed the Twin Towers, crashed into the Pentagon, and threatened the U.S. Capitol Building.

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²⁷ Julian Borger, ‘How Born-Again George Became a Man on a Mission,’ the *Guardian*, UK; October 7, 2005.

²⁸ George Herbert Walker Bush, Speech to Congress, September 11, 1990.

President George Bush, after his first meeting with President Putin of Russia (a formerly designated Antichrist in Christian conspiracy literature) that he had “looked into his heart” and found him to be “a good man.” In fact, being “a good man” or woman is the president’s designation of those he feels are on the side of truth. The other side is characterized by falsehood, acts of terrorism, and “evil.” Intuition, revelation, the “heart” as opposed to the “head” as a source of evidence, and choosing the side of truth in a war against “those who hate us and our way of life” are ways of knowing and adapting to a global struggle in a distinctly American and fundamentalist religious manner. Much as did Usama as he sought to evaluate Fisk, so the President asserts the truth of revelation about the stranger to ascertain which camp the stranger fits into.

“You are either with us or against us,” is a statement of fact in the context of apocalyptic war. Another name for the Antichrist in Islam and in Christian eschatology is “the deceiver.” In the *Left Behind* series of apocalyptic novels, the Antichrist is the director of the United Nations. He takes global power through words of peace and victory over those who rebel against internationalist institutions. He brings a new world order into being, one that has unmistakable resemblance to the new world order announced by the first President Bush. But the Antichrist becomes indwelt by Satan, turns into a persecutor who aspires to replace God itself in the hearts and minds of believers. He is a hypocrite and an apostate who is opposed only by a loyal cadre of clandestine Christians, who outsmart the new world order by planting a brilliant spy in their midst, one who controls the Antichrist’s communications network. Ultimately, the novels seem to teach, it is God who controls the Word through which we can know the truth.

Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins use fiction to convey the truth about the contemporary world. Fundamentalism, we recall from Karen Armstrong’s analysis of its development, is a modern phenomenon. At the heart of our postmodern civilization is communications technology, that which gives us the power to intercept cell phone messages between conspirators from a satellite orbiting in space, that upon which the worldwide news media transmit instant images of maimed children, abused prisoners, bombed mosques, killer waves, flooded cities, falling skyscrapers, and other cataclysms to billions of viewers.

American fundamentalism originated in words, a series of essays accessible to all readers regardless of their race or class; it has pioneered every new form of communication from radio to television to computers to cinema to spread the Word of God. All forms are used to bring as many people to Christ as possible in the time allotted before Christ judges human beings and initiates his millennial reign.

Psychiatrist Ruth Stein writes in a new paper about how “a certain state of mind... leads to fundamentalism and with further developments, to coercive and violent fundamentalism.”²⁹ Hallmarks of the state of mind include “a sense of utter certainty, a feeling of being in the right, hermetic consistency” and “highly rhetorical” repetitions of “Truths” with a capital T.³⁰ Resolving the messiness of everyday life, its anxieties, doubts, and questions into binary oppositions is characteristic of apocalyptic thinking, as well as the fundamentalist state of mind identified by Stein.

The state of mind that divides the cosmos into two warring camps, one righteous and the other unrighteous, is called apocalyptic dualism. In the mind of the jihadist there is only the “House of God” and the “House of War,” or unbelief. In the mind of the dispensational millennialist there are only the armies of Satan and the armies of God. In Arabic the word for Apocalypse is *milhima*, which is the word for ‘war’.³¹ After the three great wars of the twentieth century, an elite group of business, government, academic, and media from the United States and Britain engaged in a continuous dialogue about the shape of a new world order that would weaken the power of rogue states to visit aggression, ethnic cleansing, or weapons of mass destruction upon other states or their own people.³² It was this globalist vision that the forty-first President, George H.W. Bush, invoked before a coalition army repulsed an Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and continued to control aggression against the Iraqi Shi’ites and Kurds after the first

²⁹ “Fundamentalism, Father and Son, and Vertical Desire,” 2005 (unpublished), courtesy of

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ A discussion of the apocalyptic genre in Islam’s holy texts can be found in Said Amir Arjomand, “Islamic Apocalypticism in the Classic Period,” in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism, Volume 2*, edited by Bernard McGinn, 1999 (New York, N.Y., the Continuum Publishing Company) pp. 238-286.

³² See Bart R. Kessler, “Bush’s New World Order: The Meaning behind the Words, A Research Paper Presented to The Research Department,” Air command and Staff College, March 1997 www.whatsmells.com/ADA398504.pdf.

Gulf War. It is this same globalist vision that is presented in the fundamentalist *Left Behind* novels as the “new world order” imposed by the Antichrist. Among violent Christian fundamentalists,³³ as among violent Islamic fundamentalists, the heroic struggle against the new world order is equated with “just war” doctrines in their respective religions, but those doctrines are amended to suit their violent means used to fight the forces of evil.³⁴

American fundamentalists who see the world through the lens of apocalyptic dualism believe that the war between good and evil is fought by supernatural forces, as well as human armies. Lucifer makes his appearance on the pages of *Left Behind*, and the Holy Spirit comforts a young woman who faces execution by edict of the Antichrist. A sense of doom and fatalism results from this dependence on God’s grace to see one through the horrible events to come, but a sense of mission is intensified by the spiritual knowledge that one must play his or her part in salvation history at the most critical time.

Before al-Qaida’s suicide attack on the power centers of the United States, the son of the president who announced a new world order under the rule of law through the establishing of global institutions underwent a conversion to fundamentalism and subsequently told a fellow evangelical that he felt that God wanted him to run for president in 2000. Like Christians spreading the gospel during the first century A.D., the president humbly told an Amish audience in 2004, “I trust God speaks through me. Without that I couldn’t do my job.” In his 2003 state of the Union address, President George W. Bush described the “call of history” that had come to America, saying that

³³ Violent fundamentalists are a tiny segment of American fundamentalists, but they have perpetrated assassinations, bombings, and hate crimes. For one illuminating narrative about the violent Christian group he belonged to see, Kerry Noble, *Tabernacle of Hate: Why They Bombed Oklahoma City*, 1998 (Prescott, Ontario; Voyageur Publishing).

³⁴ Egyptian General (Ret.) Muhammad Khalaf expressed suspicion about George H.W. Bush’s globalist vision as well. In response to the question, “The U.S. naively asks: ‘Why do they hate us in the Middle East.?’” he replies: ‘It began with Bush Senior, who talked about a new world order. Plans were made and became public. The National Defense University developed a plan in January 1999, according to which, with the fall of the U.S.S.R., no other superpower should be allowed to exist... They began thinking about filling the vacuum formed in Asia with the countries that had left the U.S.S.R.,....’ Interview aired on Egypt’s al-Mihwar TV on September 11, 2005 <http://memritv.org/search.asp?ACT=S9&P1=872>

“the liberty we prize”...is “God’s gift to humanity.”³⁵ In a meeting with Palestinian leaders Nabil Shaath and Mahmoud Abbas at Sharm al-Sheikh in June, 2003, President reportedly told them that he was driven by a “mission from God” to fight terrorists in Afghanistan and end the tyranny in Iraq. Likewise, he told them, that he ‘felt God’s words coming’ to him to ‘get peace in the Middle East’.³⁶

The American president expresses himself in the language of American fundamentalism. He acknowledges his submission to Christ; his mission and drive to combat America’s enemies; and the primacy of intuition, feeling, and the heart in his leadership. He communicates with American dispensational millennialists and evangelicals in the language they understand, a language of revelation (*apocalupsis*), countering al-Qaida’s jihadist vision of the violent establishment of the Caliphate with a uniquely American Christian version of apocalypticism.

If we assume that the forty-third president accepts dispensationalist fundamentalism, much of the “war on terrorism” expressed in the language of apocalyptic dualism explains his radical departure from the internationalist foreign policy of the nine presidents preceding him.

A foreign policy realist like George H.W. Bush and his brain trust on the Council of Foreign Relations and associated forums that developed an internationalist vision of a new world order, would not have led America into a second Gulf War without a United Nations resolution and would not have engaged in nation-building after that war without the leadership of the United Nations. The forty-first president and his circle opposed the invasion of Iraq in highly publicized statements to the news media, because they recognized that it was framed as a religious war, not an extension of the internationalist vision. In the presidency of the second George Bush, the United States has refused to sign international treaties, which are regarded as part of the internationalist agenda they

³⁵ Borger, *op cit.*

³⁶ Ewen MacAskill, “George Bush: ‘God told me to end the tyranny in Iraq’,” *The Guardian*; October 7, 2005 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/international/story/0,3604,1586883,00.html>

oppose.³⁷ The United States has refused to support any initiative that American fundamentalists fear would reduce sovereignty of the United States and replace it with any rule of law that “governs the conduct of nations.”³⁸ Not even the Geneva Convention on the treatment of prisoners is adhered to by an administration that is imbued with a drive to pursue a war against terrorism for as long as it takes.

I suspect that in years to come both historians and psychologists will attempt to understand the great shift from the internationalist vision of world order that “has remained fairly constant throughout the twentieth century”³⁹ to the nationalist and fundamentalist world view that now dominates our policy in terms of the complex relationship between father and son, presidents with divergent visions of what role the United States will play in our new “American” century.

My provisional conclusion regarding the war on terrorism is that it is neither an asymmetrical struggle between the United States and an amorphous entity nor is it in any sense a clash of civilizations. It is an ideological struggle between militant fundamentalists with competing claims to ultimate truth. If this is correct, then the American responders to al-Qaida’s attacks are not concerned with understanding their enemy; the American government is concerned with defeating an evil force. On both sides of this ideological struggle, leaders emphasize winning a critical mass of supporters to combat the evil they oppose. In a recently divulged letter from Ayman al-Zawahiri in Afghanistan to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in Iraq, the commander tells his subordinate that he must win sufficient support among the Iraqi “masses” to establish jihadist control over their territory and expand the jihad to neighboring states. He must never lose sight of the overall goal of replacing apostate states with a pan-Islamic Caliphate.

In a major address to before The National Endowment for Democracy on October 6, 2005, President George Bush invoked the memory of the global struggle against communism and its nemesis, Ronald Reagan, in order to compare them with the global

³⁷ Kessler, p.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 53.

³⁹ Ibid.

war against terrorism and his leadership of the free world. A global war is by definition a cosmic struggle, in Islamist terms, a defensive *jihad*, and in religious terms, an apocalypse. In this struggle Americans are called, in the religious sense, to their mission to spread democracy and freedom throughout the world. Similarly, al-Qaida's leaders engage in *da'wa*, the call to return to the pure religion of their pious forefathers. Ruth Stein speaks of the fundamentalists' "need to sacrifice" to achieve order out of "chaos and vagueness" by employing masochism and coercion, both forms of "increasingly severe purification processes."⁴⁰ Karen Armstrong and Mark Juergensmeyer suggest that al-Qaida may be "a direct counter-reaction to...despiritualization and economical [sic] globalization,"⁴¹ while I am suggesting that the nationalist and fundamentalist counter-terrorism policies of the Bush administration may be a counter-reaction to the internationalist and economically pragmatic vision of Anglophile policymakers who conceived of the League of Nations, the United Nations, the Council on Foreign Relations, the Trilateral Commission, the European Union, the World Bank and the International Court of Justice in The Hague. Among the proponents of this latter realist new world order is George W. Bush's father, who may have lost his bid for a second term because that vision alienated millions of Moral Majority and Christian Coalition fundamentalists.⁴² On the other hand, it might be argued by future historians that the son's call to the Presidency was framed as a call to those same millions who had repudiated new world order globalism as antithetical to their alternative vision of a millennial kingdom under the law of God, not the secular order of the law of nations.

Apocalyptic mirroring extends to details of major speeches by Usama bin Ladin on the one hand and George Bush, on the other hand. On October 29, 2004, in a released transcript of a bin Ladin videotape, the al-Qaida leader speaks of freedom:

"...contrary to Bush's claim that we hate freedom...let him explain why we didn't strike, for example, Sweden...we know that freedom haters don't possess defiant spirits like those of the 19 [hijackers].

⁴⁰ Stein, *op cit*, p. 1.

⁴¹ Stein, *op cit*, referring to Armstrong, *op cit*, and Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, 2000 (Berkeley: University of California Press).

⁴² "Frontline," PBS TV,

“No, we fight you because we are freemen who don’t sleep under oppression. We want to restore freedom to our Nation [*ummah* ?] and just as you lay waste to our Nation, so shall we lay waste to yours. ...Allah knows that it had never occurred to us to strike the [Twin] towers....

“The events that affected my soul in a direct way started in 1982 when America permitted the Israelis to invade Lebanon and the American Sixth Fleet helped them in that. The bombardment began and many were killed and injured and others were terrorized and displaced [.] I couldn’t forget those moving scenes, blood, and severed limbs, women and children sprawled everywhere. Houses destroyed along with their occupants and high rises demolished over their residents rockets raining down on *our* homes without mercy[. T]he situation was like a crocodile meeting a helpless child powerless except for his screams. Does the crocodile understand a conversation that doesn’t include a weapon? And the whole world saw and heard but didn’t respond. In those difficult moments, many hard-to-describe ideas bubbled in my soul, but in the end they produced an intense feeling of rejection of tyranny and gave birth to a strong resolve to punish the oppressors. And as I looked at those demolished towers in Lebanon, it entered my mind that we should punish the oppressor in kind and that we should destroy towers in America in order that they taste some of what we tasted and so that they be deterred from killing our women and children....So with these images and their like as their background, the events of September 11th came as a reply to those great wrongs.”⁴³

It is not difficult to see in the text of George Bush’s speech before The National Endowment of Democracy on October 6, 2005, an equally passionate “mirroring” response to the *apologia* of bin Ladin. President Bush frames the conflict between America and the terrorists as “the unfolding of a global ideological struggle” which is only “the current expression of an ancient struggle between those who put their faith in dictators and those who put their faith in the people.” Americans are “responding to a global campaign of fear with a global campaign of freedom.” That struggle began, as bin Ladin observed, a quarter century ago in Beirut in 1982-83, but he is no doubt not referring to the shelling of Arab refugee camps, but to Hizbullah’s bombing of the United States marine barracks and Reagan’s subsequent withdrawal of American troops from

⁴³ “Full Transcript of Bin Laden Video”; November 1, 2004
<http://abcnews.go.com/International/print?id=215913>.

Lebanon. The President says we recently observed the fourth anniversary of “a great evil,” 9/11 and “we remember the calling that came to us on that day.” He pledges that “We will confront this mortal danger to all humanity. We will not tire or rest until the war on terror is won.” He implicitly agrees with bin Ladin that “the whole world is watching this war and the two adversaries: It’s either victory and glory or misery and humiliation.” He rejects bin Ladin’s “litany of excuses for violence” and counters:

...we’re not facing a set of grievances that can be soothed and addressed. We’re facing a radical ideology with unalterable objectives: to enslave whole nations and intimidate the world.

No act of ours invited the rage of the killers, and no concession, bribe or act of appeasement would change or limit their plans for murder....Against such an enemy there is only one effective response: We will never back down, never give in, and never accept anything less than complete victory.

Finally, the president compares the global war on terrorism with the struggle against communism in the last century, which constitutes an appeal to the internationalist Republicans of his father’s administration to unite with his nationalist and fundamentalist base of support to fight an intractable war against “not just the enemies of America,” but the “enemies of humanity” who totally reject justice, honor, morality, and religion.⁴⁴

It is clear from their publicly aired speeches that George Bush reads bin Ladin and bin Ladin reads George Bush, but they are not engaged so much in a conversation about ultimate values, but in rallying their troops to their respective armies. The words are couched in ultimacy, intractability, and in the binary opposition of good and evil. Each mirrors the other, but there is no intention or desire to understand the other. Their statements are what Garrett O’Boyle calls “deontological,” which means that they feel they are justified by God and their actions are in accordance with the will of God.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ “Theories of Justification and Political Violence: Examples from Four Groups,” in *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (Summer 2002) p. 41. O’Boyle applies his term to four terrorist groups; I am applying it to apocalyptic discourse and to the speech of a fundamentalist American president.

The apocalypse imagined by John Nelson Darby and plotted in contemporary Christian dispensationalist fiction is mercifully limited to seven-years. Thus far, the global war on terrorism has been framed as an apocalypse, but its end is not in sight. If we depart from the symbolic universe of fundamentalism and return to the rational process of understanding religious phenomena we may find useful indications about how long this religious struggle may last. David C. Rapoport in his study of terrorism in the West during the last century and a quarter has defined “four waves” of terror: anarchist, anti-colonialist, struggles for national liberation, and “holy terror.”⁴⁶ Each has lasted about one generation of roughly forty years. Within each wave are many movements that are born, endure, and die out over those forty years with some overlap with the next wave. The duration of a wave, he hypothesizes, has to do with transmitting the zeal and passion of the cause to a second generation of recruits who are as imbued with the ultimate concern as the first generation was. Bin Ladin himself lamented that before he founded al-Qaida when jihad was obscured for a long time, we saw the emergence of a generation of youths who did not experience the heat of jihad” but that “The people that had the honor of engaging in jihad in Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, or Chechnya—we had that honor—are certain that the nation nowadays can, God willing, engage in jihad against the enemies of Islam.”⁴⁷

If wars continue to provide the training for a new generation of suicide martyrs, we can not expect the current wave of holy terror to die out in ten or fifteen years, but we may extend that war indefinitely until young men and women no longer share the grievance and the passion of violent jihadism. Ultimately, the outcome of this apocalypse may not depend upon God or the Antichrist, but upon us and our rational response to the challenge of al-Qaida.

⁴⁶ “Four Waves of Holy Terror,” _____.

⁴⁷ “Usamah Bin-Ladin, the Destruction of the Base,” an interview with bin Ladin aired June 10, 1999. Terrorism Research Center www.terrorism.com.