Patterns of the Past

Christian Complicity in Global Disorder


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Faith-based governance, policies and programmes

The focus in what follows is on Christian complicity in global disorder. This is not to deny complicity of other faiths (notably Judaism and Islam) but that has been frequently analyzed in relation to the crisis in the Middle East. It is the Christian-inspired response to global instability that is of concern here.

What might be termed "faith-based governance" has a long history dating back to intimate involvement of priestly hierarchies in advising the ruler, if the ruler was not a priest or divinity in his (or her) own right. Policies were determined through consultation of oracles such as at Delphi or through the interpretation of entrails of sacrificial animals as in Rome (*extispicium*). The policies of the Empire of China were guided through consultation of the *I Ching*. Ronald Reagan, like Calvin Coolidge, Theodore Roosevelt, and Franklin D. Roosevelt before him, made use of astrology in evaluating important decisions. So did Adolf Hitler. Faith in such aids to governance is active in non-western countries at the highest level especially with regard to the selection of auspicious occasions. It remains to be discovered whether the well-recognized influence of Nancy Reagan's astrologers on the President of the USA is now matched by the influence of Cherie Blair's unconventional faith-based interests on the Prime Minister of the UK.

Early in his mandate, George Bush set in place a variety of faith-based initiatives in response to the wishes of his Christian supporters and associates. The focus was provided by the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. Religious organizations have been given a powerful input to policy-making -- particularly on sensitive issues like abortion. These initiatives have been supported by "faith-based legislation" as described in the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life's *Lift Every Voice: Report on Religion In American Public Life* (2002).

For many evangelical Christian supporters of George Bush it is to be expected that the global American hegemony sought by the new American strategic policy will be seen as the ideal vehicle through which fulfillment of the long-standing missionary aspiration can be brought to completion. This Great Commission to evangelize the world derives from the Biblical injunction: "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." (*Matthew* 28:16-20; *Acts* 1: 8; II; *Corinthians* 6:14-16).
Franklin Graham, son of the Rev. Billy Graham (advisor to a succession of presidents) and one of the USA's most outspoken critics of Islam, indicated that he had refused workers "poisoned and ready" to roll into Iraq to provide for the population's post-war physical and spiritual needs (Crusaders sending in missionaries after the Blitzkrieg, 2003; Christianizing the Enemy, 2003) [more]. This is seen as part of the process of bringing about the Kingdom of Christ on Earth -- overriding any opposition and ignoring the possibility that any such Kingdom is necessarily of the spirit. One preferred evangelical model is to "invade" the world [more]. The major failure in post-invasion Iraq to win over "hearts and minds" is clearly a challenge for the future of this mindset and the assumptions on which it is based.

Three years after the invasion of Iraq (2003), it is believed that half the Christians in the country have fled, driven out by bomb attacks, assassinations and death threats. So why haven't the coalition forces done more to protect them? (Mark Lattimer, In 20 years, there will be no more Christians in Iraq, The Guardian, 6 October 2006)

In emulation of the US initiative of George Bush, on 3 August 2003 it was revealed by The Observer that "Blair is to allow Christian organisations and other 'faith groups' a central role in policy-making in a decisive break with British tradition that religion and government should not mix" [more]. He has "set up a ministerial working group in the Home Office." Its terms of reference are:

"to consider the most effective means of achieving greater involvement of the faith communities in policy-making and delivery across Whitehall [and] to identify the specific policy areas where this input would be most valuable...It will lay down the foundations for the effective involvement of the faith communities' perspectives and needs in policy development across government."

Non-religious groups (including humanists and atheists) have been excluded from any involvement in the group. Should the Conservatives regain power in the UK, it has now become clear that they have associated themselves closely with a Christian faith-based perspective through their Conservative Christian Fellowship (based in the party's headquarters) and the recent appointment of Tim Montgomerie as the political secretary of the Ian Duncan Smith, leader of the opposition to Blair's Labour party. Montgomerie has posted an extensive set of prayers on the Fellowship's website in specific support of the Conservative party. He is known to be close to the American theologian Marvin Olusky who inspired George Bush in positioning his campaign for the American electorate [more].

A faith-based approach to governance, as currently envisaged, ignores:

- the lack of government experience with interfaith dialogue (see below)
- the extremely modest successes of such dialogue in relation to policy (Northern Ireland, Middle East, Kashmir, Sudan, etc)
- the disproportionate weight that is likely to be attached to the views of particular faiths (notably those with which Tony Blair has sympathies, by analogy with the situation in the case of George Bush)

It is a curious irony that a principal Western criticism of the governance of fundamentalist Islamic states, and of their inhibited development, has been the restrictive and distorting influences of the *sharia* as a legal interpretation of the prescriptions of the *Koran*. The question is what legal prescriptions would follow from a literal interpretation of the *Bible* in the light of the development of faith-based governance inspired by Christian fundamentalism? Was this not the experiment conducted by the early Pilgrim fathers in the USA? Has this evoked widespread calls for its emulation today?

Aspects of the theme of government by fundamentalists are now recognized as having been explored by Margaret Atwood in a prescient novel (*The Handmaid's Tale*, 1985) about a future dystopic Republic of Gilead (formerly the USA) where the regime spins news of war and terrorism to its advantage [more]. Civil rights have been extinguished, books have been banned and culture has been terminated with extreme prejudice. Women are forbidden to hold jobs, property or money. Pollution and disease have decimated fertility rates -- birth control and homosexuality are now crimes punishable by death. (The few remaining fertile women, called "handmaids", are used as brood mares for regime officials and their barren wives).

**Infallibility of Christian leadership**

Christianity has a long history of dealing with the infallibility of its leadership, whether deriving from:

- a traditional lineage, as in the case of the papacy, or of dynastic royalty ruling by divine right
- personal revelation, as with the founders of many schismatic Christian groups,
- the status of the Elders in fundamentalist communities
- conversion and becoming born-again, as with many ordinary Christians who then believe themselves to be especially graced by an understanding of God's will

The evolution of "Christianity" as a whole has resulted in constraints on the acceptance of the universal applicability of the infallibility previously attributed to the papacy, both amongst Catholics and especially amongst those forms of Christianity that broke away from Catholicism. Of course those on both sides of a schism are highly articulate regarding the spiritual danger their critics incur. They readily label each other as highly misguided -- or even as agents of Satan. Analogous processes follow the unique perspective acquired from the revelation experienced by the founders of Christian sects. The process of becoming "born-again" may similarly empower the ordinary individual to recognize the depths of spiritual error associated with any who fail to agree with their God-given insight. Such error is to be closely associated with those acting as agents of Satan.

There is a long tradition of a special relationship between religion and rulership of a country -- between divinity and royalty -- dating back
to the divine status of the pharaohs. For Western civilization, it was Alexander the Great who gave form to the concept that a man can be both king and god. Because of the vast empire that he established, the idea has affected many religions and cultures. Buddhism and Christianity share the belief in a man-god, and in Islamic writings Alexander's conquests are used as a precedent for Mohammed's quest to create God's kingdom on earth. The concept has echoes in African cultures. It was central to the status of the Emperor in China -- and was a key factor in Japan during World War II.

In the case of Christianity, spiritual status was accorded to the royalty ruling many European countries. This bond with divinity was also translated into the "divine right" to rule [more]. In 1521, as a reward for attacking Lutheran ideas, Pope Leo X conferred the title of fidei defensor (defender of the faith) on Henry VIII. Although the title relates to the Catholic Church, it is still held by current British monarchs.

A distinction can be made between three conditions:

a. where both the ruler and much of the population believe the ruler to be specially blessed by God
b. where the population (or some part) holds that belief, even though the ruler does not
c. where the ruler holds that belief, but the population (or significant portions of it) do not

In the case of Tony Blair, Condition (c) would appear to apply. His conviction of his infallibility with regard to Iraq is faith-based. In a basically secular society, however, few citizens of the UK would buy into the religious justification for this conviction although they may be impressed by his belief that this is so. In relation to the controversy regarding Iraq, this concern has been well articulated by author Michael Holroyd :

But what of Tony Blair? He was as sincere as believers in the Flat Earth were sincere. He was sincerely wrong, sincerely self-deceived, sincerely praying to love one's enemies and turn the other cheek on a Sunday and sincerely going to war on a Monday. In short, he was, with deep sincerity, drawn to the magnet of power: the United States. I believe that history will show him to have been a sincerely dangerous man. (Guardian, 14 February 2004)

In the case of George Bush, Condition (a) would appear to apply, at least to some degree -- as exemplified by his 2001 statement to world leaders: "I know what I believe, and I believe what I believe is right". Again, speaking at a USA-EU summit in Ireland on 27 June 2004: "The bitter differences over the war are over... We all agree that a democratic and peaceful Iraq, with its territorial integrity intact, is in all our benefit." However, Bush still appeared unwilling to apologise for past differences, insisting he would do what he regards as necessary, regardless of international opinion. He declared: "We will set a vision. I will lead and we will just let the chips fall where they may". [more] So much for participatory democracy.

This condition is accepted due to the predominant importance attached to Christianity in US politics and its importance in the socio-cultural life of the country. In the absence of a UK-style royalty, in which the symbolic bond between divinity and royalty continues to be nourished at coronations and other ceremonies, aspects of this bond are invested by US citizens in their presidency and in the belief that God specially cherishes America, and by extension, its leadership.

According to Michael Ortiz Hill (Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: Bush's Armageddon Obsession, Revisited, 2003), it was the Reverend Billy Graham who taught Bush to live in anticipation of the Second Coming but it was his friendship with Dr. Tony Evans (a founder of the Promise Keepers movement) that shaped Bush's political understanding of how to deport himself in an apocalyptic era -- "how the world should be seen from a divine viewpoint". Hill cites S.R. Shearer (Antipas Ministries) with regard to such "Messianic leadership":

Most of the leaders of the Promise Keepers embrace a doctrine of 'end time' (eschatology), known as 'dominionism.' Dominionism pictures the seizure of earthly (temporal) power by the 'people of God' as the only means through which the world can be rescued... It is the eschatology through which Bush has imbued; an eschatology through which he has gradually (and easily) come to see himself as an agent of God who has been called by him to 'restore the earth to God's contro', a 'chosen vessel', so to speak, to bring in the Restoration of All Things.

The challenge of infallibility is closely related to a sense of moral certainty on the part of the ruler and a dislike of nuance. A recent report (Political Conservatism as Motivated Social Cognition, 2003) concluded that conservatism can be explained psychologically as a set of neuroses rooted in "fear and aggression, dogmatism and the intolerance of ambiguity". According to the report, typical cases include: Hitler, Mussolini, Reagan and Bush -- all of whom "preached a return to an idealized past and conditioned inequality."

"...[W]e consider evidence for and against the hypotheses that political conservatism is significantly associated with (1) mental rigidity and closed-mindedness, including (a) increased dogmatism and intolerance of ambiguity, (b) decreased cognitive complexity, (c) decreased openness to experience, (d) uncertainty avoidance, (e) personal needs for order and structure, and (f) need for cognitive closure; (2) lowered self-esteem; (3) fear, anger, and aggression; (4) pessimism, disgust, and contempt; (5) loss prevention; (6) fear of death; (7) threat arising from social and economic deprivation; and (8) threat to the stability of the social system. We have argued that these motives are in fact related to one another psychologically, and our motivated social-cognitive perspective helps to integrate them. We now offer an integrative, meta-analytic review of research on epistemic, existential, and ideological bases of conservatism."

According to psychologist Oliver James,

Authoritarian personalities are organised around rabid hostility to "legitimate" targets, often ones nominated by their parents'
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informed by the morning prayer meetings of their leadership. Whatever its merits, the problematic historical consequences of faith-based politics of earlier centuries have momentarily been forgotten.

The dangers are evident in the historical statement by Tsar Nicholas, Emperor of Russia, on taking command of all military forces, who declared in an Order of the Day (6 September 1915): "With firm trust in divine mercy and unshakable confidence in ultimate victory, we shall fulfil our sacred duty of defending our country to the death, and we will never allow Russian soil to be dishonoured" [more] History may conclude that Russian soil was already dishonoured by the conditions of the serfs who worked it under the Tsar's cronies. His failure to recognize and act on this knowledge resulted in the deaths of tens of millions. Despite his spiritual advisers in the Russian Orthodox Church, his interpretation of divine will would also appear to have been faulty.

The leader of the Coalition of the Willing, with the aid of his own spiritual advisers, is of course now free to act according to his own inspired understanding of his "sacred duty". It remains to be seen to what extent this is re-establishing a 21st century variant of the "divine right" to rule.

Democratic contradictions in faith-based politics

A fundamental challenge is in process of being set in place, at least in the USA, with respect to the future of democracy. Tony Blair is already facing with increasing opposition to his emulation of the "presidential" style of non-democratic governance supported by cronies. As noted by Graham Alken (Guardian, 16 August 2003):

We have accidentally created a presidential system with a mighty prime minister at the centre of every decision, and everyone else -- parliament, political parties, local government -- reduced to obedient followers. It means that the prime minister has a monopoly of wisdom and he or she can never admit to being wrong for fear of exposing weakness. The prime minister cannot even talk seriously with the obedient followers, because that might suggest they know something which he does not. [Reputation, not reality, now governs our politics]

Once a Christian leader of a God-fearing nation is in place, as with George Bush, it becomes extremely problematic to criticize any of his actions. For as a born-again Christian he can only be acting with God's will and guidance. Critics would not only be traitorous -- in the case of foreign policy -- but more generally would be in defiance of God's will and therefore subject to every condemnation from those of religious persuasion.

Given Christianity's own immense difficulties over the centuries in handling any form of dissension -- as currently to be seen with such issues as ordination of women and gay-marriages -- this ideological and "methodological" difficulty is now in process of being projected onto the democratic process itself through the focus on faith-based politics. There is an irony to the fact that it was the Christian monastic orders that were at the origin of most modern democratic processes and their terminology ("assembly", "commission", etc). But their processes may be understood as having operated within a particular "party" or policy framework.

The problem for the future of democratic processes -- especially at the global level -- lies in processes between "parties" and policy frameworks, and not within them. In the case of the USA, the Republicans have now effectively positioned themselves as "closer to
God”. How are Democrats to criticize the Republican policies and presidency without positioning themselves as critical of policies inspired by God? The Republicans have effectively occupied the spiritual highground. Is voting Republican to be framed as “voting for God” – with the implication that voting for the Democrats is tantamount to voting for his opponent?

Michael Kinsley (God Bless You…, 2001) explored the ubiquitous use of "God Bless You and God Bless America" by politicians in the USA -- increasingly obliged to use the phrase in any farewell greeting. He even suggests that it is starting to appear suspicious if a politician does not use that phrase. Tony Blair’s minders had to protest strongly against his proposed use of the phrase "God Bless You" at the end of his televised address to the nation at the start of the war in Iraq. Consternation was expressed when Blair, asked who he would answer to for the deaths of British soldiers, replied: “My Maker” [more]. This is indicative of a classic arrogation of sovereign authority by a prime minister. In fact “Dieu et Mon Droit” (God and My Law) is the motto of the British Sovereign, dating from Henry V (1413-1422) and appearing on the Royal Coat of Arms – whose function is to identify the person who is the Head of State.

Is it the case in the USA that the Democrats must now seek to become more spiritually inspired than the Republicans -- a competition for "spiritual access"? How can Democrats seek to correct for "errors" in Republican policy when all such "errors" come with a God-given guarantee of rectitude beyond reproach? Or is it the case, as with some of the most prominent tele-evangelists in the USA (or some prominent representatives of the Republican party), that the nature of their "sins" must be detected -- namely the areas in which, as vulnerable human beings, they have strayed from fulfilling God’s will? Given the sense of righteousness that pervades faith-based politics, how is "sin" then to be identified and proven? The remarkable use of satire to this end by the Door Magazine merits attention.

Does this imply a need for a new faith-based process of "outing" -- analogous to that practiced in early American spiritual communities, and functionally similar to well-explored procedures for informing on Communist party members that stray from the ideological line in totalitarian societies? A step in this direction is the Terrorism Information and Prevention System (TIPS) program billed by George Bush under the Citizen Corps program - designed to create a civilian secret police informant program out of the nation's truck drivers, loggers, postal workers, ship captains, cable TV repairmen and others [more].

At the time of writing the world has been exposed to the anguished dynamics within the Anglican Communion regarding the election of homosexual bishops (in the UK and in the USA). The democratic process of that Communion in the USA (the General Convention of the Episcopal Church) was interrupted by a last minute attempt by the evangelical faction to smear the gay candidate with indecent and pornographic associations (subsequently discredited). This would appear to anticipate the nature of faith-based democracy when a faction that knows it is right feels empowered to use any tactics -- presumably including assassination (as in the case of pro-life action against abortionists) in order to forestall due process [more | more].

With regard to the furore concerning homosexuality, an editorial in the Financial Times asks whether Christians can indeed distinguish between "deviance" and "difference" (Financial Times, 9 August 2003), making the point that:

Sexual mores and religious beliefs aside, it is always worth remembering that Christians appealed to the authority of the scripture to argue on both sides of the slavery debate. The charging of interest -- haram or forbidden in Islam -- was also prohibited by Catholic canon law until comparatively recently. The early church took a long time to decide whether gentiles could be Christians. Centuries of religious wars and persecution of heretics, as well as ostensibly scripture-backed collective neuroses such as witch-burning and anti-Semitism, testify to the bigotry of many of their successors.

In that long searchlight of history, a little bit of humility and humanism might help Anglican and other Christian leaders understand the difference between deviance and difference.

Such understanding places new demands on discernment. Failure in this respect reinforces the traditional political dynamics between opposing parties -- to be reframed in faith-based terms as an archetypal battle between "Good" and "Evil". The art of politics in the USA may thus become the art of detecting the vulnerability of the opposing party to "vice" -- of which the Enron and other corporate scandals were interesting examples, especially given the intimate involvement of key members of the Bush administration.

Party politics in europe has been associated with major political funding scandals over the past decade [more]. Christianity’s association with politics, through parties of Christian Democrats, has not significantly distanced such parties from such corruption. Typically the scandals have involved party financing and money laundering -- often at the highest level (as in the case of the involvement of Helmut Kohl, chancellor of Germany) [more | more | more]. A major political corruption scandal involving the Christian Democrats has disrupted Italian politics since 1992 [more | more]. Christian Democrats have also been directly involved in scandals in Belgium. The involvement of Christian Democrats in the dictatorship of Latin America is a different matter.

The contradictions of faith-based democracy become all the more evident in the Christian-inspired effort to promote democracy in Muslim countries. It is assumed by Christians, however, that part of the problem of those countries is the role of the faith-based leadership there -- except, for Christians (as for other monotheistic religions), it is the wrong faith. For some prominent evangelical spokesmen ‘Islam is Evil” and "Muhammad was a terrorist” [more | more]. The idea of a faith-based democracy in Islamic countries, which it must be if it is to conform to the Islamic religion and culture, is anathema to Western political thought.

It has been argued by Ed Deak that : "The demise of all past societies and empires has always been caused by misused faith and always through the manipulations of the 3 traditional dictatorial sectors: the merchants, the religious clergy and the the military. The merchants created the demand, the clergy the divine authorization and the military did the dirty work." [more]

Resolution of policy dilemmas in faith-based politics

Richard Sennett (They mean well: the American flight from politics into faith. Times Literary Supplement, 7 June 2002) concludes:
The US, like most other Western democracies, has seen the legitimacy of the political process nosedive in the last generation. Cynicism about political ethics leaves only two options: retreat into spectacle -- which could be called the Berlusconi Way, in which the spectacles of "militantism" would fit all too comfortably; or appeal to religion as a guide to politics.

The self-standing integrity of politics is a particularly urgent one for American intellectuals. Stained by histories of bad faith, and partly by an unconscious elitism, we too have ceased to be credible, critical, citizen voices for our own people. To regain that legitimacy by appealing to religious sentiment, by tapping into religious "personhood", is only to declare that intellectuals, too, are good Americans. Fred Hilliday [Two Hours that Shook the World, 2002] makes the straightforward point that American power has aroused "global inequality and global rancour". To which "What We Are Fighting For" [Institute of American Values, 2002], replies: we mean well. This amounts to a retreat from politics; it simply will not do.

But George Bush has been remarkably successful in giving new form and public credibility to faith-based politics. Given unshakable religious conviction, it becomes very straightforward to resolve complex strategic dilemmas from which strategic analysts have vainly struggled to derive coherence over the years through the best efforts of their disciplines. Given the conviction that relevant insight will be provided directly from God through prayer, decisions can easily be reached -- even on life-and-death matters of final appeal prior to signature of a warrant of execution or on the launching of pre-emptive strikes with high risk of loss of civilian lives. Decisions made under such circumstances cannot be a subject of regret or lead to any crisis of conscience. A decision made in this way, with God's assistance, is a matter of God's will -- whatever the consequences.

It is of course the case that there is a long tradition of leaders appealing for divine guidance when faced with complex decisions. The earliest religious settlements of the USA sought divine guidance articulated through their Elders -- a process which is now known to have had its own problems and abuses. The contrast in recent times is that policy scientists and strategists have endeavoured to develop new disciplines to balance complex sets of factors regarding circumstances that may call for counter-intuitive judgement. It would appear that the contribution of these disciplines is now being set aside -- except perhaps where it can be used to confirm (especially for wider audiences of unbelievers) the leadership decisions informed by prayer.

There is however a challenge where decisions by a Christian-inspired leadership are expected to convince those who are not of Christian persuasion and who may have unreasonable doubt regarding the quality and relevance of any divine support from a Christian God -- especially where that support appears to be less than equitable in favouring Christians at the expense of those of other faiths. The question then is the part to be played by policy sciences in reconciling faith-based strategies with those favoured by people of other faiths. How are think-tanks funded by Christian governments to handle the perspectives of the unbelievers who have not yet been converted to a Christian perspective and who must necessarily be understood as vulnerable to profoundly dangerous religious error?

Such difficulties are compounded when the "unbelievers" in Christian eyes hold to faiths that entitle them, in their own eyes, to a privileged relationship to (an apparently different) God that frames the Christians as "unbelievers". This classical situation in conflicts inspired by religion unfortunately cannot now be effectively addressed by faith-based think-tanks that necessarily have a prior conviction as to the correct conclusion to be drawn from any investigation.

**Faith-based evidence**

As in the case of policy dilemmas, the privileged relationship with God, facilitates the handling and interpretation of evidence. As a leader of a country "under God", with the full knowledge of what is right and what is God's will, there should be no need for the leader to justify what he/she knows to be right. However, as a courtesy, efforts can indeed be deployed to satisfy those of insufficient faith (the "Doubting Thomases" of the world) through the best use of science to confirm this judgement. The process may be considerably facilitated by pre-selecting which matters are worthy of such inquiry and excluding those which may confuse investigators and lead to a contrary, and therefore erroneous, conclusion -- one that would necessarily be opposed to God's will. The delay in recognition of Galileo's evidence, and the rationalizations for it, exemplifies the process -- as does the creationist approach to biological evolution.

From such a perspective, the recognition of Evil becomes straightforward. It should not be forgotten that the judicial procedures of the Inquisition have been valued as a pioneering historical effort to give form to the judicial process of inquiry. It is to be expected that a Christian leadership would demonstrate such leadership in naming Evil once evidence has been obtained. The challenge becomes evident in the case of genetically modified foodstuffs in support of which the Vatican is seeking the Pope's moral authority. The clinching argument being that, irrespective of any other consequences (notably to other species), the Vatican is convinced of their overriding benefit to humanity. [More]

The Christian leader of a country "under God" cannot be meaningfully accused of lying to the public. Any such accusation would necessarily reflect a dangerous misunderstanding of what was said, why it was said, or of the benediction of God in approving what was said. This is a major issue for both George Bush and Tony Blair with respect to the widely documented mishandling of "evidence" relating to weapons of mass destruction justifying the attack on Iraq. This is especially problematic when, as Christians, they ask others to trust them in their judgement and conviction -- as a complementary feature of faith-based governance in which the electorate is expected to have heightened "faith" in the leadership.

A specific example of reframing of evidence under faith-based leadership is the case of the denial by the Pentagon that napalm was used in Iraq. Although "napalm" was indeed used according to marines stationed there, this "napalm" was based on an improved distillate from the napalm named in international treaties against its use. As an upgraded product, the Pentagon then felt entitled to deny that it was using the earlier version of the product even though a more powerful version was indeed used [more]. A second example is the recently announced research on a gamma-ray bomb that could either be developed (because it is not defined by non-proliferation and nuclear testing treaties) or could put in place the conditions to end a ban on nuclear testing [more]. These definitional game-playing procedures
are used by manufacturers of designer drugs to evade legally the provisions of legislation prohibiting earlier specified variants. They are also reminiscent of a previous American president's challenge, under oath, faced with the definition of sexual relations.

Retired American intelligence officers, formed a lobby group (Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity) which accused the US administration of manipulating intelligence evidence about Iraq to fit the political agenda (a concern that has also been highlighted in the UK). The focus of the protest was US Defence Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld's, call for a subjective judgment, "a connecting of the dots" according to the principle; "Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence'. This is a process conducive to "group think". The concern with appropriately commemorating through architecture the remaining evidence of Gound Zero and those who died there -- a major concern to New Yorkers, notably for the benefit of freedom-lovers around the world -- can usefully be contrasted with the treatment of evidence by the military during peacekeeping operations in post-war Iraq. Peter Beaumont (Farah tried to plead with the US troops but she was killed anyway, Observer, 7 September 2003) reports on a raid on an apartment by troops:

What is most curious about this story is that, when I called the US military press office in Baghdad, it said it could find no record of the raid or of the deaths. It is curious because the police in Mahmudiya have told us how US military policemen delivered the bodies to their station the next morning. It became less puzzling when I spoke to Nada Doumani, spokeswoman for the International Committee for the Red Cross, who confirmed what she has said before - that despite repeated requests from the Red Cross, it can neither get information nor figures on civilian deaths during raids.

What happened at Mahmudiya would be disturbing enough if it was unique, but it is not. It is part of a pattern that points not to a deliberate policy but perhaps to something equally worrying, an institutional lack of care among many in the US military for whether civilians are killed in their operations. It is not enough to say, as some defenders of the US military in Iraq do, that its soldiers are tired, frightened and under pressure from the simmering guerrilla attacks directed against them. For it is the impression that the US military gives of not caring about those innocent Iraqis that they kill that is stoking resentment.

These Christian principles of faith-based evidence also cover the cases where evidence may be inadequate to convince the Doubting Thomases. As leader, given one's privileged awareness of God's will, evidence that is insufficiently robust to satisfy doubters may usefully be enhanced in the interest of advancing God's cause. The major inquiry in August 2003 into the "sexing-up" (versus "hardening", "enhancing", or "egging-up") of the case for the invasion of Iraq, presented to the UK Parliament by Tony Blair is an example. This "enhancement" may also be extended to fabricating (as with the uranium from Niger), or planting, of appropriate evidence whose lack would otherwise endanger the national security of God's favoured country or one's ability as leader to defend that security credibly. The difficulty is that a context is being created in which even if "evidence" is uncovered it will be very difficult to prove that it was not fabricated - or that the time required to locate it was not used to ensure the apparent authenticity of the "evidence" and to "motivate" those brought forward to declare it to be genuine.

The unclarified dimensions of this Christian-inspired approach to evidence are explored by the former UK environment minister (May 1997- June 2003) Michael Meacher (This war on terrorism is bogus, Guardian, 6 September 2003), following Gore Vidal (Dreaming War: Blood for Oil and the Bush-Cheney Junta, Thunder's Mouth Press, 2002) and Naheed Nenshi (The War on Freedom: How and Why America was Attacked, September 11, Tree of Life Publications, 2002), Meacher argues, citing many public domain sources:

None of this assembled evidence, all of which comes from sources already in the public domain, is compatible with the idea of a real, determined war on terrorism. The catalogue of evidence does, however, fall into place when set against the PNAC blueprint [Rebuilding America's Defense, 2000]. From this it seems that the so-called "war on terrorism" is being used largely as a cover for achieving wider US strategic geopolitical objectives. Indeed Tony Blair himself hinted at this when he said to the Commons liaison committee: "To be truthful about it, there was no way we could have got the public consent to have suddenly launched a campaign on Afghanistan but for what happened on September 11" (Times, July 17 2002). Similarly Rumsfeld was so determined to obtain a rationale for an attack on Iraq that on 10 separate occasions he asked the CIA to find evidence linking Iraq to 9/11; the CIA repeatedly came back empty-handed (Time Magazine, May 13 2002)....

The conclusion of all this analysis must surely be that the "global war on terrorism" has the hallmarks of a political myth propagated to pave the way for a wholly different agenda - the US goal of world hegemony, built around securing by force command over the oil supplies required to drive the whole project. Is collusion in this myth and junior participation in this project really a proper aspiration for British foreign policy? If there was ever need to justify a more objective British stance, driven by our own independent goals, this whole depressing saga surely provides all the evidence needed for a radical change of course.

The difficulty for Christians lies in the possibility that those lacking Christian convictions might then be challenged to distinguish such manipulated evidence from the shifty practices deplored in the case of Saddam Hussein.

The challenges of faith-based evidence may also be seen in studies of "groupthink" (see Groupthink: the Search for Archaeoraptor as a Metaphoric Tale, 2002). This case illustrates the challenges for science of becoming entrapped in a particular pattern of belief and of adapting "scientific evidence" to fit that belief.

Ironically such faith-based evidence is in marked contrast to the approach to evidence recommended by Nobel peace prize winner, Bishop Desmond Tutu (Guardian, 31 December 2001) following 9/11 (in the light of his experience with the abuses of the apartheid regime in South Africa):
Evil and demonization

Once having accepted that one's country is specially cherished by God, it is easily recognized that having been elected to lead that country one must necessarily (and by definition) be especially close to God in order to carry out his will. Under such circumstances, any attack of any kind on that country by outsiders, or any internal attack on its institutions, can only be understood as an attack on God and therefore necessarily Evil. As leader, given one's closeness to God, and as a privileged channel for his perspective, any dissenting views regarding the "goodness" of one's leadership decisions in articulating God's will must necessarily be framed as (at best) misguided, but necessarily serving the cause of Evil.

For a leader uniquely associated with Good in this world, the presence of individuals and groups opposed to that Good must necessarily be defined as Evil, and must necessarily evoke an "appropriate" response. Hence the justification for the phrase: "if you are not with us, you are against us". And those opposed to the Good must necessarily be expressing demonic attributes -- providing a justification for the programmes of demonization that are a standard feature of American psychological warfare (PsyOps). This is a real challenge to those of deep religious conviction who now have difficulty in according their whole-hearted support to the leader of the Christian free world.

The challenge for Christians is that the evolution of Christianity over the centuries has offered them many insights into the difficulties associated with the detection of Evil in a community. This was most notably the case with respect to the processes of the Inquisition guided by principles articulated by what has since been renamed as the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Of the prominent leaders of the Coalition of the Willing, Tony Blair as a devout Anglo-Catholic, would tend to hold views closest to this Catholic tradition. Unfortunately he was unable to obtain the Pope's support for the actions against the Evil detected by the Coalition of the Willing. But in the USA itself, the role of the Elders in early Pilgrim communities in detecting and rooting out Evil has been the subject of extensive study (as in the notorious trials of the "witches of Salem") in 1692.

Whereas Evil in previous centuries was closely associated with sorcery and called for the detection of "witches", whether in Europe or the USA, during the Cold War it was to be detected in the form of Communism. In the current period, Evil is epitomized by the action of terrorists. For those lacking the clarity deriving from a privileged relationship with God, it is unfortunate that there is some confusion in the distinction, in each of the following cases:

- the Evil of witches condemned from a religious perspective by male judges as distinct from the repression of women and feminine values (painfully recognized only centuries later)
- the subversive initiatives of Communist agents as distinct from the expression of alternative ideological perspectives (as in Allende's Chile and in recent opposition to economic globalization)
- the reprehensible violence of terrorists as distinct from the case in many countries whose independence was achieved as a consequence of what would now be labelled as terrorism (and who may celebrate early leaders who were in their time labelled as terrorists, or who would be so labelled by today's criteria)
- the Evil associated with withholding assistance now to those in desperate need (as in the case of starvation) as distinct from that of promising future assistance now (as in the case of nation-building funds) in the full knowledge that it will in all probability be subsequently withheld

After Ronald Reagan's labelling of the UssR as an "Evil Empire", American presidents now make full use of their authority to detect and label Evil -- a judgement previously reserved for religious leaders. Tony Blair follows this trend. Curiously, however, the definition -- after centuries of unresolved theological controversy -- has not been the subject of public debate or clarification by the United Nations (itself long-challenged by the definition of "aggression"). Nor is there any question of an appeal. The judgement is final and absolute and derives directly from God's guidance. It is regrettable that other religions -- viewed as Evil by Christianity -- find themselves equally able to label Christian undertakings as Evil. Such two-facedness is of course itself a characteristic of Evil.

The unfortunate feature for Christians is that their various sects tend to distinguish themselves precisely because they regret, or even abhor, the practices and views of other sects within the Christian community -- even to the point of labelling such practices or views as Evil or inspired by the Satan.

This pattern is unfortunately echoed in some aspects of the conduct of science. The relationship between the disciplines may involve a high degree of arrogance and mutual disparagement. Scientists may even be demonized by their colleagues in other disciplines or by the media -- all of whom would claim to be acting "in good faith". For example, the former editor of Nature, John Maddox advocated burning Rupert Sheldrake's books as heresy, stating: "He deserves to be condemned for the exact same reasons the Pope condemned Galileo".

Faith-based justice

This term has been used in an appreciative sense to refer to the involvement of faith-based organizations in seeking to respond to conditions of injustice -- notably through charitable action for the needy. Unfortunately it also has a more sinister connotation based on the faith-based biases introduced in the handling of evidence (see above) and the biases in subsequently assessing that evidence during any judicial procedure before a tribunal.

The challenge of faith-based justice is highlighted at the time of writing by the actions of Chief Justice Roy Moore in Alabama who
installed a two-tonne monument bearing the Ten Commandments at the entrance to the courthouse. In response to rulings for its removal, he declared to his supporters: "The acknowledgement of God as the moral foundation of law in this nation is being hidden from us" [more | more].

As noted in an earlier paper (Warping the Judgement of Dissenting Opinion: towards a general framework for comparing distortion in rules of evidence, 2002):

In a period when re-introduction of faith-based policies is being actively considered both in the USA and in the UK, the extraordinary post-attack polarization of policy debate into "good" versus "evil" is also partly reinforced by the imminent "end times" scenarios of Christian fundamentalists -- the final battle between "Good" and "Evil" [more; more; more]. Such framings notably call for re-examination of the legalistic procedures originally introduced by the Catholic Inquisition to root out evil in the population in centuries past. The current relevance is established by Doug Linder in Searching for Evil: an examination of the nature of evil and its persistence in the American legal system.

What is to be understood when any presiding judge applies the label 'evil' to a person convicted in a trial during the final summation and sentencing? It is appropriate to express concern at the possible re-emergence of some form of "faith-based justice" -- as would seem to be the case at this time.

The problem is unfortunately echoed in the judgement meted out by scientific peer groups to those scientists who fail to respect the norms of a discipline. As with religion, the difficulty lies in the rigid belief system of some scientific authorities who claim to know what is true (arrogantly anticipating all future development of knowledge) thus precluding the need to give balanced evidence. Such patterns are only broken by "paradigm shifts".

**Interfaith dialogue**

Although scientific disciplines have been much challenged to establish any form of meaningful and non-tokenistic interdisciplinarity, it is in the world of faith that the failure to respond effectively to the analogous challenge amongst religions that has become a blight on any claim to a faith-based world civilisation. Many of the regional conflicts around the world are inspired by contrasting religious perspectives. But, whether between Christians or with other faiths, the poverty of insight in practice regarding fruitful interfaith dialogue is shameful. This is exemplified in the Middle East between Muslims and Jews, but is most obvious in the divisiveness within the Christian Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

The problem for each religion is the doctrinal point of departure of knowing the truth -- and being uniquely correct in the face of an ocean of dissent and unbelief. Under such circumstances any effort towards mutual "tolerance" can only be understood as dangerously compromising the only correct truth. The situation is aggravated by efforts of particular religious factions to engage in "interfaith evangelism" -- namely to seek aggressively to proselytize other faiths [more].

The special advantage of the Christian leadership of the Coalition of the Willing is their conviction that those who have not yet recognized Christ are in grave spiritual danger which can only exacerbate the danger that their actions may constitute for the rest of the world if they are terrorist suspects. The absurdity of seeking to dialogue with those holding such dangerously erroneous perspectives is then only too understandable. Curiously it is the evangelical Christians most supportive of George Bush who, of all the Christian denominations, are least disposed to participate in interfaith initiatives.

The challenge in practice is that the many holding to faiths distinct from those held by the Christian leadership of the Coalition of the Willing, including those of other Christian faiths, are not about to disappear voluntarily. Since it is not meaningful to dialogue with them, other than in token exercises of diplomatic courtesy, the challenge becomes one of determining how to ensure their conversion or neutralization in order to achieve the Kingdom of Christ on Earth. Their resistance to this process -- especially when expressed violently - is much to be regretted.

The position of George Bush regarding interfaith dialogue is particularly well illustrated by his appointment (undemocratically by-passing the Senate) in August 2003 of Daniel Pipes to the Board of the US Institute for Peace (USIP) and despite public outrage at his extremist views [more | more | more].

**Faith-based withdrawal of human rights**

Many commentators have remarked on the initiative taken since 9/11 by the world's superpower to dramatically constrain the human rights for which so many had struggled for so long -- even in the USA. It might be suspected that this initiative was to some degree reinforced, in a vengeful fit of pique, by the earlier termination of the USA's long-standing "automatic" membership of the UN Commission on Human Rights -- and its unsympathetic reception at the UN World Conference Against Racism (Durban, 2001) [more]. There is much irony to the fact that, as an enthusiastic promoter of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the USA has now become exemplary in its abuse of those rights in the guise of faith-based governance. Given the primacy accorded to the USA's own Bill of Rights in exporting democracy worldwide -- including to countries such as Iraq -- the reinterpretation by the Bush administration of the principles of the Second Amendment to the US Constitution (into which the Bill of rights is incorporated) should not be forgotten. The Amendment stresses the need for armed militias as a guarantee of the security of the state (see also Arming Civil Society Worldwide: Getting democracy to work in the emergent American Empire?, 2003).

The point has not however been emphasized that this curtailment of human rights has been promoted by a born-again Christian leader who is candid about the role of God in guiding his actions. There can be no question that George Bush is persuaded that God is personally guiding his decisions in withholding human rights and that Christians of the USA are in large measure tacitly or explicitly
The actions declared to be in response to terrorism, and for the protection of Americans everywhere, are therefore to be understood as uniquely supported by God. The attack on Iraq is to be so understood -- as with the treatment of those suspected of terrorism.

Before discussing this matter, it is important to recognize that the USA is one of the few remaining democratic countries that continues to make use of the death penalty -- and has arrogated to itself the right to execute this penalty on others. George Bush himself, as Governor of Texas, was personally responsible for authorization of the death penalty against several hundred offenders. It has been clearly stated that, as a born-again Christian, he sought the guidance of God in prayer in each case before making the authorization. All concerned, including those terminated in this way, can therefore be reassured that his actions are a reflection of God's will. For there can be no doubt whatsoever, in a country "under God" that its leader could fail to act in a manner consonant with God's will. Support for this view has been affirmed in the USA by the National Association of Evangelicals and by the Southern Baptist Convention. Indeed the latter declared: "God...has established capital punishment as a just and appropriate means by which the civil magistrate may punish those guilty of capital crimes." [More].

In the UK, Tony Blair, has appealed for similar recognition of the merits of his personal religiously-inspired conviction of the appropriateness of his actions in matters relating to Iraq. He has ensured the necessary legislation, matching that of the USA, for the treatment of those suspected of terrorism. John Howard in Australia has made similar endeavours. Christians are therefore significantly inhibited in questioning the merits of these initiatives undertaken in the light of their faith.

Curiously, as the would be successor to religion, science is also not reluctant to be associated with the curtailment of human rights in its pursuit of knowledge. This pattern is to be seen with respect to potential dangerous physical experiments, weapons research, biological research with inadequate safeguards, and experimentation on human beings without their consent -- including torture.

**Torture under faith-based leadership**

With respect to curtailment of human rights of those suspected of terrorism on American (or UK) soil, few are aware of the treatment meted out to suspects behind closed doors under such Christian leadership and with its full approval. As with the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II, this may be understood as a justifiable precautionary measure whose injustice need not provoke Christian qualms of conscience. The fact that the legal protection of terrorism suspects is deliberately curtailed under the direction of US Attorney General John Ashcroft, a born-again Christian and an ordained minister, should therefore not to be considered a matter of concern to Christians.

The difficulty for those of Christian faith is their complicity in the subsequent processes of torture -- carried out in their name and in defence of their values -- processes which have become commonplace in the response by the Coalition of the Willing to terrorism.

Three aspects can be distinguished:

- torture practiced on the continental USA on terrorist suspects
- torture carried out in other countries on American bases: In the case of the Bagram air base in Afghanistan, two deaths were declared to be homicide. In the case of Guantanamo Bay, there is no information on the nature of the torture carried out or the number of deaths that have resulted -- and there could be no confirmation of the veracity of official statements on these matters. Hard evidence concerning conditions there is restricted to widely distributed information from telephoto lens.
- outsourced torture: The USA is documented as having made use of the services of allies to whom suspects could be transferred for "less constrained" forms of torture -- again with no record of their treatment or fate

The use of torture in these ways has been widely acknowledged. The precise nature and extent of that torture remains classified information since those exposed to it are entitled to no legal protection and may well disappear without trace -- possibly to be "released" over the ocean from a plane as with many "disappearances" in Argentine and Mexico in the 1970s [more | more]. Records will undoubtedly be shredded, if they are maintained at all. But again it is important to be absolutely clear that such torture is carried out under Christian leadership, fully supported by policy counsellors inspired by daily White House prayer groups. It is done in the name of the highest Christian values, as the most appropriate action for their defence -- in the light of God's guidance. However, it is unlikely that non-Christians would seek to make any fine distinctions regarding the degree of complicity of particular flavours of Christianity in support of such activity.

Ironically, torture was completely justified according to Christian principles during the period of the Inquisition -- which was partly responsible for stimulating the emergence of the Protestant Christian groups currently most supportive of George Bush. The archives of the Inquisition have only recently been declassified for the appreciation of historians.

**Faith-based military action: "Gott MIT Uns"**

Christianity has a long tradition of justifying its defence and advancement through the use of military force. This has included the Knights Templar and the Crusades, the forces of the Papal States (including a papal navy dating back to the 9th century) and of the Holy Roman Empire -- and the reinforcement of the activities of Christian missionaries (notably by the Conquistadores). A characteristic confusion was however cultivated between "saving souls" and "filling the coffers of Christendom". European colonialism was born of this ambiguity (now echoed in the preoccupations regarding "development" of the United Nations Development Programme and its associated Global Compact).

There is a long tradition of ensuring that military activity is appropriate blessed and supported by representatives of an appropriate priesthood. As early as 7 BC, there are records of the Assyrian Army having a cadre of military chaplains. The role of the chaplain became more clearly defined at the time of the Crusades when he was charged with the spiritual and moral welfare of the troops which
has been formalized in recent centuries.

The notion of a Christian "church militant" (Ecclesia Militans) has long been cultivated as "the Christian church on earth, which is supposed to be engaged in a constant warfare against its enemies." [more] [more]. It is evident in the rationale of the Crusades -- a term now widely used metaphorically in relation to missionary activity. It is evident in the title of the Salvation Army and its military structure, or the Army of God (that is open in its support of those assassinating abortionists [more] [more]). The point continues to be made with regard to the Army of Christ, that Christians are enjoined to serve as soldiers of Jesus Anointed [more] [more].

The New Testament is filled with militaristic references and characterizations of Christians as soldiers. For example:

- "You, therefore, my child, be empowered by favor in Anointed Jesus. And what things you hear from me through many witnesses, these things commit to men of persuasion, who will be competent also to teach others. You, then, suffer hardship with us as a good soldier of Jesus Anointed. No one serving as a soldier tangles with the affairs of life, so that he might please the one having enlented him." (II Timothy 2:1-4)
- "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword." (Matthew 10:34)
- "But now, he having a purse, let him take it. Likewise also a wallet. And he not having, let him sell his garment and buy a sword." (Luke 22:36)

Millions of children have been exposed to hymns joyously employing military metaphors [more] [more] [more] [more] such as:

Onward Christian soldiers, Marching as to War
With the Cross of Jesus, Going on Before

Such words raise questions about the legitimacy of concern expressed by Christians regarding analogous comments in the Koran relating to any references to holy war. The use of warlike metaphors by Christians was debated at a Consultation on Mission Language and Metaphors at the Fuller Theological Seminary in June 2000. It concluded:

"We regret that certain words and images long employed to call the church to mission have increasingly caused offense to the very people with whom we are seeking to share the good news. Some of these words and images are biblical; some are motivational tools from the secular arena that we use to inspire involvement and action. Many are military in nature: 'target,' 'conquer,' 'army,' 'crusade,' 'mobilize,' 'beachhead,' 'advance,' 'enemy,' 'battle,' etc. Warfare metaphors and terminology have become increasingly counterproductive to mission work." They recommend alternate words and images such as "blessing, healing, inviting, sowing and reaping, fishing, restoring family relationships, becoming reconcilers, peacemakers and ambassadors." [More] [more]

St Augustine provided five qualifications for a "just war," which are still useful in guiding a Christian's evaluation of the rightness of his nation's cause. The concept was reviewed, to justify exceptions, by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (Just War Tradition and the New War on Terrorism, 2001). Briefly, St Augustine's points include:

- the war must have a just cause such as the punishment of injustice and the restoration of peace.
- the use of armed force must be the last resort when no other maneuver will stop the injustice.
- war must be waged under the authority and sovereignty of the state (not for private purposes).
- the effects must be proportionate; the evils inflicted by war should be less severe than the evils being righted.
- the war must have a reasonable probability of succeeding.

But, surprisingly to those convinced of the "godlessness" of their enemy, military chaplains were active in the Wehrmacht of Hitler's Germany (but not in the ss). During the military activity of World War II, Germany set up military religious jurisdictions in Austria, Poland, France, Norway and in the Balkan countries. These initiatives followed a long history of military religious welfare. In Prussia, for example, Christianity and the military professionals had joined in a particularly close and characteristic relationship based on its special relationship to monarchy. (see Pastor Dr. Dieter Beese. The Role of Protestant Military Chaplains in the Second World War Pacem Forsvarets Overkommando, nr. 2-2001).

Although war is inimical to the teachings of Jesus (as it is to other religions), the role of a military chaplain is not to justify war in general. A chaplain's task is to minister to the emotional and spiritual needs of service members in both war and in peace [more] [more]. In this context, chaplains have an extraordinary combination of tasks that may variously include:

- ministering to personnel who may be suffering from crises of conscience, whether in anticipation or following acts of violence for which they were personally responsible
- ministering to personnel of other denominations by embodying the challenges of interfaith dialogue
- encouraging personnel to continue to perform their military duties in the light of the orders that they are given
- determining those (rare) instances in which it is inappropriate to follow military orders
- determining whether information given under an implicit oath of confidentiality calls for a breach of that confidentiality
- reflecting the Christian values which the force claims to be fighting to defend
- justifying to personnel the acts of savagery (inadvertently) perpetrated in defence of those values
- during peacekeeping missions, assisting people toward peace and reconciliation [more]

The degree of involvement of religion in the German military enterprise of the two World Wars is illustrated by the standard issue military belt buckle bearing the phrase Gott MIT Uns ("God Is With Us"). For the first war it included the crown of Imperial Germany, for the second, this was replaced by a Reichs Eagle and Swastika as part of Hitler's symbolic agenda (see Hitler's Cross). The Serbian Orthodox
Church was intimately involved in the nationalist aspirations of Slobodan Milosevic (since indicted for crimes against humanity). The Shinto religion was intimately involved in support of the Japanese war effort of World War II and continues to play a controversial role in Japanese nationalist policies. Islam promises direct entrance to the "7th degree of heaven" for those who die in battle defending, or promoting, the faith. Hitler's own interest in pagan religion -- suggesting a distinct understanding of "Gott" by the ss -- there is a high degree of irony to the existence of a Military Pagan Network within the US military forces, that has provoked considerable controversy amongst Christian groups [more].

Ironically the assistance of witchdoctors, as the earliest practitioners in this arena, continues to be sought by combatants in conflicts in developing countries -- thus acknowledging the power of early understanding of faith-based military action.

Given the interdenominational role of which military chaplains are so rightfully proud, one wonders at the extent to which they effectively minister to the spiritual needs of Muslim terrorist suspects held on the American military base at Guantanamo Bay -- and who are tortured in the name of Christian values by the chaplains' military colleagues (the primary focus of the chaplain's spiritual ministry). Despite professional issues of breach of confidence, are detainees encouraged to confess to such chaplains as part of the standard "good-cop / bad-cop" interrogation routine? [more | more | more]

Few Americans would doubt from the words of George Bush that God is specially supportive of the successful outcome of the attack on Iraq in defence of US interests and Christian values. In American terms, the attack might be said to have been "endorsed" by God. The special theological problem is that Muslims hold to a corresponding belief that Allah is specially supportive of Arab interests and Muslim values. Neither Christians nor Muslims have ever been able to address these differences of perspective non-violently. In the world of binary thinking favoured by both sides, the other must necessarily be wrong. As such each sees the other as misrepresenting God and therefore, as unbelievers, as being the epitome of Evil.

The Institute of American Values has produced a manifesto to demonstrate that a times waging war is not only morally permitted, but morally necessary, as a response to calamitous acts of violence, hatred and injustice. To justify this position the manifesto invokes those "American values [which] do not belong only to America, but are in fact the shared inheritance of humankind". As reviewed by richard Sennett (They mean well: the American flight from politics into faith. Times Literary Supplement, 7 June 2002):

> They invoke an American version of religious faith as the most important of these values. While they recognize "no religious tradition in spotless", still they reject what the manifesto calls "ideological secularism"...What they affirm is that religious faith is an "important dimension of personhood"....

### Faith-based commerce

To the extent that military metaphors are very commonly used in business, it is expected that the perspective offered by faith-based military action would also be translated into commerce. This is admirably illustrated by Zac Goldsmith (Progress to Nowhere: Resurgence, 219, July/August 2003, pp. 22-3) in a quote from the report of the head of the Campbell Soup Company:

> As I look into the future, I shiver with business excitement. That's because Campbell Soup Company is engaged in a Global Business Crusade... The aim is to convert millions of new customers to Campbell brands evry year. We are moving across the oceans and into new nation-states and blocs. The joy of it is that we can't be fined for speeding...

There is little wonder that such attitudes invite a vigorous response from those that do not wish to be the subject of such crusades and converted in this way. As might be expected, their opposition is frequently framed by those in favour of such crusades as an "anti-business crusade" (in documents on the web for example).

Similarly those religious groups with commercial interests, such as the Rev Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church, may well openly define themselves as having a "business crusade" [more]. This may be understood as religious initiatives in the business community.

### Faith-based intolerance of disagreement: avoidance of dialogue with dissenters

One of the most significant features of terrorism and the response to it has been:

- the virtual absence of dialogue,
- the poor quality of any "dialogue" that does occur, and
- the apparent failure to seek out new ways of dialoguing between those holding radically opposed viewpoints -- whether or not these are religiously inspired.

It might even be declared that terrorism is a direct consequence of the failure of dialogue -- of a failure of the privileged to listen and of the disadvantaged to be heard. One of the curious features of the Bush regime is that soon after its inauguration there was interaction with the Taliban. Reports indicate however that the nature of the "dialogue" was one of demand and threat which failed to intimidate those whom the USA subsequently chose to attack.

This pattern has obtained in more recent years to the degree that George Bush is reputed not to wish to be exposed to those holding alternative perspectives -- a view which presumably reinforces any such tendencies amongst his subordinates. Dissenting views are not fully or energetically communicated to the President. Critics of this see-no-dissent, hear-no-dissent mindset are mocked for preferring leaders who have the capacity to doubt [more | more | more]. As a superpower, the USA has emphasized its superiority through a refusal to dialogue -- except on its own terms. And yet it is curious that the agents of the Christian-inspired Coalition of the Willing are always portrayed as "reasonable" -- faced with dissenters who are "dogmatic" and "intractable".
The study cited earlier (*Political Conservatism as Motivated Social Cognition*, 2003) would appear to explain this reluctance to dialogue as a dislike of nuance within a framework of moral certainty:

This intolerance of ambiguity can lead people to cling to the familiar, to arrive at premature conclusions, and to impose simplistic clichés and stereotypes.

One of the authors of the report, Jack Glaser, suggests that the aversion to shades of grey and the need for "closure" could explain the manner in which the Bush administration ignored intelligence that contradicted its beliefs about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq -- a typical example of groupthink (see *Groupthink: the Search for Archaeoaraptor as a Metaphoric Tale*, 2002). Such an attitude is to be contrasted with that of the Czech Republic which described its policy on US-EU relations as one of "constructive ambiguity" -- a view echoed by Poland (Financial Times, 12 August 2003).

Those of Christian faith like to portray themselves as naturally disposed to dialogue -- to the point of perceiving themselves as leaders of the interfaith movement. Biblical stories focus fondly on the tendency of Jesus to seek out sinners and to consort freely with them. Christians have long engaged in missionary work in prisons for that reason. Despite the guidance offered by God to George Bush in avoiding dialogue, it would be interesting to see how the historical Jesus would react to the "sinners" who disagreed with Bush's views and abhorred his treatment of suspects of terrorism. Given his profile and ethnic origins, the provisions of the Patriot Act would in all probability now require that Jesus be strip searched and detained on entry to the USA -- and possibly transported to Guantanamo Bay for more in-depth "dialogue"!

For Christians in general the threats of terrorism raise issues regarding the quality of dialogue with those of contrary views which they have sought and in which they have engaged. It might be inferred that they are largely supportive of the avoidance of dialogue -- as practiced by Bush, Blair and Howard -- little realizing how this fuels the processes from which terrorism is born. This avoidance makes a mockery of the "safe" forms of dialogue associated with the interfaith movement that completely fail to address the issues that inspire acts of terrorism.

In reviewing the impact of faith-based Labour leadership in the UK on the legislature and civil service, Jenni Russell (*Victims of a culture of contempt*, Guardian, 3 September 2003) makes the following points:

- Here is a government obsessed with maintaining the public's respect. Yet it has shown that it is not willing to respect those who hold a different viewpoint, or question its interpretation of how to govern.
- In the Lords, peers appointed by Labour because of their record of independent thinking and adherence to liberal values have been shattered by the pressures imposed by the whips when they dare to vote against the government. They have been threatened with social isolation, told they are loathed by their colleagues and warned to keep their profiles low....Meanwhile, MPs who stand their ground have been briefed against, warned they'll never have a career or told they'll be deselected.
- But in some key departments -- though not all -- civil servants describe the ministers who arrived as suspicious, arrogant and completely intolerant of dissent. Officials who thought it was their role to raise queries discovered that they had been marginalised, while ministers looked elsewhere for advice....More seriously, in its refusal to listen, Labour made key managerial mistakes.

Such attitudes regarding dialogue are likely to inspire the emergence of "dissenters" whose effect on global society may eventually be similar to those of the *protestant religious dissenters* in England in the 17th century which were a direct force for the creation of the USA: Baptists, Congregationalists, Covenants, Methodists, Moravians, Plymouth Brethren, Presbyterians, Puritans and Quakers. An indication of such a shift in perspective is evident in the collection of writings gathered by Stanley M. Hauerwas and Frank Lentricchia: *Dissent from the Homeland: Essays After September 11* (2002).

The tragic irony is that the preferred mode of safe "dialogue" with those of radically opposed views, as now authorized by the Christian leadership of the White House, is under conditions of torture. As with the processes of the Inquisition of centuries past, the agents of the leadership defending the highest values of Christian civilization would appear to feel most comfortable with dialogue under conditions in which the partner in dialogue holding "deviant" views can be persuaded by pain under constraint to accede to the correct perspectives of their enlightened Christian counterparts.

Would the Inquisition have been especially comfortable defending Christian values in Guantanamo Bay? One might wonder at the number of born-again Christians engaged in dialogue with suspects there. It is curious that this same leadership prides itself on relieving the world of Saddam Hussein, notably because of his use of torture. One of the greatest contributions by the Coalition of the Willing to the art of governance may then be the clarification of the distinction between "acceptable" torture and "unacceptable" torture at the "cutting edge" of dialogue. At this stage it is not clear that any forms are defined as unacceptable or that anybody trustworthy is empowered to verify that acceptable limits are being respected.

It would seem that Christianity is peculiarly challenged in its ability to handle disagreement and dissent. As with the other monotheistic religions (and despite the complexities of the Trinity), its principles do not make provision for alternative complementary perspectives -- which can only derive from error. With Christianity, deviance, schism and heresy therefore tend to be commonplace -- and might even be said to characterize that faith and its evolution and speculation over time. This speculation is especially puzzling in the case of the many hundreds of religious orders within the Catholic Church -- unrenowned for their mutual sympathies -- whose complementarity is poorly recognized.

The challenges of difference are epitomized, as in some other faiths, by the relationship to women and the role of women in celebration of God. Christianity has been completely unable to devise a dynamic for a spiritual community without the need to design out the contrasting perspective epitomized by the opposite sex.
The issues of disagreement are currently highlighted by the challenges to Christian community of homosexuality (and same-sex marriages) -- in addition to that of the acceptance of homosexuality in the priesthood. Tragically the world has been scandalized by the sexual abuses practiced within religious communities or on their charges -- but above all by the denial over many years regarding such matters. The degree of denial has been highlighted by the recent revelation by *The Observer* (17 August 2003) of a 40-year-old confidential document *Instruction on the Manner of Proceeding in cases of Solicitation (Crimee sollicitationis, 162)* bearing the seal of Pope John XXIII and ordering silence on these matters on pain of excommunication. It is now being called a "blueprint for deception and concealment" [more | more].

It is curious therefore that incompatibility of policies with Christian values is so effectively handled by the brother of George Bush as Governor of Florida. For it is from Florida that a very high proportion of the world's electronic junk mail originates to flood electronic mailboxes around the world. A high proportion of this mail is designed to expose recipients to material and practices which might be considered the antithesis of Christian values -- and is certainly deeply offensive to other cultures.

### Transference of moral responsibility for deferred pain

Terrorism has been converted into a dramatic global challenge by 9/11 -- and especially by the Christian-inspired response to it. Similar disasters have occurred before in other countries. The 1995 Oklahoma bombing was one such disaster in the USA. The *Bhopal* disaster of 1984 -- resulting in many more deaths -- could usefully be considered as a form of terrorism.

But for Americans, 9/11 is to be understood by the rest of the world as a heinous violation sans pareil -- the ultimate rape of the spirit of freedom at the core of Christian civilization. The possibility that other cultures might feel themselves to have been raped by the USA at some time is a spurious argument of the most dubious motivation -- although feminists have long struggled to promote awareness of male use of this mode of denial in the case of the rape of women. Neither the destruction of American peoples through which American settlement was achieved, nor the enslavement of millions through which the USA first built its wealth, nor the economic exploitation of client states by multinationals, is to be considered comparable to any degree to the actions of a group of men armed with box cutters in an attack of surgical precision to rival any Pentagon missile.

There is also the supreme irony of the erosion of collective memory regarding the coup on 11 September 1973 against Allende's democratically elected government in Chile -- a coup that history has established as having been strongly supported and funded by the US in order that the Americas should not be faced with a viable alternative model to capitalism [more, more | more]. In contrast with 9/11 (with which many compare it), subsequent operations (notably *Operation Condor*) to ensure the stability of the new Chilean "democracy" resulted in over 3,000 deaths, and thousands of "disappearances" after torture [more]. General Pinochet, later indicted for crimes against humanity, was portrayed as a strong ally by the USA and the UK. Margaret Thatcher, who personally supported him during his extradition proceedings asserted that he "brought democracy to Chile" [more].

The special challenge of the times is that the complexities of world governance no longer lend themselves to any hope of strategic management with the skills and resources considered acceptable. There is therefore considerable merit in reframing the challenge by focusing on singular threats with well-defined "enemies" that are sufficiently elusive and dangerous so as to justify repressive legislation and continuing military initiatives. "Terrorism" is one threat that may be suitably promoted and managed to this end (*Promoting a Singular Global Threat -- Terrorism: Strategy of choice for world governance, 2002*).

As many have remarked, the focus on terrorism very effectively draws attention away from the hundreds of millions of unnecessary deaths associated yearly with problems that have proven to be unresponsive to modest international programmes, notably in countries that have been labelled "basket cases". Such problems include starvation, water shortage, disease, illiteracy, shelter, etc. The resources briefly expended on the conquest of Afghanistan and Iraq vastly exceed the resources that have ever been recommended for remedial action by such programmes.

The actions against terrorism are claimed to be in revenge for a few thousand American deaths on the occasion of 9/11, and to prevent more deaths in that country later. But this neglects the fact that the allocation of scarce resources to this end has already guaranteed the deaths of far larger numbers of people -- elsewhere. They will die because the intractable problems -- that breed terrorism incidentally -- continue to be neglected. And fewer resources are now available to address them -- even if the will to do so has not now been severely eroded.

In this respect, Christianity is however curiously influenced by its foundation myth and especially by the "hand-washing" of Pontius Pilate that it has embodied through a perverse form of transference. It is a religion with a special relation to pain (as symbolized by the Cross as an instrument of torture and execution) and to lack of responsibility for the pain of others before God. Like the Aztec priests, Catholic priests were empowered to cause pain during the Inquisition to assist in the salvation of the sufferer -- even if this was achieved through the actions of menials, alleviating those responsible of any direct personal responsibility. Withholding succour to those in distress is not to be framed as causing pain -- since the pain experienced is the responsibility of the sufferer, especially if its manifestation is delayed for years.

Similarly, the failure of Christian leadership to address the intractable problems of the world is not to be recognized as implying any responsibility for the pain that will necessarily result. Indeed, cynically, as illustrated by both George Bush and Tony Blair with regard to Africa, the problems are skillfully and repeatedly "addressed" only through the promises briefly made in their speeches -- promises quickly to be forgotten in practice. Good intentions -- in the light of the highest Christian values in the present -- easily absolve Christian leadership of failure to engage in any effective action in practice. The latter is limited to military rather than humanitarian intervention -- as currently indicated by the evident challenge of fulfilling earlier nation-building commitments in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The main guarantee for present and future collective pain worldwide is the population explosion and its accumulative effect on quality of life and propensity for death. The world's population is set to rise from 6 billion to 9 billion in the next 70 years. Christian faiths have
been at the core of efforts to avoid addressing this issue effectively -- to the point of ensuring that it is now only mentioned in passing in international debate, if at all. Responsibility now has been displaced -- with pain and social unrest to be experienced later -- a pain from which Christians have creatively absolved themselves of any responsibility.

This historic irresponsibility for experienced pain is to be seen most poignantly and personally in the challenge of those exposed to terminal illness and the suffering associated with it in its final phases. Again it has primarily been Christian faiths, in the light of their highest values, that see it as their loving obligation to ensure that the terminally ill experience pain and indignity for as long as possible, irrespective of their expressed desire for euthanasia. Christians admit of no doubt that such is the will of God -- seeking by the most perverse means to ensure that individuals in their power experience some measure of the pain associated with their own founding myth of the Cross.

Vengefulness and redemption

There is a certain public pride in the American leadership's response to whomever may be suspected of terrorism -- whether justifiably or not. Revenge and vengefulness are valued, as in the blood feuds of tribal societies, despite the contradiction with Christian values. To remain a legitimate superpower, military might must be used (repeatedly) as a proof of being right -- a process known amongst the earliest pack animals.

Specifically any Biblical notion of "turning the other cheek" (Luke 6:27-36; Romans 13:1-5, Matthew 5:38-48) is then more un-American than the preoccupations of the Un-American Activities Committee. In relation to 9/11, it is a real challenge to Christians to understand the Biblical injunction "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord" (Romans 12:19). [more; more]

Will history judge US military activity in post-war Iraq (under a Christian leadership seeking to export Christian values) to be disproportionate and vengeful? Robert Fisk (Secret slaughter by night, lies and blind eyes by day. Independent on Sunday, 14 September 2003) sees the death rate of some 1,000 Iraqi civilians per week, against American military deaths of 7 per week, as being highly problematic. He states:

"Though light years from the atrocities of Saddam's military forces, the US military here is turning out to be as badly disciplined and brutal as the Israeli army in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Its "recon-by-fire", its lethal raids into civilian homes, its shooting of demonstrators and children during fire-fights, its destruction of houses, its imprisonment of thousands of Iraqis without trial or contact with their families, its refusal to investigate killings, its harassment -- and killing -- of journalists, its constant refrain that it has "no information" about bloody incidents which it must all too much about, are something like an echo-chamber of the Israeli army. Worse still their intelligence information is still as warped by ideology as was the illegal Anglo-American invasion of Iraq."

The quality of vengefulness is evident in the treatment of US anti-war activists who had gone to Iraq to act as human shields. Because of their violation of a pre-war travel ban, after the war they faced up to 12 years imprisonment and a $1 million fine as punishment from the US Treasury. From the perspective of the activists, they are to be punished for their concern for other human beings [more]. Bush claims to loath "people who feel guilty about their lot in life because others were suffering" [more].

Given the assumptions about the special relationship of the USA to God, 9/11 was immediately presented by prominent Christian evangelists, Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, as an expression of God's anger regarding liberal civil liberties groups, feminists, homosexuals and abortion rights: "God continues to lift the curtain and allow the enemies of America to give us probably what we deserve" [more]. Presumably subsequent disasters befalling the USA could be understood in the same light. However there is a certain irony to the total power blackout of the eastern USA (August 2003) at a time when the USA has been unable to restore power to Iraq.

From a broader (and as yet unrevealed) perspective, God may have a variety of reasons to continue to express his anger against the USA.

On the other hand in the USA the possibility of redemption of those who have sinned is extensively cultivated. Whether it be drunkenness, adultery, embezzlement, perjury, or even abuse of power ensuring the death of thousands, Christian principles are evoked to grant remission of sins -- in the eyes of God. As a criminal, recognizing Christ -- and becoming born-again -- is one of the most effective ways of obtaining the support necessary to ensure early release from prison, and possibly to avoid the death penalty. This follows a long Catholic tradition of the sale and purchase of indulgences. Non-Christians require much assistance to grant remission of sins -- in the eyes of God. As a criminal, recognizing Christ -- and becoming born-again -- is one of the most effective ways of obtaining the support necessary to ensure early release from prison, and possibly to avoid the death penalty. This follows a long Catholic tradition of the sale and purchase of indulgences. Non-Christians require much assistance to

It is curious that, to the above end, there is a capacity and motivation amongst Christian evangelists to dialogue with the most hardened killers -- but seemingly none to dialogue with those suspected of terrorism.

Complicity of Christian faiths

The multitude of Christian faiths and sects has resulted in a complex psycho-social system in which none need take responsibility for the action of "Christians". In fact each Christian faith is distinct from others precisely because it does not wish to be held responsible for their actions or require specific allegiance to their prescriptions. Each derives its strength from the convictions through which it relates uniquely to God -- recognizing in most cases the inappropriateness, or regrettable error, with which other such sects relate to God.

The complaint is often made regarding Islam, that there is no central authority that could be challenged or held responsible for the actions or views of Muslims in the world as a whole. The same is however true regarding Christians. Each Christian faith -- however many its adherents -- can readily deny responsibility for (or complicity in) acts perceived to be problematic by others. "Christianity" is not a well-managed brand! As with Islam, this might be understood as creatively maintaining a condition of plausible deniability.
And yet it is a fact that the current disorder in the world has resulted directly from the action of Christian-inspired leadership that has consciously endeavoured to act in the name of Christianity in seeking to extend its strategic defences to encompass the whole world -- the quest for a form of spiritual Lebensraum. Protest by other Christians, as Christians, has been insignificant -- even though these actions are carried out in the name of Christian values. Those of other Christian faiths are happy to be tacitly associated with any successes of the Christian project, just as when Christian values are advanced or exemplified by the actions of a person of one Christian faith (whether Mother Teresa or Martin Luther King) -- denying their complicity in the harm they may cause under other circumstances. Christianity should know better -- if it would claim to be the basis of faith-based governance of the world.

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