



*Theocratic extremist Rob Schenck on the steps of the Supreme Court stumping for mandatory inclusion of the Ten Commandments in public places.* photo: NPR

by Henry Clark

Market fundamentalism is not the only dangerous superstition we have to battle against today. Enlightened civilization is also menaced by *theocratic fundamentalism*, an ideology that is determined to make everything it calls sin punishable as a crime by the state.

Back in their Texas days, Carl Rove and George W. Bush realized that the corporate right could not rule without allying with the theocratic fundamentalists of the Christian Right. No less an establishment figure than Kevin Phillips is worried about the power this has given evangelicals in pushing this country toward what he does not hesitate to label "American theocracy." Nearly a third of his book by this title is taken up with an issue-by-issue account of how the policies thrust upon this nation and the world by Bush's band of neoconservative ideologues have been aided and abetted by their alliance with religious conservatives. Phillips joins a host of writers whose work appears in *The Nation*, *Harpers* and other mainstream periodicals in pointing out the fruits of the unholy alliance between neoconservatives and theocratic fundamentalists.

Bush in turn has made administrative directives driven by fundamentalist religious philosophies. These measures have corrupted the integrity and effectiveness of science, education and family services. In exchange, this fundamentalist base supports Bush's corporate-driven military adventures and his class warfare against wage-earners, union members and taxpayers.

Thus we must conclude that the political clout of religious reactionaries is not something to be ignored or treated with mere ridicule. So much—one is tempted to say everything—depends on what kind of religion attracts the loyalty of believers and inspires them to energetic action. If mainstream religion recovers the ethical vitality it had only a few decades ago, then there is a chance we will see a splendid resurgence of political and economic justice. If, on the other hand, the three faiths rooted in the Biblical

# How Dangerous Is Theocratic Fundamentalism?

Abraham continue to be outrageously misinterpreted by fundamentalist fanatics, the world may be ravaged by jihadist wars and programs of ethnic cleansing. Believers of various kinds deserve respect, but the same cannot be said of all beliefs, especially those of self-styled "defenders of God" who feel themselves duty bound to impose their reactionary notion of righteousness on every citizen.

We are often told that, even though an appropriate supply of military power may be an essential ingredient in the battle against Islamic terrorism, it is even more important for our country and its people to side with mainstream Muslims in their necessary campaign to discredit and disarm Islamic jihadists. The same must surely be true of our stance and our action against theocratic fundamentalists inside the household of faith in Judaism and Christianity. Otherwise, the Bush crowd will be partners in giving Osama bin Laden exactly what he seems to have wanted: a 100-year culture war between Islam and the Judeo-Christian civilization of Europe and America.

Fortunately, progressive churches are busy on several fronts these days. The examples of vigorous action on behalf of economic justice and ecological sanity contained in this issue of *Justice Rising* can be multiplied by reference to those being undertaken by the National Council of Churches as recounted in Dan Wakefield's *The Hijacking of Jesus*. Other agencies such as the California Council of Churches are not only running similar social justice programs, they are also reaching out to mosques and other Muslim organizations to promote ecumenical understanding, mutual respect and cooperation.

As Thomas Wolfe wrote in a famous essay warning of the rise of Nazism and hoping for its defeat, "A wind is rising, and the rivers flow."

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*Members of Clergy and Laity Concerned about Iraq march to the White House, including: Rev. Dr. Rita Nagashima Brock, El Hajj Talib Abdur-Rashid (Imam, Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood), Rabbi Arthur Waskow (Director, The Shalom Center), Rev. Dr. Walter Wink, Rev. Amy Stapleton, and Father G. Simon Harak (Anti-Militarism Coordinator, War Resisters League)*

photo: United for Peace and Justice