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Is President George W. Bush a Dangerous Theocrat?

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Professor David Domke is a very worried man who has written a very worried book. In *God Willing?: Political Fundamentalism in the White House, the 'War on Terror' and the Echoing Press*, Domke, associate professor of Communications at University of Washington, is sounding an alarm—America has a dangerous theocrat in the White House.

Domke, along with other prophets of secular alarmism, is hoping to see this danger—namely President George W. Bush—go away on November 2.

Domke's book, appropriately published by an outfit called "Pluto Press," is a political fantasy posing as a serious academic work. According to Domke, "the Bush administration's worldview is one grounded in religious fundamentalism—that is, it emphasizes absolutes, authority and tradition, and a divine hand in history and upon the United States." Scared yet? As he continues, "Such a worldview is disastrous for a democratic political system, for it mandates an ideological shift away from open discussion, publicly responsive leadership, and humility, toward authoritarianism, publicly unmindful leadership, and arrogance."

A quick trip to your local bookstore will reveal an entire constellation of books written by left-wing academics who are ready to declare President George W. Bush everything from a theocrat to a religious fundamentalist equivalent to Osama bin Laden. If you take these books seriously, it will appear that the American Left is losing its mind.

Domke's field is communications, and he applies his expertise to analyze the Bush administration. What he finds is nothing less than a sinister conspiracy to turn America into a right-wing Christian theocracy. How is this being done? Domke suggests that President Bush is leading a religious crusade by employing "binary" communication strategies with "strategic political communications" that will combine to make America a fundamentalist republic. "From this perspective," he argues, "the public communications of the Bush administration might be viewed as the central mechanism in propagating a religiously grounded, politically focused ideology—that is, a political fundamentalism—as the appropriate approach to fighting terrorism."

In other words, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 afforded the Bush administration an opportunity to employ their sinister binary communications in a strategic approach that will completely reorder the American experiment, undermine our democratic system of government, and put the nation into the hands of a far-right religious fringe.

The conspiracy theory doesn't end there, however, for Domke also blames a compliant press for allowing the Bush administration to run rough shod over American democracy. "In sum, these four dimensions—nation-challenging crisis, conservative religious political leaders, strategic political communications by the same leaders, and an echoing press—provide a conceptual framework for understanding how political fundamentalism might (re)emerge, gain wide public presentation, and receive a favorable hearing in the United States."

God Willing? is not a book for the masses. The Bush campaign should lose no sleep over the publication of this screed, for the book's assuredly few readers would be found among those who regularly talk in terms of "multiple binary

constructions.” Don’t expect to throw that phrase around down at the local Elks’ lodge.

But Domke is sure he is on to something here. Christian fundamentalism is always in the background as the threat and precipitating cause of this crisis. Why? “Religious fundamentalism sets black-and-white boundaries through the establishment of rigid norms and behavioral codes. That is, it conceives of the world as a place of absolutist rules and relations that serve as guideposts for how people think, talk, and live. This archetypal component of fundamentalism is at the core of an administration headed by a president who once said, ‘In Texas, we don’t do nuance.’”

The “binaries” that so worry Domke include distinctions like good and evil, right and wrong, heterosexual and homosexual. Religious fundamentalists, he avers, tend to get hung up on such distinctions, while, presumably, professors of communication at the University of Washington have transcended such mundane differences.

Oh—religious fundamentalists also represent a danger to the body politic because of “a belief in a universal gospel.” Citing sociologist Bruce Lawrence, Domke points to a fundamentalist concern with “mandated universalist norms” as the source of the danger. These norms “are to be shared with all peoples—a perspective made clear by the biblical command of ‘go therefore and make disciples of all the nations.’” Alert the political correctness police at once! How shall the republic stand?

In the end, Domke’s main concern is that the Bush administration is waging a crusade by means of Weapons of Mass Communication Destruction, which are reduced to those pesky “binaries” once again. As he explains, “The centrifugal binary for the religious fundamentalist is good versus evil. A conception of reality as a struggle between these opposing forces is at the core of Christian thought, found throughout the Bible in notions of light versus dark, pure versus impure, and righteous versus sinful.” Well, he’s got at least that much right.

Nevertheless, “binary conceptions, in part because they are often rooted in fundamentalism, almost without exception have moral power, which give them a resonance with the mass public and a sustaining news value, both crucial components in the ability of political elites to shape public sentiment.”

The bottom line of Domke’s analysis? “The evidence is clear: The Bush administration brought a political fundamentalism into the mainstream of American politics in the aftermath of September 11. The president and his team did so by strategically choosing language and communication approaches that were structurally grounded in a conservative Christian outlook, but were primarily political in manifest content.”

A similar warning comes from Mark Crispin Miller, professor of media studies at New York University. He’s worried about binaries too, but he is quite certain that the Bush administration is being fueled by an even more sinister force—Christian theocrats. Miller’s book, *Cruel and Unusual: Bush/Cheney’s New World Order*, is an hysterical manifesto of paranoid liberalism. According to Miller, America is threatened by a cabal of right-wing lunatics who are subverting the Constitution, undermining our democratic system of government, and using George W. Bush as a mechanism for turning America into a Christian theocracy.

After taking readers through several chapters of left-wing rant, Miller turns to attack “an elite theocratic movement of extreme commitment and considerable wealth that has fast become the most influential force on the religious right.” What is this force? Why, “Christian Reconstructionism”, of course. As described by Mark Crispin Miller, Reconstructionism is a “transdenominational ideology” that poses a great threat to the republic.

Miller has done a bit of research into Christian Reconstructionism, also known as “dominion theology,” but he has pasted together an absolutely untenable myth in order to frame his conspiracy theory. Without the slightest shred of evidence, or the faintest concern for fact, he simply accuses President George W. Bush of sharing a theocratic dream with the reconstructionists.

“The radical collapse of all distinction between church and state, and the promotion of an angry ‘Christianity’ as the USA’s official state religion, have grown increasingly apparent as the Bush regime turns more grandiose and reckless after 9/11,” Miller claims. Miller pushes his conspiracy theory to the limits of imagination charging: “A cursory survey of Bush/Cheney’s foreign and domestic innovations will make clear that this regime has, from the start, been hard at work transforming the United States into a theocratic system, and, globally, at the gradual creation of a nominally Christian New World Order.”

Did an editor read this manuscript? As evidence of the Bush administration's penchant for theocracy, Miller points to President Bush's advocacy for a Federal Marriage Amendment. "On gay sexuality, for instance, it is hard to see much difference between Bush and Co.'s views" and the theocrats, he insists. With this sentence, Miller attempts to link George W. Bush to a theocratic impulse he claims would lead to the execution of homosexuals. How can we take seriously a man who argues that promotion of a federal marriage amendment and the execution of homosexuals are legally, morally, or factually equivalent?

As is true with so much of this literature, the real target of the attack is evangelical Christianity itself. When Miller accuses the Bush administration of pushing for theocracy "by loading the judiciary branch with jurists who would gladly serve a 'Christian' order," he singles out Judge Charles Pickering of Mississippi as an example, noting that this Bush nominee "was president of the Southern Baptists in that state, allying himself with the 'inerrantists' who read the Bible as a factual history from the mouth of God." According to Miller's worldview, belief in an inspired Scripture is evidence of insanity, extremism, and insipient theocracy.

A final example of this liberal animus toward Christianity is Ron Suskind's cover article in the October 17, 2004 edition of *The New York Times Magazine*. Suskind, author of the much criticized *The Price of Loyalty*, *George W. Bush, the White House and the Education of Paul O'Neill*, accuses President Bush of running a "faith-based presidency" closed to debate and given to extremism. According to Suskind's conspiracy theory, Bush had harbored faith-based ambitions throughout the early months of his administration, but the terrorist attacks of September 11 afforded him the opportunity to seize the moment for his agenda.

Looking at the President's address to the joint session of Congress on September 20, 2001, Suskind claims, "This is where the faith-based presidency truly takes shape. Faith, which for months had been coloring his decision-making process and a host of political tactics—think of his address to the nation on stem-cell research—now began to guide events. It was the most natural ascension: George W. Bush turning to faith in his darkest moment and discovering a wellspring of power and confidence."

In the end Suskind's main lament is that President Bush is a conservative and a Christian. He portrays as tragedy the fact that President Bush did not follow the advice of liberal religious figures and advisors. He condescendingly considers what might have happened if the President had chosen what he sees as the better path. Nevertheless, Suskind intends to send the nation a warning: There is a faith-based lunatic in the White House, so be very scared.

These books and articles share a common animus toward biblical Christianity and represent a chilling reflection of the secularist worldview that dominates America's cultural and academic elites.

According to their worldview, poor deluded souls like George W. Bush who believe in "binaries" like good and evil are both pitiable and dangerous. At the same time, these authors have done us a service by reminding us all what is really at stake on November 2.

