



Book Review of *Captain America and the Crusade Against Evil: The Dilemma of Zealous Nationalism*, Robert Jewett and John Shelton Lawrence, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003, 392 pp.;
***The Armageddon Factor: The Rise of Christian Nationalism in Canada*, Marci McDonald, Random House Canada, 2010, 419 pp.**

These are disturbing books. One could feel having read them like a serious crime victim: the universe once seemed well ordered, predictably unfolding. Until violent crime strikes. And the equilibrium of the universe tilts. One thought perhaps Canada was a safe democracy. One thought the United States stood in reality for making the world safe for democracy. Both books urgently cry out, *Think again!*

The Armageddon Factor is a second go at publishing on this theme, the first an essay in *Walrus* magazine in 2006. *Captain America* is reprised publication from initial discussion thirty years prior, and variously since. McDonald repeatedly alludes to, sometimes describes, antecedents from the States to the rise of Christian Nationalism. Jewett and Lawrence give a full-blown account of what they call “zealous nationalism” from colonial times onwards. I’ll begin with their account.

Captain America, a comic-book character, “combines explosive strength with perfect moral intuitions... he takes on a masked identity and rids the world of evil. [Like] America’s sense of mission – and its affinity for violent crusading. This book explains the religious roots and historical development of this crusading tendency (p. xiii).” Unpretentiously stated. The authors deliver masterfully.

There are sixteen chapters in all. Meticulously researched and footnoted, the authors retain a steady gaze and commitment to neither under- nor overstatement. The first chapter discusses “The Challenge of a Contradictory Civil Religion”. “One of the puzzles about the American civil religion is that biblical images of peacemaking through holy war reappear during times of crisis (p. 1)”, they aver. This is the founding national double-speak conundrum: *peace through war* is *core American ethos* from The War of Independence onwards. This is fundamental civil religion of the Founding Fathers. What the authors fail to mention is: *this is no less founding Christian Just War double-speak* from Augustine onwards. Augustine might indeed have been America’s patron saint had it started out Roman Catholic. He indeed is for the vast majority of Roman Catholics, America’s largest religious group by far. Only one American Bishop opposed the Second Gulf War. Bush’s declaration of War on Terrorism was initially dubbed “Operation Infinite Justice” – classic Americana.

The authors point to the grounding mission vision of the United States: “In its most expansive form, this sense of mission called the nation to nothing less than redeeming the entire world (p. 3).” It combined secular and religious images so that “In major developments of American life – the Civil War, the settling of the western frontier, the World Wars, the Cold War, the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, and the so-called war on terrorism – these ideas have continued to surface (p. 5).” Not only is this so, they have become pervasive through pop culture proliferation, not least in comic books. Captain America emerges as defining “iconic shorthand for this tendency of popular entertainment to carry the zealous mainstream of political sentiment (p. 6).”

The authors state that there is deep biblical rootedness in two contradictory strands of American culture, evident from the beginning. “The first tradition is what we call *zealous nationalism*. It seeks to redeem the world by destroying enemies (p. 8).” They point out: “The phenomenon of zeal itself provides a fascinating access to the inner workings of our national psyche: the term itself, as we shall see, is the biblical and cultural counterpart of the Islamic term *jihad* (p. 8).” Then, “Alongside *zealous nationalism* runs the tradition of *prophetic realism*. It avoids taking the stances of complete innocence and selflessness. It seeks to redeem the world for coexistence by impartial justice that claims no favoured status for individual nations (p. 8).” No “American exceptionalism” in other words, a term first coined by French American cultural observer Alexis de Tocqueville.

The authors acknowledge that these two strands have coexisted in “uneasy wedlock” in earlier times, but in a time of worldwide militant jihad, zealous nationalism everywhere must be let die. “Our conclusions are that prophetic realism alone should guide an effective response to terrorism and lead us to resolve zealous nationalist conflicts through submission to international law; and that the crusades inspired by zealous nationalism are inherently destructive, not only of the American prospect but of the world itself (p. 9).”

In Chapter 2, “The Endangered Towers and the Crusade against Jihad”, the writers quote former Republican presidential candidate, Vietnam war hero, Senator John McCain who “enunciates the cold willingness to kill innocents on the other side of the world – and then to assign the blame to others (p. 12).” Or as C.I.A. operative Michael Scheuer, author of *Imperial Hubris: Why the West is Losing the War on Terror* (Dulles, Va.: Brassey's, 2004), in an interview with NBC Chief foreign affairs correspondent Andrea Mitchell blatantly stated: “That's the way war is. I've never really understood the idea that any American government, any American elected official is responsible for protecting civilians who are not Americans.”¹

This is not unlike political commentator Alan Dershowitz, early staunch supporter of upholding the Bill of Rights in letter and spirit, but “Since September 11 he has repeatedly advocated that the United States join Israel as the world’s only democracy that maintains the legal option to authorize the torture of suspects in cases of extreme urgency (p. 236).” This of course was authorized in the Bush years, the Americans with Canadian university research abetting², having developed to an art not only physical tortures, but so-called “no-touch” travesties as well.³

They compellingly sketch the parallel paths of Christian/American civil religion *crusade*, and Islamic *jihad*. They agree with Lee Griffith’s statement on terrorism: “Terrorism is a tactic, whether used by an established government, a revolutionary group, or an individual. The characterization of an action as ‘terrorism’ depends on *what* is done, not on *who* does it (p. 20).”⁴

¹ See: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/5279743/>, last accessed February 13, 2011.

² See: <http://reviewcanada.ca/essays/2008/03/01/a-history-of-hypocrisy/>; also *A Question of Torture* (New York: Metropolitan, 2006) and “Science in Dachau’s Shadow,” *Journal of the History of Behavioral Sciences*, Fall 2007, both by Alfred McCoy. Canada emerges as fully complicit through university endowed research.

³ One could say though with perhaps nary a secular liberal voice supporting: “God damn the institutional secular university which gave us ‘a veritable Manhattan Project of the mind’ (Alfred McCoy), and above all the actual university-based Manhattan project that produced the most diabolical instrument of all time, the atomic bomb!”

⁴ *The War on Terrorism and the Terror of God*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002, p. 18.

In a telling admission, Winston Churchill wrote that the Allied carpet-bombing campaign was a campaign of “terror”.⁵ Depending on who does the counting, there were up to a million civilian casualties in 42 German cities bombed. Similarly, former Defense Secretary Robert McNamara in Errol Morris’ *The Fog of War*, admitted that had the Americans lost the War, he and his superior General Curtis LeMay, the most decorated man until then in American military history, would have been rightly indicted for war crimes. Sixty-six Japanese cities were attacked with incendiary bombs, with a similar estimated civilian casualty toll of one million. But the Allies won, so they got to indict the Nazis for their war crimes. There is such widespread western cultural denial of Allied atrocities on a par with the Nazis, that a single small panel in the Canadian War Museum that obliquely alluded to Canadian war crimes in carpet-bombing was so viciously attacked by Canadian war veterans, that it was removed⁶. This despite its simple non-polemical statement of the facts. But war crimes and acts of terror are by definition only done by “the bad guys”. Just as right wing Christian writer Lloyd Billingsley once personally assured me that “ideology” by definition was only “left-wing”. Such pure ideological closed-mindedness absolutely shuts out dialogue – and self-awareness.

Beyond mere definition of terrorism, we read: “Our contention is that one must also ask *why* terrorist acts are committed. We believe that the answer lies in zealous forms of civil religion whose origins can be traced back to biblical archetypes that are honoured by zealous strands of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam – and now influence other movements throughout the world (pp. 21 & 22).” Reality is, “The crusading logic believed by each side encourages actions that achieve the very opposite of their intended result (p. 24).”

The authors at chapter’s end identify “six important elements of the Captain America complex, which it shares with Christian and Jewish zeal as well as with militant Islamic jihad:

- Each side views its anger as blessed by the deity, which thereby absolutizes zeal and jihad and eliminates normal restraint.
- Each side conceives of its opponents as members of a malevolent conspiracy, originating from the realm of absolute evil, and thus sees any compromise as immoral.
- The stereotypes of the actors in this conflict are stark and extreme, with all goodness on one side and absolute evil on the other. To mourn over the deaths of such opponents thus appears to make as little sense as concern over the seasonal demise of locusts.

⁵ A military historian writes:

At this point, Prime Minister Churchill interposed himself, once again, into the history of the Dresden raid. By March 1945 the crisis atmosphere surrounding the war effort had passed, and the fate of Hitler’s Reich was well and truly sealed. With Yalta behind him as well, Churchill now had troubled second thoughts. These surfaced in a minute he wrote on March 28 to Portal and General Sir Hastings Ismay (for the Chiefs of Staff Committee). “It seems to me,” Churchill began, “that the moment has come when the question of bombing of German cities simply for the sake of increasing the terror, though under other pretexts, should be reviewed.” After stating that “the destruction of Dresden remains a serious query against the conduct of Allied bombing,” he insisted there was a need for “more precise concentration on military objectives, such as oil and communications behind the immediate battle zone, rather than on mere acts of terror and wanton destruction, however impressive (“Sifting Dresden’s Ashes”, Tami Davis Biddle, *Wilson Quarterly* 29:60-80 Spring 2005.).”

⁶ See: http://goliath.ecnext.com/coms2/gi_0199-9671848/Controversy-commemoration-and-capitulation-the.html, last accessed February 13, 2011. Unfortunately, the whole article may be viewed only by paying for it.

- As the quote by Ann Coulter reveals [p. 11] such opponents must either be killed or converted. Each side believes that its own violence is redemptive, while it deplors the violence of the other side as senseless and unjust.
- To allow oneself to be defeated by the other side is to abandon faith itself, whether in the form of Christianity, Islam, or Judaism, and whether devoutly religious or explicitly secular.
- Every action of one's enemies is perceived to desecrate the holy, and overcoming such desecration is seen as a religious and political imperative whose fulfillment will usher in an era of peace (pp. 24 & 25)."

Though the authors adduce it nowhere in the book, this is profound scapegoating logic. For half a century the premier theorist has been René Girard, with a plethora of supporting publications by theorists and activists in many academic disciplines and causes⁷. Their book would have been strengthened by a chapter on Girard's work, such as that found in the final publication of Walter Wink's trilogy on the Powers: *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*. Their publication would also have benefitted from use of Wink's trilogy.

Girard has argued that it is precisely the hiddenness of the "scapegoat mechanism" inherent in every human culture known to history that blinds one to "idols closer to home" that invariably mirror "the enemy's" societal scapegoating violence. That United States imperialism was the mirror image of Soviet expansionism was the "inconvenient truth" that presidential hopeful Al Gore failed to see in retrospect equally as presidential hopeful John McCain, and the vast majority of all Americans throughout the Cold War. This ubiquitous blindness persists throughout the "War on Terrorism" era to the present. In November 2001, a Gallup Poll found that 89 percent of Americans supported the attacks in Afghanistan on Taliban and al Qaeda forces. In 2003 a Pew Charitable Trust poll found that 87 percent of white American evangelicals supported the "War on Terrorism".

The writers comment: "These features of popular zealotry derive from the biblical heritage held in common by Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. Yet within the very same biblical tradition – and the cultural strands that derive from it – lie sources of prophetic realism that could lead our crusading societies on a more promising course (p. 25)" The rest of the book presents the counter to the profound scapegoating violence coursing through dominant forms of Christianity, Judaism and Islam in the world today.

Chapter 3, "Popular Culture as a Bearer of the National Complex" demonstrates that "When we examine comic books, television programs, films, video games, and other arenas of fantasy experience, we find a competing, powerful center for a symbolic education (p. 27)." They go on to discuss the American superhero that first appeared in the 1930's and "embodies the neurotic conflicts of the Captain America complex (p. 28)." They draw on their previous study, *The Myth of the American Superhero*, to describe a unique *American monomyth* with these characteristics:

- It is unlike the *classical monomyth* of rites of passage stories inducting youth into full adult participation in marriage and civic life.

⁷ See: <http://www.uibk.ac.at/theol/cover/>, last accessed February 13, 2011.

- By contrast, the American monomyth has helpless communities redeemed by lone saviour figures who are not really part of the community from beginning to end.
- A democratic face is shown in that such a figure is Everyman, yet is pop-fascist in that s/he is self-elected and transcends laws, since democratic institutions and due process are invariably ineffectual before real crisis.
- The superhero is both of transcendent moral qualities combined with overwhelming powers to act. He of necessity hides his true identity, and thereby embodies a vigilante tradition with white robes even as in the Book of Revelation.

The comment is made: “These stories popularized Manifest Destiny and the allegedly selfless imperialism of earlier American civil religion, when seizing other countries surfaced as the nation’s mission during the Spanish-American War (pp. 30 & 31).” Rudyard Kipling wrote the famous poem “The White Man’s Burden” at this time, about America’s needing to “wage savage wars of peace” to bring salvation to hapless natives. We read further, “The story of superheroes who must bypass the restraints of law to redeem the nation and the world has become dominant in the past sixty years, and it should now be recognized as a major source of crusading idealism that marks the American civil religion (p. 35).”

The authors wonder why democratic premises could not have been likewise reflected in these mega cultural blockbusters. They also wonder that calls for impossible ideals in the superhero do not demotivate the public in any kind of imitation. “[M]onomyth drama has the character of a tranquilizer, exchanging the sense of communal alarm and obligation for the fantasy of an Eden-like resolution achievable only by superhumans (pp. 40 & 41).” As a consequence power is permitted to be centralized in “superhumans” in the White House for instance, by a traumatized public. Therefore, “... one can see that the American monomyth betrays deep antagonism toward the creative exercise of reason on the part of the public as well as of the individual (p. 42).”

The authors recount striking confirmation of the American monomyth in the White House itself during the Bush years. Germany’s foremost news magazine *Der Spiegel* did a feature article on America’s crusade against evil (February 18, 2002). To accompany it, a satirical cover was commissioned depicting Bush as Rambo and his main advisers each in superhero garb. The U.S. ambassador to Germany consequently visited *Der Spiegel’s* editorial offices to order thirty-three poster-size covers for the White House! Rambo invariably fought outside law and democratic structures. “But the array of superheroic advisors behind Rambo suggests that they support his crusade without grasping its divergence from the ethos of a constitutional democracy (p. 43).” In moving forward with their analysis, they add ominously: “We shall see that the fascist thinking lurking in the shadow side of the Captain America complex has roots in its religious foundations, and that these roots have always produced poisonous fruit (p. 43).”

Chapter 4 investigates the concept of America as “A Rod of Iron or a Light to the Nations”, drawing on its self-appropriated biblical roots at its founding as “the Israel of their time” (p. 44). The formative story of the calling of Abram and the Exodus from the land of slavery meant “They would be set free by violence to fulfil their mission of saving the world (p. 45).” Indeed, “... Yahweh’s battles served the cause of ‘Israel’s deliverance’ in order to achieve its national mission within the scope of world history (p. 45).” Likewise America from the get-go, with a

concomitant scheme of conquest, was to take control wherever its citizens set foot. Today there are at least 700 military bases encircling the globe, besides many secret military installations, and dreams of “Star Wars” defence stations that all know are designed for conquest too. The authors describe this commitment to world dominion “ ‘zeal’, the passionate commitment to the national mission that matched the vehemence of the zealous God, Yahweh (p. 46).”

Ultimately though, as we read on, “The reliance on a pure form of zealous nationalism proved suicidal (p. 46).”, as, one might add, it invariably does. Over against this, they note the emergence shortly before the collapse of the Northern Kingdom with the fall of Samaria in 721 BCE: *prophetic realism*. They explain, “The simplistic claim that God would always favour the elect had led into the abyss and opened the way for a more realistic view (p. 47).” Now “In letting herself be purified by defeat, Israel might be able to take up her true national mission of bearing the word of God’s impartial justice as the basis for world peace (p. 48).” And again, “Israel’s subsequent history reflects the dilemmas posed by these two conflicting versions of mission (p. 48).” As time continued after the eventual fall of the Southern Kingdom a Deuteronomic reading of history conjoined with apocalyptic triumphalism in Daniel kept giving rise to devastating zealous nationalism. After two rebellions against Rome in CE 66-70 and 132-135, the population of Palestine was decimated, never to recover until a new state of Israel was declared in 1948.

The authors explain that “The clear enunciation of prophetic realism during this final period was set forth by Jesus of Nazareth. At the beginning of his ministry he rejected the dream of bringing the messianic kingdom through violence (Luke 4:5 – 8). He located evil not in one’s foreign or ideological enemy but in the heart of the chosen people itself, exposing the cruelty and callous disregard for life that legalistic self-righteousness had produced (Mark 3:1-6). He reversed the premise of divine favoritism for the chosen people, suggesting that sinners and foreigners would be the first to be welcomed into God’s kingdom (Luke 4:16 – 30)... Jesus worked to alter the stereotypes that made zealous warfare seem necessary, picturing a hated Samaritan as humane and welcoming into his circle disciples from various sides of the ideological struggle. He warned his fellow Jews about the dangers of subscribing to the zealous war aims, predicting that a revolt against Rome would bring destruction to Jerusalem (Luke 19:41-44; 23:26-31) (p. 52).”

The thesis about Jesus turns challenging to two thousand years of biblical interpretation in the writers’ claim that not only was Jesus’ message unheeded when spoken and he himself was executed; “not only that it was misunderstood and distorted by those who preferred not to hear the truth about themselves; it was that the message itself came to be placed in a collection of writings that obscured its essential thrust. Jesus’ message was interpreted by posterity in the light of Deuteronomy, of Daniel, and, worst of all, the Book of Revelation. This is a matter frequently overlooked by critical biblical scholarship, concerned as it is with the meaning of passages for their original audiences. For later generations, however, and throughout much of the course of American experience in particular, it was the Book of Revelation that placed its stamp upon the whole Bible (p. 53).”

This is disturbing rebuff for the church that since Augustine reversed overall a nonviolent theological orientation in favour of “Just War” whose western legacy against domestic enemies

has been a violently retributive criminal justice system⁸, and against international enemies support of both sides of every war waged since Christ⁹. That Deuteronomy¹⁰, Daniel¹¹, and Revelation¹² have been interpreted in a zealous nationalist sense sufficient to displace Christ's prophetic realist message of peace is historically accurate, including for *some* of their original hearers' understanding. That they *must* be so interpreted is both a question of biblical exegesis and theology. The writers do not concern themselves with a theology of biblical inspiration in their book that might address this issue. They straightforwardly favour prophetic realism throughout as pragmatically and Christianly preferential. This reviewer is in complete sympathy. For resources that reinterpret these books along just peacemaking lines, one should consult the voluminous writings of Old Testament scholars Walter Brueggemann and Millard Lind, and New Testament scholars Richard Hays, Willard Swartley and Chris Marshall, amongst many others, including those mentioned in the footnotes.

Yet even there, the authors acknowledge that Julia Ward Howe's violent "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" based on the background passage of Revelation 19:13-15 "failed to notice that the 'sword' proper and the 'sword of the word' indicate two diametrically opposed methods of redemption. The one originated in the tradition of zealous nationalism and the other in the tradition of prophetic realism (p. 53)." Their footnote here adduces Hebrews 4:12 "a writing that has no trace of redemption through violence (p. 336)." Likewise in Ephesians 6:12ff – which some scholars claim was the primary early church passage about the state. The writers note too the transposition of the image of the lamb who in Isaiah is symbol for self-sacrifice, but in Revelation is so ferocious an agent that people cringe in fear. But even here, while the image is intensely violent, the conquering is as many indicate through nonviolent self-sacrifice. Just as biblical wrath is supremely seen according to prophetic realism as God's covenant love poured out in an agony to woo humanity back to God, or the doctrine of hell is ultimately that place from which God's intention is full liberation, despite humanity's wilful "hell-bentness"¹³. There is finally something terrifying in owning up to one's wrongdoing (confession), repentance and amends-making. We humans cringe in abject fear of such prospect, as many quake at making amends in Restorative Justice processes in response to crime. Objectifying God's wrath means

⁸ See: *Beyond Retribution: A New Testament Vision for Justice, Crime, and Punishment*, Christopher D. Marshall, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001; and James J. Megivern, *The Death Penalty: An Historical and Theological Survey*, New York/Mahway, N.J.: Paulist Press 1997.

⁹ See *Covenant of Peace: The Missing Peace in New Testament Theology and Ethics*, Willard M. Swartley, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006.

¹⁰ See however Ron Dart's "Deuteronomy, Jewish Prophets and the Sermon on the Mount": http://www.clarion-journal.com/clarion_journal_of_spirit/2010/05/deuteronomy-jewish-prophets-and-the-sermon-on-the-mount-by-ron-dart.html, last accessed February 26, 2011, "There are two traditions at work in *Deuteronomy*, and the remainder of the Hebrew canon is torn between which tradition will dominate, when and why. There is the nationalist tradition that legitimates any sort of Divine and Jewish behaviour, and there is the prophetic tradition that raises the ethical bar to a higher level. It is in this clash between the nationalist and prophetic traditions within Biblical Judaism that different paths are taken both in the Jewish past and contemporary Jewish life in Israel."

¹¹ See however Walter Brueggemann's six-part lecture series: <http://erb.kingdomnow.org/multimedia-tuesday-video-walter-brueggemann-on-daniel/> (last accessed February 13, 2011).

¹² See however: *Unveiling Empire: Reading Revelation Then and Now*, Wes Howard-Brook and Anthony Gwyther, Maryknoll: Orbis, 2005, for a reading that opposes zealous nationalism in favour of prophetic realism.

¹³ See Bradley Jersak's *Her Gates Will Never Be Shut: Hope, Hell, and the New Jerusalem*, Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2009, for such an alternative reading.

extreme violent interpretation. “Subjectifying” it means ultimate prospect of liberation, the fires of hell experienced in loving embrace.

Sadly though, “. . . under the impact of the Book of Revelation, an appealing synthesis of apocalyptic, zealous nationalism became accessible to the uncritical mind (p. 54).”, one that ultimately proved itself untenable in the twenty-first century. The authors conclude the chapter ominously: “Two opposing images of God, two contradictory versions of national mission, and two different approaches to world mission lie beside each other in uneasy wedlock. To accept their coalescence today is to continue in the dangerous habit of ‘doublethink’ and ‘double-talk’. But for earlier generations of Americans, untouched by the realities that now drive this synthesis apart, *the Book of Revelation provided the mythic framework for the mission of the nation*. The materials were there ready and waiting for the development of the Captain America complex (p. 54, italics added).”

Chapter 5 logically follows: “America’s Zeal to Redeem the World”. This zeal, that violence would inaugurate God’s kingdom, attended the Puritans from the outset, who genuinely expected to establish God’s thousand-year kingdom of Revelation 20 immediately. First American Awakening (mid-18th century) revivalist preacher Jonathan Edwards believed that with the conversion of the New World, the last corner of the globe, Satan’s kingdom would be overthrown throughout the whole habitable world. America was the “millennial nation” with consequent cosmic importance. Americans waged the 18th century French and Indian wars in that firm belief: *peace through violence*. The War of Independence was fought against Britain in similar ideological grip. There was thankfully prophetic realism leavening to offset a fully violent crusade, “Lockean liberalism, Enlightenment egalitarianism, and common-law definitions of political rights. . . Its [prophetic realism’s] influence may be seen particularly in the Constitution, drafted and amended after the war, with its separation of powers, its defense of human rights, its federal approach to the powers retained by various states, and its methods of conflict resolution through legislatures and courts (p. 58).”

By the Second Great Awakening in the 1830’s, belief was widespread that conversion of the entire world was now in prospect. Evangelical pietism of the 19th century took on characteristics reprised repeatedly whenever Evangelicals came alive to politics, spilling over into Canada as we shall yet see in McDonald’s book. The authors quote at length depiction of said pietism, as current in nineteenth century North America as 2011, and for the foreseeable future in the United States and Canada: “Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Baptists, Separatists and Methodists. . . believed that a Christian commonwealth could be achieved through the massing of votes of the regenerate to make ‘a Christian party in politics.’ These voters would elect only converted Christians to office and these legislators in turn would enact and enforce Christian morality throughout the nation. . . . They wanted to outlaw Masons and the Mormons, to enact nativist laws [against Catholics], to enforce prohibition, to censor immorality, to prevent birth control, to maintain a Christian Sabbath, and eventually to restrict immigration and pass laws preventing the teaching of evolution (p. 59).”

Great intolerance attended these initiatives. Slavery however for a long time proved intractable to evangelical piety. And “Possibly the most ominous expression of this zealous nationalism was the sense of ‘Manifest Destiny’ by which unscrupulous wars against Mexico and the Native

Americans were justified (p. 59).” An editorialist in 1845 caught the representative *hubris* of the nation when he concluded “that we the American people, are the most independent, intelligent, moral and happy people on the face of the earth (p. 59).” Generations later the “ugly American” is still a worldwide phenomenon. More sinister because absolutely contradictory of morality and justice, was an expansionist urge felt across the nation precisely because “the moral requirements for millennial mission had been met (p. 60).” Pot calling kettle black in reverse. With that logic, expansionism with all the more necessary attendant pacification/slaughter of Mexican and Indian is turned into an air tight cause of the end justifying the means. It was for Christian liberty.

Slavery became the fulcrum issue during the Civil War to highlight the impossible tensions between zealous nationalism and prophetic realism. The Battle Hymn of the Republic, written in the North in 1862, was the most powerful embodiment of zealous nationalism that “sets the stage for the next 140 years of altruistic, martial zeal in America (p. 63).” Similar sentiments were throughout the South. With the South’s defeat, and the Radicals imposing slavery’s immediate abolition, a new religious impulse for American imperialism emerged. Anglo-Saxons, it was believed, carried the highest civilization of humanity. They must therefore spread selflessly their values everywhere: Kipling’s “white man’s burden”. “This notion of unselfish mission is combined with a powerful sense of cultural and racial superiority that would inevitably lead to imperialistic warfare against the presumed enemies of progress (p. 69).”

The Spanish-American War of 1898 was direct consequence: “Not for gain, not for territory, but for freedom and human brotherhood! That avowal alone made the war possible and successful (p. 69).”, preached Navy chaplain Henry van Dyke and many others. There was consequent “synthesis between prophetic ideals and zealous nationalism (p. 69).” that led directly to the famous saying during the Vietnam War by an American major: “It became necessary to destroy the town to save it (p. 269).” Few Americans lost their lives to be sure, but “pacification” of the Filipinos was at the expense of as many as 200,000 lives. Not for the first or last time. Justification for the war at the time had to “set aside the very democratic values it sought to advance. Here was the dilemma that would one day tear the myths asunder (p. 71).” Hence the book’s subtitle: “The Dilemma of Zealous Nationalism”.

By the end of World War I, Americans quickly became disillusioned with the League of Nations and moved towards “splendid isolationism”. Meanwhile, the “war to end all wars” eventuated in German rearmament under the Nazis and Japan’s uncurtailed mounting aggression towards other nations. World War II broke out and communism spread widely post-war. “Yet the illusions shaped by the great crusade made the American public incapable of comprehending its own complicity in these tragic developments. As the inevitable disillusionment deepened, it brought a growing lack of faith in the democratic ideals with which zeal had been joined. It produced the moral cynicism and the hunger for alien ideologies that would serve to erode democracy itself (pp. 74 & 75).”

As mentioned, three main biblical books were drawn upon: Daniel and Revelation that in one-sided interpretation underscored zealous nationalism, and Deuteronomy, that called for a nation to be “righteous” for God’s blessing in any military campaign. Zeal was not soon to disappear as dominant American ethos.

Chapter 6 treats of “The Frustration of American Zealous Nationalism”. “For the first time in American history, a mortal threat followed immediately on the successful completion of a crusade; the very existence of the nation was jeopardized; and another great crusade did not seem feasible. The size of the adversaries and the threat of nuclear extinction marked limitations that all but the foolhardy had to admit (p. 80).” Captain America could not just apply superhuman strength without committing suicide. But “The incongruity between ideology [“that had informed American thought and behaviour for more than three centuries”] and necessity was so great that a chronic state of frustration set in (p. 80).”

The authors chart masterfully the course of various post-war administrations. They indicate a central conviction of American civil religion had now become “centered in the belief in its own superpower (p. 102).” No administration wished to be the first to lose a war, so, with reference to the Vietnam War “escalation followed escalation as lie followed lie (p. 102).” The paragraph concludes thus: “When Mr. Nixon’s lies and abuse of power came to light, they resulted in the first presidential resignation in American history. But the country never came to terms with the deaths of two or three million Asians that the Captain America complex had inspired. The failure of the wars in Southeast Asia was the appropriate season for national soul searching, but instead the country turned to even more unrealistic forms of mythic politics (p. 106).”

Chapter 7 follows on the theme: “The Ascendancy of Mythic Politics”. Under President Reagan for instance, Grenada and Panama were invaded, and harbours in Nicaragua under false pretexts were mined, all violations of international law. “The zealous components in our American ideals had triumphed over the tradition of ‘prophetic realism,’ over our commitment to coexist under law (p. 122).” So it continued through to the end of Clinton’s presidency.

“The Rapturous Rebirth of Millennial Zealotry” is title of Chapter 8, beginning with: “One of the most distressing aspects of the contemporary world is the proliferation of mutually antagonistic apocalyptic movements – Christian, Jewish, Islamic, and Hindu – offering roads to heaven that are paved with the corpses they detest (p. 131).” Televangelists lead the pack. The 1970’s *Late Great Planet Earth* by Hal Lindsay became the decade’s and all-time religious best seller in America; the 1980’s/1990’s *Left Behind* series of 16 novels by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins became the best seller series of all time in any language and country. Parallel movements of Islamic jihadists and Jewish fundamentalists share identical visions of world conflagration to rid the world of perceived enemies.

The authors trace the presence of millennial zealotry throughout American history: from The First Great Awakening (mid-18th century), through the American Revolution, the early 19th century emergence of “Latter-Day Saints” (Mormons), the Civil War, the founding of late 19th-century “Jehovah’s Witnesses”, 19th-century social reform movements, 20th-century Social Gospel, the Spanish-American War (1898) and against Germany in World War I (1917/18). Likewise “American fundamentalism was dominated by [a] pessimistic, premillennial outlook in the latter decades of the nineteenth century (p. 137).”, with “some form of rapture theology [that] has arguably become the ‘mainstream’ of American religion (p. 138).”

In foreshadowing the discussion in *The Armageddon Factor* as American antecedents, fundamentalists across America entered directly into politics, “Transcending almost a century of

suspicion regarding the evil arena of politics... (p. 140).”, forming into “The Moral Majority”. “In the conviction that the final crisis of world history was at hand, the Moral Majority movement promoted candidates and policies suited for Armageddon, including a stronger nuclear force and enlarged military budget, a resistance to any compromise with the Soviet Union, an unquestioning support of Israel, a rejection of Palestinian claims for autonomy, and an uncompromising position on moral issues such as abortion... [T]he impetus and all of the state and national leaders of the Moral Majority movement reflected the conviction that the Rapture was virtually within sight (p. 140).”

The impact on American political life far outweighed its relative short lifespan. It transformed the Republican Party “into a millenarian party resistant to federal authority, hostile to the traditional American politics of compromise, and profoundly suspicious of international law and peacekeeping (p. 141).” The “Tea Party” movement, though emergent after this book’s publication, so explained author Marci McDonald in a fall 2010 lecture in Abbotsford, is contemporary resurgence of the Moral Majority.

Chapter 9 discusses “The Global Popularization of Zeal and Jihad”. Pop culture stepped in “at a time when the American monomyth had gained global ascendancy as an entertainment product. The most sophisticated, cheapest, and thus most widely dispersed films and television programs came from Hollywood and New York, spreading the message of regeneration through violence across the entire world. Captain America’s ideology thus became a dominant theme... (p. 149).”

The authors proceed to examine Islamic jihadism and Israeli zealotry, then characterize similar trends elsewhere, observing the Captain America complex in divergent groups who otherwise hate everything American. They observe: “As the bipolar structures of the Cold War lapsed, the world has once again become the scene of holy warfares of the sort that inspired thinkers of the enlightenment to finally conceive a formal separation of church and state. For centuries of European history, visions of holiness, enforced by the power of government, had proven to be recipes for cyclical acts of violence and counterviolence. The warriors who conducted the Crusades and the internecine Christian wars on the European continent were little deterred by the Sermon on the Mount or the other resources of prophetic realism within the Judaeo-Christian tradition (p. 162).”

The authors conclude the chapter with a discussion of responsible forms of zeal and jihad. They note that governments with official atheism policy such as China and the former Soviet Union are equally given to zealous nationalism as religious counterparts. The final words are: “Nor do we recommend a life without myth. Rather, we recommend the cultivation of myths associated with prophetic realism – tolerant myths that make it possible to live with others who do not share the same beliefs. Indeed, without better myths and a self-critical fidelity to the realistic religious resources that each tradition has inherited, the entire world could come to resemble the ruins at the foot of Manhattan Island (p. 166).”

Chapter 10, “Consumed by Zeal and Jihad” discusses “varieties of hot zeal, cool zeal, and artful zeal”, concluding that “Finally, while accepting the need for zeal, we propose a prophetic model for its healthy transformation (p. 168).”

Phinehas in Numbers 25 is prototype for hot zeal that is “active, direct, and violent in its outcome (p. 170).” “Here is a zeal so nurtured by the tradition of Phinehas that the rage of the self becomes the rage of God, eliminating any hindrance from mercy or due process. A bloody massacre, which finally consumes the zealots themselves, is the logical consequence (p. 172).” John Brown, a white abolitionist who massacred several slave owners, became prototypical zealot, and consequently “A number of crucial motifs, whose religious origins were soon to be forgotten, are inserted here into the mainstream of American popular consciousness. They provide the raw materials for countless detective stories, comic books, cowboy Westerns, and commencement addresses: the distaste for the compromises required by the ‘dust’ of democratic politics, the disdain for the institutions of due process of law, the desire for total solutions by holding to pure ideals, the inclination toward violence and its justification on grounds of idealism, and the ‘sublime’ superiority of such an image of manhood. The myth of an idealistic superhero who redeems his community by selfless violence is here set on its path through the American imagination (pp. 173 & 174).”

“Standing in contrast to hot zeal is *cool zeal*, which is passive: it prefers to let others dispatch the victim and is concerned that the saint not be defiled in the regrettable course of battle... [T]he biblical books of Daniel and Revelation provide inspiration for the cool variety (p. 176).” But “The premises and the outcome are precisely the same here as in the tradition of hot zeal (p. 177).” The “saints” stand back impassively and permit cool zeal to do its dirty work. Even when it is genocide against the American Indians, cool zeal is shielded in massacre after massacre by Manifest Destiny. “By and large, the saints felt as guiltless in those engagements as Daniel felt about the fate of his enemies in the lions’ den (p. 178).”

“While both cool and hot zeal are the moral reactions of a self that is deeply grounded in traditional ideals, there is a third form: the reaction of a self that is grounded in the will to power. *Artful zeal* is motivated by the desire for mastery, usually in the form of political advantage (p. 180).” Three presidential administrations employed *artful zeal* in response to the Vietnam War, from the initial false claim about a North Vietnamese act of aggression in the Bay of Tonkin, to the massive secret (to Congressional approval) bombing raids in Laos. “Even decades after these events, the country still has not acknowledged, nor grieved, nor sought to atone for, the atrocities it committed in the futile effort to gain ‘peace with honor.’ They make the destruction of the World Trade Center appear tiny in scale (p. 186).”

Zeal becomes destructively addictive if and when “In short, as the biblical tradition has always affirmed, [zealous] idolatry first enslaves and then consumes the idolater; it then destroys everything he or she touches (p. 187).” However, “Contrary to popular belief, the greatest danger in the United States does not lie in the excesses of hot zeal (p. 187).” The authors contend that “Much more serious in its potential for destruction on the American scene is cool zeal (p. 187).” But “Of the three forms of zeal, however, it is the artful variety that is finally the most insidious. Since it is tied to the drive for power rather than to any transcendent norm of justice, it is impervious to regret (p. 188).”

They believe however that “It is not zeal itself, but the absolutizing of zeal, that is destructive. Only when the fatal short circuit occurs between human and divine rage does idolatry commence (p. 189).” But zeal is no less essential to the moral life. They suggest human zeal should be

bound by the First and Second Commandments enunciated by Jesus. Likewise, when Jesus challenged “anger” in Matt. 5:21f., it was in the context of ferocious religious zeal out of control! “Killing in God’s name thus turns out to be murder... [for] the enemy is a ‘brother.’ (p. 191)”

Chapter 11 looks at “Evil as a Grand Conspiracy”, beginning with the Book of Daniel where is found “the myth of the saints in battle against the grand conspiracy (p. 195).”, one finding extensive elaboration in the intertestamental period. “The classic form of the myth of the grand conspiracy is set forth in the Book of Revelation (p. 196).”, in which is depicted the “destruction of the grand conspiracy and all who serve it (p. 196).” It became consequently “perfectly logical that the world needed to be destroyed to cure the source of evil (p. 197).” The authors proceed to contrast this “conspiracy theory” and prophetic realism. In the former, evil originates in the demonic realm, not in humankind, and must be utterly routed and destroyed. In the latter, evil originates in humankind who is personally responsible, and calls for conversion. In the former, “Human responsibility is limited to the matter of faithfulness to the force whose pawn one has become (p. 198).” “It matters little whether their zeal is hot or cool; the important thing is that right triumph, though the world itself is destroyed in the process (p. 198).”

The writers observe: “That it is idolatrous to assume to themselves Godlike vision and responsibility for punishment does not seem to occur to the saints. After all, did they not learn of the grand conspiracy from the Bible itself (p. 200)?” They proceed to offer numerous examples in American politics of such a theory, including campaigns against Masons, Irish Catholic immigrants, the south and their slave power conspiracy, the Red Scare after World War I, fear of the rise of Communism in the 1950’s, etc. “What makes the nonsense plausible is simply the conspiracy premise itself. No evidence is required; indeed, none can be provided because everything is really controlled by the mysterious beings ‘at the top.’ (p. 204).” These notions can dominate the Left and the Right in politics.

They suggest in detail that the Vietnam War was product of such a grand theory. And the early Bush years during which they write are demonstration of another “grand conspiracy” by an “axis of evil”. They sum up that “Under the influence of the grand conspiracy, reality disappears from view and the nation is advised repeatedly to enter unwise crusades that undermine the very democracy they are intended to save (p. 209).”

They turn to Jesus as grand debunker of conspiracy theories. “But most shocking of all, he has denoted as demonic not the presumed source of evil in the form of foreign conspiracies but rather the very belief in the theology of the grand conspiracy itself (p. 211)!” They contend that “Accepting this interpretation of Jesus’ ministry would cut the nerve of conspiracy thought, which ascribes the dominant role in history to the demonic and then takes up demonic methods in the crusade. It would allow people to incorporate Jesus’ realistic assessment of the demonic potential of the religious impulse itself (p. 212).” At this point, they could have drawn on the insights of scapegoating theory and mimetic desire of René Girard, that likewise find in Jesus the way out of scapegoating mechanisms endemic to all human cultures throughout history¹⁴.

The chapter ends ominously: “To act on the premise of the grand conspiracy in the name of Americanism or Christianity or Islam remains a classic instance of wolves in sheep’s clothing:

¹⁴ See footnote 7.

no matter how convincingly they bleat, the results of their crusades are bloody annihilation (p. 213).”

Chapter 12 investigates “Stereotypes of Good and Evil”. “Radical stereotypes are the logical corollaries of the conspiracy theory (p. 215).” In World War II, “The Japanese were stubbornly reluctant to surrender to ‘demons,’ and the United States proved willing to incinerate Japan’s civilian populations by the hundreds of thousands to bring the war to a conclusion (p. 215).”

They consider the rise of stereotypes in biblical history. “That the enemy is not human and therefore deserves annihilation has been one of the most frequently repeated legacies of Daniel and Revelation (p. 221).” They identify six features of popular stereotypes, to be found in the Books of Daniel and Revelation.

They proceed to suggest that three negative effects of stereotyping are alarming:

- The growth of official dishonesty.
- Its impact on the political process is loss of faith in it.
- Due process of law is eroded and the principle of democratic equality.

They look at not only the consequent emergence of secret torture in America, but at its overt advocacy by political commentators such as Alan Dershowitz.

They conclude the chapter with five strategies to overcome stereotyping, acknowledging that “In actuality it is a religious problem (p. 237).”

Chapter 13 considers the question “To Convert Them or Destroy Them”. They wonder why “[violence] remains so appealing – especially to Americans – after centuries of exposure to gospel messages of peace and love (p. 245).” The answer lies in a line from comic character Dick Tracy: “Violence is golden when it’s used to put evil down (p. 245).”, rendering American violence thereby benign. For Americans “From its beginnings, the idea of righteous violence as means of redemption and conversion has carried the positive aura of moral purity (p. 246).” This chapter is reminiscent of Walter Wink’s trilogy on the Powers, in particular the third volume¹⁵.

They first discuss redemptive violence in the Bible. That violence sets men free is found in the earliest of Israelite tradition, one in which divinity hates violence yet is supreme in violence himself. The authors suggest, “Not until the maturing of prophetic realism was this paradox of divinity rectified, but for America civil religion, the redemptive capacity of righteous violence – in the hands of the right men – still predominates (p. 247).” So destruction and conversion of peoples are overlapping. “Convert or die!” the Crusader threatened the Muslim Saracen. “Convert or go to hell!” Billy Graham warned in his famous 20th-century Crusades. It is no surprise that he and all evangelists like him supported the government in every military crusade it undertook. Christian mission in one sense “is simply an alternate form of warfare (p. 251).”

¹⁵ Wink, Walter (1984). *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament*; (1986). *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces That Determine Human Existence*; (1992). *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

They note the particular hankering by Americans for bombing raids that massively destroy civilians to be sure, but protect American soldiers from huge casualties on the ground.

“That the world should be destroyed for the sake of American principles seemed self-evident to most Americans, while those in other countries decided that it might be better to be ‘red than dead.’ (p. 259).” When Americans began bombing Afghanistan in the War on Terror, thousands of civilians died in an imprecise application of *lex talionis*, only innocents became American victims, not the perpetrators of 9/11. Besides which, Christ stands for complete abolition of *lex talionis* – a fact widely noted in his rejection of positive (Luke 14:12 – 14) and negative (Matthew 5:39 – 41) reciprocity; ultimately in his words from the cross: *Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing* (Luke 23:34).

Hosea is used to critique the mystique of redemptive violence. “Hosea was the first thinker in world history, so far as we know, to wrestle with this question in something like its modern form (p. 270).” First, the inner wretched decay of the Israelites is exposed. Externalizing evil towards another nation is not the problem. It is *Pogo*: “We have met the enemy, and he is us.” Second, Hosea calls for a repudiation of the zealous myths. He repudiates militarism. Third, he connects the popularization of crime and brutality to zealous nationalism. Fourth, he connects public zealotry with private murders, etc., in complete imitation of the public injustices committed. Fifth, he points to ecological devastation that invariably follows in the wake of zealous crusades. This quite apart from the continued ravages of Agent Orange in Southeast Asian ecosystems that lead to widespread birth defects; and bomblets by the multiplied millions that dismember and kill hapless farmers and others who unknowingly detonate them. Sixth, perversions of justice within criminal justice itself begin to mount. There is consequent undermining of respect for law and order. Finally, foreign policy becomes locked in to militarization.

Over against this, Hosea posits redemptive love, essence of Jesus’ subsequent ministry. “Unconditional acceptance replaced aggression, joy took the place of rage, and a zeal for love overcame the zeal to destroy (p. 271).” The chapter concludes: “If our path is to be redemptive love under the aegis of international law enforcement, then we must repudiate the mystique of violence and its policies once and for all... These two paths are mutually exclusive, as Hosea demonstrated some 2,600 years ago. It is time for this prophet, whom Judaism, Islam, and Christianity all acknowledge as authoritative, to finally come into his own (p. 272).”

The fourteenth chapter is entitled “Neither Humiliation nor Defeat”. Deeply embedded in the American psyche, the authors claim, is the need to be right as well as victorious. They are in fact interdependent. The authors trace this yen to biblical antecedents. They note a “Deuteronomic principle” that understood America needed “to be righteous so as to continue to triumph (p. 276).” They see this principle already taking shape in early American experience, theme of countless political sermons. In Francis Scott Kee’s poem, “The Star-Spangled Banner”, a line in verse three goes: “Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just, And this be our motto: ‘In God is our Trust.’ (p. 277).” This notion transferred widely to post-Civil War laissez-faire economics, where God blessed the faithful with wealth and prosperity. “Nowhere else does wealth so directly point towards virtue in morality, and spirituality in religion, as in America (p. 278).”, Henry Ward Beecher preached. Victory in war and wealth in the nation prove virtue is endemic to American essence unlike all other nations. So the Vietnam War was prosecuted

across three administrations for the most part to avoid embarrassing defeat, to secure “victory with honor”, however vacuous. And the “Vietnam Syndrome” set in with Americans’ ignominious withdrawal.

When defeat nonetheless encroaches, or economic set-backs occur, various mythic explanatory theories are advanced. One is the betrayal theory whereby scapegoats, in classic Girardian sense¹⁶, are sought for immolation. Instead, the authors propose prophetic realism resources to accept defeat as part of the tragedy of life. They propose a reality dose of Paul’s theology of the cross.

They discuss in Chapter 15 “Crusades against Symbolic Desecration”. They indicate that “The attempt to use law as the instrument to bestow holiness on the flag has been a leitmotif in much of American history (p. 297).” They draw on biblical motifs to oppose such a cult of the state.

Their final chapter (16) is a look at “Prophetic Realism in Response to Jihad”. They say simply that “The dream that Captain America could protect the world, or that some ultimate defensive system will guarantee security, remains a hollow illusion (p. 313).” They draw instead on material from Isaiah that “strikes at the heart of our national ideology: that human liberation is achieved through military power in selfless crusades (p. 315).” They conclude that “Neither crusading zeal nor suicidal jihad is consistent with this biblical vision (p. 317).” of Isaiah. Isaiah instead points to “a vision of mutually transforming coexistence between cultures and classes that can be produced by equality under law (p. 317).”

They detail waning American support for international law as consequence of the stalemated Cold War. Likewise is America’s absence of support of the United Nations, a reprise of similar disavowal of the League of Nations. They propose instead that American Constitutional experience has shown that “when higher tribunals are revered, states no longer ‘lift up the sword’ against each other (p. 323).” They propose that the United States in that regard is well situated to “become the kind of redeemer nation we are called to be... not because we are superior, or somehow have a right to lead, but because we are called to be a servant and a light to the world (pp. 323 & 324).” They assert, “The American sense of mission... needs to be transformed rather than abandoned (p. 324).”

They acknowledge the need to address “what is dark within ourselves. It is not our adversaries alone who must change; it is ourselves (p. 324).” The book concludes with these words: “It [a renewed mission] calls for the transformation of the mythic forms that shape our culture and define the pattern of our politics. It calls for a creative rechanneling of Captain America’s impulse to ‘fight for right’ toward a religious commitment that is shaped both by self-critical questioning and a sense of hope about the possibilities for peace (p. 324).”

This is a book of hope in response to a three centuries long bully culture that has perpetrated massive violence including genocide in its evil history. Yet for the most part America is afflicted with a mass collective blindness that asks incredulously with President George W. Bush after 9/11, “Why do they hate us?”, and came up with all the wrong answers, that nonetheless all American political leadership genuflected to. A former Canadian friend and author mentioned

¹⁶ See footnote 7.

above, Lloyd Billingsley, who embraced fully America's self-righteousness and became a citizen there, informed me as already indicated in all seriousness that by definition the "Left Wing" was ideological against the norm of non-ideological "Right Wing". His blindness in that assertion is its own sad proof of such overweening Right Wing ideology.

The Armageddon Factor

One could expect that no other nation, against the tragic reality of over three centuries of American rapacious expansionism, could even think to imitate the blatant religious imperialism in such a culture. Yet that is precisely what Marci McDonald charts for us in *The Armageddon Factor* with reference to current 21st- century Canadian politics. At the outset one registers simple incredulity that in fact such a phenomenon could arise in another democracy when its tragic excesses are obvious to any non-ideological observer... Which of course is the very point. No one is without ideology. How, we must constantly ask, do we take off ideological lenses we all wear to actually "see" aright? This is, in the language of the two authors above the "prophetic realism" issue central to our humanity. In Jesus' words: "*In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: 'You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.'*" (Matt 13:14)"

McDonald in her Preface describes a similar incredulity expressed to her in her bid to "write a book on the rise of the Christian right in Canadian politics (p. 1)." She constantly heard, as expressed by a close friend, "Surely, you don't think that it can happen here. This is a profoundly different country than the United States (p. 1)." This is precisely the theme of the book: thirty years behind the political rise of the Religious Right in the States, Canada is indeed undergoing a similar phenomenon, with direct links to its American precursors. "In this book, I have chosen to focus on those political activists whose goal is to attain the same political power that their counterparts have enjoyed in the United States (p. 10).", she explains. She believes that an extremist vision of Christianity shaped by "the Armageddon factor" is slowly, covertly co-opting Canadian politics. To this she turns in the rest of the book.

She begins in Chapter I, "GOD'S DOMINION", with the famous national motto on the Peace Tower: "He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth (Psalm 72:8)." According to Pentecostal leader Faytene Kryskow, this conjunction of Canada's national motto with a biblical Psalm is proof positive that "God fingered Canada for a key role in the final days preceding the Battle of Armageddon and the Second Coming of Christ (p. 14)."

Kryskow heads TheCRY, whose agenda is "nothing less than restructuring Canada as a devoutly Christian nation governed by biblical literalists according to principles selectively plucked from the Old and New Testaments (p. 15)." It is a theocratic vision for a (re)new(ed) Christian nationalism advanced by a militant group of evangelicals. It is modelled after TheCall in the United States. The author indicates that it had wide *entrée* into inner circles of Ottawa political power, including of the prime minister himself.

In a 2003 speech to Civitas, a secretive right wing group of movers and shakers, Prime Minister Harper declared his shift to placing primacy not on economic but on social values. It was a clear overture to "theo-conservatives", an expression coined by religious right journalist Ted Byfield.

Suddenly gay marriage and abortion loomed as political issues, though Harper became extremely cautious in advancing these concerns.

The author concludes the chapter by saying “there is no doubt that the religious right he [Harper] has so openly fostered is here to stay as a political force (p. 49).”, with a half-dozen new Christian conservative organizations in Ottawa. She explains, “Almost all are modelled on the institutions that the religious right planted in Washington three decades ago... (p. 49).”

Chapter II, “COAT OF MANY COLOURS”, charts the rise of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada and its anti-abortion fight. It eventually opened a “Centre for Faith and Public Life” in Ottawa (1996). However, it never demonstrated the vehemence towards anti-abortion sentiments that others did, who “admired the stridency and showmanship of Jerry Falwell and the U. S. religious right (p. 59).” Reverend Charles McVety of Canada Christian College is one such, directly impacted by his American counterparts. Much of the space in fact of his College is rented to American evangelists, John Hagee chief tenant, “who has become the continent’s leading Christian Zionist and, not incidentally, a multi-millionaire whom McVety calls his business partner (p. 60).”

Hagee teaches a Rapture theology that, as pointed out in *Captain America*, recklessly encourages even nuclear confrontation with other nations on Israel’s behalf, since born-again believers will be snatched out of harm’s way in any event. This is variation on the theme of zealous nationalism that believes one must (God will) destroy the world to save it. As the other authors, McDonald traces the prophetic teaching to John Nelson Darby, who, in an “outrageous reading of the Bible” according to most mainstream theologians, one of whom claims it is “a modern heresy with cultish proportions (pp. 61 & 62)”, divides the world into seven dispensations, near the end of the seventh we clearly are.

McDonald reveals her central theme that “dispensationalism, Darby’s feverish end-times vision has become the driving force behind the continent’s religious right, fuelling its sense of urgency and obsession with biblical literalism while providing the cornerstone for one of its key constituencies, the Christian Zionist movement (p. 62).” She mentions Tim LaHaye, one of the chief architects of Jerry Falwell’s “Moral Majority”, and co-author of the *Left Behind* series that had sold by time of publication (2010) a staggering 62 million copies worldwide. In a recent book of LaHaye’s, available in McVety’s College bookstore, LaHaye proposes harsh sentences for abortionists and for homosexual activity, and a litmus test for politicians: “only Christians who believe that every word of the Bible is divinely dictated, he argues, ought to be allowed to hold public office (p. 62).”

McVety is closely aligned to these sentiments, and to the American counterparts shocked when courts in Ontario and B.C. gave rulings sanctioning same-sex marriage. McDonald traces the slow emergence of McVety into political activism, including the Canada Family Action Coalition over which he presides, “with a distinctly Christian nationalist ring (p. 65)”, “to see Judeo-Christian moral principles restored in Canada (p. 65).” “CFAC was the prime mover behind the Defend Marriage Coalition, which played almost as much of a role in Harper’s 2006 victory as the Christian Coalition did in putting George W. Bush in the White House (p. 71).”

McVety took seriously the *National Post*'s headline: "Canada Needs a Ralph Reed", the man who had been the organizational genius behind George W. Bush's White House victories. He accordingly organized a gala reception for Reed November 30, 2005. Reed pointed out then that "democracy is often a game played by a motivated few: in the nitty-gritty of grassroots organizing, it can take only a handful of citizens to commandeer a nomination contest (p. 76)."

The chapter continues to describe many other players, all with fairly common right wing religious commitments, who had discovered political activism as road to get their opinions wider resonance on the national scene. All were drawing on American antecedents of zealous nationalism.

Chapter III, "SERPENTS AND DOVES" takes us into the contemporary world of Preston Manning, whose mantra for political involvement is being wise as serpents, harmless as doves. The Manning Centre for Building Democracy was launched in 2006. Frank Luntz was brought in to help Manning with the Centre's start-up, Luntz who had been called "the Machiavelli of message manipulation (p. 101)". And he helped Manning to return to politics, albeit "no longer the earnest idealist of Reform days: he had come to regard politics as a game that could only be played with deception (p. 103)." And the only kind of "democracy" he envisaged was one where "peace, order and good government is delivered by conservatives (p. 103)."

Manning's model was the Leadership Institute in Virginia that trained multiplied thousands of Republican supporters and hundreds of Canadians, including "a handful of current Conservative MP's (p. 104)." Harper was also closely tied in at the very beginning of his national political career. Manning counsels an approach to politics "that requires not only linguistic subterfuge but strategic wiles (p. 106).", namely, *Be wise as serpents and harmless as doves* (Matthew 10:16)." McDonald comments: "When it came to dispensing advice for political action, Christian or otherwise, there seemed no doubt that Manning's new watchword was guile, but that raised one obvious question: to what extent were his own efforts guided by cunning and equivocation (p. 108)?" She argues at chapter's end that Manning hid his zeal behind an incrementalism oriented towards conciliation and the long haul.

Chapter IV, "WATCHMEN ON THE WALLS", begins with "another redoubt of the country's brash new Christian right (p. 122)": the National House of Prayer, "an initiative by one of the most radical wings of the Pentecostal community, a determined company of charismatic Christians with ties to an international network of revivalists who believe Canada has a scripturally ordained role to play in the end-times. Their goal is to see the country transformed into a righteous Christian nation governed by biblical principles, one capable of fulfilling the prophetic destiny implicit in the national motto taken from Psalm 72:8: 'He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.' (p. 122)"

Rob and Fran Parker are the organization's directors who possess unprecedented access to the halls of power in Ottawa. Their "embassy of prayer" grew out of American precedents similar to TheCRY that the Parkers helped organize in Ottawa. In their prayer room "the Peace Tower bends in humility before a crowd of Christians while the name of Jesus glows above in a cloudless sky – a neat précis of their mission: to see government bowing in obeisance to Christian authority and God's dominion established on Parliament Hill (p. 130)."

The Parkers' aspirations for Canada are in line, the author argues, with "the doctrine of America's Manifest Destiny, exalting the United States as the New Jerusalem, the 'Shining City on a Hill' that Ronald Reagan invoked in 1984 when he accepted the Republican nomination... But over the last three decades, as the stars of the U. S. prophetic circuit ventured north of the forty-ninth parallel, evangelicals here began to promote the notion that this country, too, had its own glorious, biblically ordained destiny (pp. 130 & 131)." And they are convinced that abortion and same-sex marriage laws are "sins that defile the land (p. 131).", that cry out for correction.

They became deeply involved in "Watchmen for the Nations" founded by Rev. Bob Birch of Vancouver. It in turn has become a leading Christian Zionist agency in Canada, not unlike American counterparts. David Moshen Demian is current leader of the agency, named by Birch his spiritual son. Demian repeatedly makes it clear that "it was time for God-fearing believers to seize the reins of power (p. 137)."

The Parkers helped organize the "Ottawa debut of Faytene Kryskow, a Gen-Xer whom Demian had designated to lead the spiritual charge (p. 140).", subject of Chapter V, "ROCKING THE VOTE".

McDonald writes: "Laying out that theocratic agenda, [Kryskow] offers a dissertation on dominionism: Jesus came to earth not simply to save souls, she insists, but to save entire countries, and she calls on her young faithful to form an 'army of God,' as the prophet Joel once did in the Old Testament, battling to 'disciple' the nation, indeed to see it 'completely submitted to Christ.' (p. 173 & 174)."

This is zealous nationalism at its most uncompromisingly explicit. The chapter ends with a quote from Kryskow to her ranks of followers: "You are going to kick major devil butt!" She emerges from the chapter as a serious spiritual "nut-case".

In Chapter VI, "IN THE BEGINNING", the author takes on Creation Science and Intelligent Design. She concludes the chapter: "For [those upholding Creationism and Intelligent Design], the first step in remaking Canada as a Christian nation is to rein in the forces of secularism and science... (p. 206)."

Chapter VII, "RAISING THE JOSHUA GENERATION"¹⁷, McDonald turns her attention to Christian schools and (mainly) Christian-based homeschooling. Presenting that the outcomes are consistently highly educated and socialized students over against public school counterparts, she nonetheless comments that for many Christians in the movement, "Homeschooling is a political act with a profoundly subversive goal: to groom a new generation of fiercely motivated evangelical leaders capable of taking their place in society's power centres and creating a form

¹⁷ Michael Farris opened "Patrick Henry College" in Purcellville, Virginia in September 2000, saying that like Moses his generation had brought Bible believers to the brink of political power in the States. "Now, it was time for a new generation – what he calls 'the Joshua generation' – to lead the way into the promised land, establishing a true Christian nation in [Christian Reconstructionist Roussas J.] Rushdooney's theocratic mold (p. 232)." *The Joshua Generation* is also title of a book he wrote.

of Bible-based government (p. 229).” Once again, we have zealous nationalism. McDonald links this indeed to American homeschooling mentors, specifically the “Home School Legal Defense Association”.

The author eventually compares the founding of Patrick Henry College mentioned in footnote 17 to Trinity Western’s “Laurentian Leadership Centre” in Ottawa. She sees this as another instance of growing influence of the religious right under the influence of zealous nationalism.

“THE ELECTRONIC PULPIT” is title of Chapter VIII. During the ascendancy of Christian-right broadcasting in the United States, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) for more than a decade refused to issue a license to any English-language faith group on radio or television. McDonald comments: “That ban on religious broadcasting may be the single most important reason why Canadian evangelicals have lagged behind their American brethren in both numbers and political clout – a restriction that has put the CRTC at the top of the Christian right’s hit list and prompted the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada to demand changes in the country’s telecommunications policy (p. 248).”

When the CRTC eventually granted single-faith radio and television licenses to charismatic Christians, it was discovered that they shared the same political goal as zealous nationalists to the south: “a determination to return the country to what they claim are its Christian roots – the first step toward ultimately refashioning it as a theocracy... determined to see biblical precepts guide every level of government and conservative Christians installed in the key seats of power (p. 268).”

Chapter IX is entitled “JUDGMENT DAY”. McDonald describes in some detail the emergence and activities of the American Allied Defense Fund, that in turn has the Christian Legal Fellowship of Canada allied with it. Both in turn point to zealous nationalism.

Chapter X is entitled “THE ARMAGEDDON FACTOR”. Here she lays out the title’s concerns:

- Unqualified support of the state of Israel – a Harper government commitment too
- “to what extent is this country’s role in the Middle East being influenced by the dubious theology of a renegade nineteenth-century Anglican priest [John Nelson Darby] obsessed with the idea that the end of the world is at hand (p. 312)?” The author proceeds to tell the story of the development of the theory of “Dispensationalism” that has captured the worldwide imagination of fundamentalist Christians since the nineteenth century. The monumental sales success of the *Left Behind* series mentioned above is testimonial to this. This theology enormously influenced U.S. Middle East policy during the Bush years. The author indicates that there is at least a ten-year partnership between Canadian evangelicals and conservative Jews that is directly influencing Canadian Middle East policy today. She describes the 1980 founding of the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem, “the largest and most influential of the country’s Christian Zionist organizations (p. 330).” It has in turn enormously influenced Conservative government policy.
- McDonald cites New Testament theologian Barbara Rossing’s *The Rapture Exposed*, stating that her “debunking of dispensationalism is sufficiently persuasive that I can’t

help wondering if the current craze for final-days film scripts is based on theological hogwash (p. 335).”

- Her chapter ends: “At a time when *Left Behind* followers can check the proximity of the end times on the Rapture Index at raptureready.com, the worry is that a government that has aligned itself with the most belligerent voices in Israel – and is riddled with biblical literalists certain of the inevitability of an end-times conflagration in the Middle East – could, unwittingly or not, hasten that apocalyptic scenario (p. 336).”

Chapter XI is entitled “HERE TO STAY”, a quote from Faytene Kryskow. With the election of Barack Obama, it was widely thought that the United States had moved on past the Religious Right extremes influencing American politics. McDonald asserts they were wrong.

McDonald says near the chapter’s end: “In their idealized Christian nation, non-believers – atheists (*sic*), non-Christians and even Christian secularists – have no place, and those in violation of biblical law, notably homosexuals and adulterers, would merit severe punishment and the sort of shunning that once characterized a society where suspected witches were burned. There is a dark and dangerous vision, one that brooks no dissent and requires the dismantling of key democratic institutions. A preview is on display south of the border, where decades of religious-right triumphs have left a nation bitterly splintered along lines of faith and ideology, trapped in the hysteria of overcharged rhetoric and resentment (pp. 359 & 360).”

This is Christian nationalism militant and triumphant. The author comments, “In tracing the influence of that emergent force in this country, I have attempted to sound a wake-up call... (p. 361).” She then puts it to Canadian voters “to write the next chapter” and “decide the kind of country in which they want to live (p. 361).”

It may be, as Christian political scientist Dr. John Redekop indicated in rebutting the book during a fall forum in Abbotsford with Marci McDonald, that these Christians are in fact simply doing what all are welcome to do in a democracy: vie for political power and influence in national politics. That is obviously what the Christian Right has done for over 30 years in the United States.

That the form of Christian nationalism espoused is “zealous nationalism” is hard to doubt, given the research findings of McDonald. That it contradicts the political realism of Jesus and the prophets is the thesis of *Captain America*.

Twenty-seven years ago, journalist Judith Haiven published a book subtitled *An Inside Look at the Born-Again Movement in Canada and the United States*. The title summed up her findings then about “evangelicals” across North America. Many had, she concluded, lots of *Faith, Hope, [but] No Charity* (Vancouver: New Star Books. 1984).

Three years later, American evangelical historian/sociologist Douglas Frank published *Less Than Conquerors: How Evangelicals Entered the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987.) He argued that the core characteristic of dominant evangelicalism is *a spirit of pharisaism*; a spirit not likely easily to disappear from those who set the evangelical agenda. He yearned nonetheless for, “... a church that awakens to

the Stranger, Jesus Christ, the Jesus Christ of the biblical witness; not the denatured, ideologically and morally useful Jesus Christ of evangelicalism... (p. 277).” The Epilogue’s penultimate paragraph read: “Whether in auspicious or declining times, as we have seen, we display a tenacious commitment to self-deceit. It is true that we are those who like to think we heed Jeremiah’s words, ‘Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord.’ Our history, however, gives evidence of Jeremiah’s wisdom in adding these words: ‘The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it?’ (Jer. 17:7, 9). In our very protests of trust in the Lord, we find occasion for our deepest self-deceits (p. 278).”

Both earlier volumes speak to similar concerns in *Captain America* and *The Armageddon Factor*.

Both books just reviewed stand in the tradition of prophetic realism. It is not in the end merely a question of what kind of country we wish to live in, it is what kind of God we choose to serve. Both books aver: the god of zealous nationalism in the final analysis is an idol.