



## **BUSH AND HIS GOD**

*The “theological” roots  
of the policies of George W. Bush*

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WORLD’S GREAT TRAGEDIES

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The title of this essay may seem strange. But equally strange in the West are the continuous references that George W. Bush makes to the Bible, to religion, and to God, as if it were to reassure the public about his decisions. In the Western world, it seems unusual for a president to say that he was chosen for the role as part of God's plan. It is also unusual that the sessions of the Council of Ministers should begin with prayers, and that on Friday afternoons, the Government offices close so that the workers can attend Bible study sessions

Religious discourse, which has always been present in North American public life, has started to increase in recent years, in spite of the separation of Church and State by the Constitution after independence was declared in 1776. And on several occasions, as this same president has affirmed, the presence of this religious discourse has been the main reason behind decisions made by the current republican administration. This discourse has strong links with the Calvinist tradition as it does with the question of identity and the issue of confrontation between cultures, best expressed by Samuel Huntington when he talked of the "clash of civilisations". And like Huntington, the classic *The End of History* by Fukuyama bases its theories on a sort of religious categorisation of nations, ethnic groups and cultures according to the western and North-American model, which it believed all cultures should resemble.

Here are three quotes from President Bush:

- "I heard a call. I know that God wants me to run in the presidential elections" [Bush speaking to the TV preacher James Robinson in 1998].
- "It was a national tragedy. An act of war. Liberty and democracy have been attacked [...]. Terrorism against our country will not go unpunished. Those who committed these acts and those who protect them will pay a very high price for what they have done [...]. The war that awaits us will be a monumental struggle of good versus evil [...]. It will be long and dirty [...]. Those who attacked us have chosen their own destruction [...]. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists. [...]. God is on our side [...]. God bless America" [President Bush, after the attacks of 11th September, 2001].
- "Anyone who is not with us is against us"; "we know that God is not neutral"; "We are at the start of a military attack which will be very long. Military intervention in Afghanistan is just the start of the war against terror. For many years, and all around the world, we are going to have to fight against evil. It is our mission, and we are sure that we will win" [Bush speaking to the military that were destined for Afghanistan, 21st November 2001].

Let no one underestimate the importance of these words. These reveal all the elements that I intend to analyse in the course of this essay<sup>1</sup>. These words were the basis for the introductory lesson of the 2003-2004 academic course at the *Institut Superior de Ciències Religioses de Vic*. It was since published in a limited edition in the *Col·lecció Textos* of this same Institute.

They are in fact very similar to the speeches made by Bush's enemy, Osama Bin Laden, during that same period. It is a message laced with apocalyptic, moral and theological statements, which turns the political action that is being proposed into a

particularly dangerous threat, firstly because it is so close to bigoted fanaticism, and secondly because the person who pronounced these words, the President of the largest continent and leader of the most powerful army in the world, has demonstrated that his words were not simply rhetorical - he has in fact carried out his threats with blood and fire.

# 1. SOCIOLOGY: RELIGIOSITY IN THE UNITED STATES

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However disturbing these statements by Bush may appear to a European person, they do not appear so strange to the North-American public. American presidents have been using symbolic and religious language in their speeches for a long time. We've seen images of Clinton coming out of Baptist services, heard Reagan's invocations of God, or even the confession of the "reborn Christian" Jimmy Carter. Furthermore, these are all similar to the statements of the country's founders: Jefferson, Franklin, Lincoln and Tocqueville, for example. There has never been an American president who didn't declare himself to be a practising believer. Religion and religious practice are essential elements used in the symbolism of power of the USA.

Following Independence, and while secularism became more widespread in nineteenth century Europe, religiosity became more popular than ever in the USA, and the number of denominations increased. Even now, more than 90% of North-Americans say they believe in God, 82% believe in eternal life, Sunday service attendance is at 60%, and another 60% say they pray every day. So we are talking about a nation with a high level of religiosity. Approximately 60% of the population of the USA declare themselves to be Protestant, 25% are Catholics, and the rest are from other denominations, in particular, there are many Jews (6 million; in fact there are more Jews in the USA than in Israel), as well as Moslems (3 million, some of them are descendants of the slaves from the eighteenth century and immigrants from the twentieth century). It is estimated that there are more than 1500 different Protestant denominations: Puritan Calvinists, Lutherans, Presbyterians and Baptists in the early days, who have since witnessed an increase in the number of denominations coming from Europe (Methodists, Adventists, Pentecostals, Episcopalians, etc.) as well as others that originated in the United States, for example, Mormons, Amish, Dunkers, Amish, Amish, Anglo-Israelites, the Apostolic Church, etc.

This diversity has always been accompanied by great tolerance, which in the USA does not simply mean indifference, but on the contrary, is an indication of the vitality of this form of "à la carte religion". The peaceful coexistence of so many denominations in an atmosphere of equality must signify that none consider themselves to be superior to others. For this reason, claiming dogmatic truth is not the main way one denomination would distinguish itself from another. Instead we are talking about a religious identity that harks back to a shared Judo-Christian heritage. So the reasons why someone chooses one denomination over another has a more subjective, historical and cultural character, rather than being for purely theological reasons.

Sociologists state that, with time, differences between denominations will gradually disappear. It is almost as though the different theologies behind them have followed the pattern of democratic pluralism in North-American society. They believe that there is even a gradual unification occurring among forms of religion that have recently arrived with immigrants into the country, bringing them towards a more "Americanised" model of religion, which in the seventies was called "civil religion" by Robert N. Bellah (*Civil Religion in America*). This "civil religion" has a high level of flexibility and can be easily adapted to the economic system, and its logic.

It is a culture that has impregnated the whole of North-American society, in which the most public symbols of the State: hymns, flags, and solemn political liturgies are linked, whether implicitly or explicitly to God. For example, we see "In God we trust" printed

on every dollar note, there is also evidence of the Calvinist morality of efficiency, the Puritan conviction of the need for sacrifice to obtain salvation, the daily recital of Franklin that “time is golden” understood in the literal financial sense, the identification of material success as being a result of God’s blessing, as in the Old Testament, the community and family-oriented view of life alongside the concept of individualism and the concept of individual freedom being seen as the supreme aim, as well as the preaching of mercy being seen as a virtue, etc.

In this way, civil religion is becoming a significant political factor, because it will give society the cohesion which social and economic individualism is unable to provide. It fulfils an integrating function by bringing the aspect of religious sublimation to the political discourse of individualism. Political and economic power can in this way be transformed into the sublime incarnation of God’s will. For this reason, and although the Constitution of 1787 confirmed the separation of Church (or Churches) and State, the US government uses a language that is close to that of the theology of expert lay theologians. This is the discourse of the “Chosen People”.

## 2. THE HISTORY AND IDEOLOGY OF THE NATION. THE BIRTH OF A POLITICAL FORM OF THEOLOGY

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In 1845, the journalist John O'Sullivan invented the phrase "manifest destiny" (*Manifest Destiny*), in order to justify the annexation of Mexico and the imperialism of the USA, a phrase which became popular because it was linked with the sentiment of being the Chosen People that was held by the Founding Fathers of the country, a feeling that is still as popular as ever today. This doctrine legitimises territorial and economic expansion as being the will of God. On the other hand, the USA takes on the onerous task of being the spokesperson for God's plans for the whole world. The desire to expand and the feeling of being the Chosen People are closely linked. Some would call it "the frontier spirit". In 1902, Woodrow Wilson justified it by saying: "This great pressure of people moving always to new frontiers, in search of new lands, new power, the full freedom of a virgin world has ruled our course and formed our policies like Fate".

### 2.1. The Chosen People. Foundational mythology

The first settlers of the United States came from England and Scotland, and made the metaphor of Israel's People of God their own. This is one of the most powerful metaphors in history, and can be found in the roots of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and this formed the cosmology of each of these three great cultures. The first settlers that came from Europe internalised this metaphor in such a way that it became something that was always implicitly present in the collective imagination of the people. Elia Kazan described it brilliantly in *America, America*, in the figure of poor Stavros, the Greek man who wanted to flee from Turkish oppression. The USA is "God's New Israel". People had fled from the landowners and businessmen and their feudal system as well as from the start of capitalism. They had read the Bible as the book inspired by God and found similarities between the mysticism of Judaism and the conquest of Canaan, (the Promised Land), with what they were doing, moving eastward and conquering Native Indian territory. This metaphor also includes a pact, like a new Agreement made with God on Mount Sinai: if we are faithful, then God will fulfil His promise and from a lowly people, He will make us great, from slaves He will make us free, from being nomads, He will give us all this land to own.

This view was strengthened when seen from the perspective of Old Testament theology, where material prosperity was seen as a sign of being a member of the Chosen People. Add to this the ease with which the first settlers occupied the Native Indian territory, this being seen as an indication that they were following God's will, ultimately making them seem like a just and righteous nation in the eyes of God. However, failure would not necessarily have meant that their methods were unjust, but could have been seen as a consequence of the immorality of the people, in other words, a breach of the Agreement. Only after correcting their sins could they re-establish their relationship with God.

This also applies to international relations. These people were entrusted with a great mission. John Adams, the second president, believed that the USA had the mission of liberating the whole of humanity. Benjamin Franklin believed that Divine Providence

had given a place of honour to the USA in the struggle for human dignity. Samuel Cooper believed that the USA had to fulfil its providential mission of transforming the USA into the seat of liberty. Albert Beveridge, senator of Indiana in 1900, said:

“God has made us the master organisers of the world to establish system where chaos reigns. He has marked the American people as His chosen nation to finally lead in the regeneration of the world”.

On May 8<sup>th</sup> 1999, John Ashcroft, currently the Attorney General and Secretary of Justice, said on receiving a diploma from the far-right Bob Jones University, known for its support of policies of racial segregation:

“Unique among the nations, America recognized the source of our character as being godly and eternal, not being civic and temporal. And because we have understood that our source is eternal, America has been different. We have no king but Jesus.”.

With expressions like ‘Chosen People’, ‘loved nation’, ‘God’s representative on Earth’ and ‘spokesman for His message among humanity’, the USA positions itself closer to God than any other nation on Earth; no one can get between God and the USA. It not only claims to be able to play the role of a unique intermediary between God and the rest of the world, but also seems to feel that fulfilling this role is their duty. It is the instrument of God, the saving Messiah. As Johan Galtung says, it has the Messianic obligation of taking on the divine qualities of omnipotence, omniscience, goodness and infinite mercy. In order to do this, it needs money, power and information. It wants people to believe that it is through God’s will that it is obliged to be the most economically and militarily powerful nation in the world, and that it is also God’s decree that it should have the most effective intelligence service in the world. This is a very powerful form of Messiahship. The USA is not subject to the same conditions as other countries: only it has the right to hold the last weapon and to have an unlimited amount of information gained by any means.

## **2.2. Messiahship**

This sacred Messianic role that the USA has to fulfil means that it has the right to know everything and to exercise punishment where necessary, in order to liberate people from the clutches of Evil. If one God exists and the USA is its representative, then it is logical that one single enemy should also exist, against which the USA must struggle. If there is to be a Chosen People, a Holy Nation, States of Salvation, or to be more precise, an axis of Good, then it is logical that there should also be a Cursed Nation, an Evil Nation, States of Perdition, or in other words, an axis of Evil. In theological terms, we are talking about salvation or perdition, goodness or sin. In economical terms, we are talking about prosperity or poverty

In order to fulfil the will of God and successfully obtain the ultimate triumph of Good over Evil, the USA must be intransigent when it comes to Evil. They must destroy it as though it were a contagious threat. This will take the form of a universal struggle that will continue until the final victory. If the evil country acknowledges their sinful ways, whether by common agreement or by force, all traces of evil must be rooted out forever,

just as the Inquisition did in the Middle Ages with an accused person who might happen to confess. If they don't accept their sinful ways, this will be manifest proof that they are in fact possessed by the devil, and action must be taken with even greater resolution than ever, again, in the same way as the Inquisition dealt with an accused person who refused to confess. If the USA felt itself obliged to enter into conflict, it would never admit to doing so out of vengeance or because of material interests, reasons that may be used by other nations. Instead, their action would represent evidence for the existence of good and evil, so they would act in the name of God, helping the forces of Good to combat the forces of Evil, so as to liberate people from the clutches of the devil.

For this huge 'quasi-divine' responsibility, the USA may often find itself obliged to act alone. This may incite the mistrust of other nations, that may require agreements, dialogue or multilateral organisations to make decisions, but the USA only has to give their explanations to God.

So what is the divine message that the USA feels they are obliged to give the whole world in their role of the Chosen People? What is Good and what is Evil? What barriers are they putting up between Good and Evil? For them, 'Good' would represent all that which is similar to the North-American way of life, and 'Evil' would represent all that which is separate from it. Countries would be seen as good if they recognise the intrinsic good in the economic, political and cultural principles of the USA, and accept its role as supreme interlocutor with God. Nations would be seen as bad if they did not recognise this role of the USA, or if they refused to accept these principles. In brief, those considered as good would accept three central elements:

1. In the sphere of the economy, the market is the only option.
2. In politics, they must have the formal democracy of elections.
3. In culture, the model of American culture should be accepted foremost, including its religion.

Any country or State that rejects these principles will be seen as evil. For many years, during the Cold War, communism and the Soviet Union were seen as the incarnation of Evil.

This ideology has always been very much alive in right-wing America and materialised in the form of the Republican Party, in particular during the presidencies of Reagan, George Bush Senior and with the current George W. Bush. They make continuous reference to the "moral superiority of the USA" in order to justify political, economic and military invasions all over the world, especially during the arms race of the Cold War. Pat Buchanan, a staunch conservative and frustrated presidential candidate for the Republican Party in 1992 and 1996, said:

"Our culture is superior because our religion is Christianity. And Christianity is the truth. And the truth makes people free".

Another example is the speech of Reagan in Orlando, Florida, on March 8<sup>th</sup> 1983, at the National Association of Evangelicals. On speaking of Communists, he said:

"...They are the focus of evil in the modern world... To ignore the facts of history and the aggressive impulses of an evil empire, to simply call the arms

race a giant misunderstanding and thereby remove yourself from the struggle between right and wrong and good and evil... There is sin and evil in the world, and we're enjoined by scripture and the Lord Jesus to oppose it with all our might. Our nation too has a legacy of evil with which it must deal. The glory of this land has been its capacity for transcending the moral evils of our past".

When this enemy fell, it became necessary to create another that would suit the collective imagination, and one that would be powerful enough to polarise internal opinion in the USA and external opinion. This occasion presented itself on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001 with the attack on the Twin Towers. From that moment, the widespread phenomenon of international terrorism, identified with the Arab world and those that the USA, in keeping with its qualities of omniscience, considered to be directly or indirectly implicated, became the root of all evil. And the US government believe that, as decreed by God, they are obliged to crush their enemies. The Jews and the State of Israel agreed with this new personification of Evil, but then they had never agreed with Moslems or with Moslem countries. Bush and his God have a strong anti-Moslem component.

Nevertheless, even before September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, the doctrine of the dominant role that the USA had to fulfil in the world, through God's will, had already been formulated. This is evident in the "The Project for the New American Century" (PNAC). This group was founded in 1997 by a group of neo-conservative strategists "in regards to the foreign and defence policy of the USA", and with the aim of "rallying support for American global leadership", also demanding "a Reaganite policy of military strength and moral clarity". Dick Cheney, Jeb Bush, Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz and Scooter Libby signed the declaration. In summary, the proposal was for direct and unilateral military intervention with the sole objective of making North-American supremacy irreversible throughout the world.

One year after September 11<sup>th</sup>, the proposal of the PNAC was put in the document of the New Doctrine of National Security, presented by Bush on the 20<sup>th</sup> September 2002. It was the official unilateralist proclamation that had been built up by Robert Kagan, Richard Perle and Condolezza Rice since the start of the PNAC, together with the original signatories..

The document, which is about 20 pages long, can be summarised in four points:

1. The USA gives itself the right to identify who is a terrorist. Any organisation or State will be considered as such if they (a) attempt to go against US interests anywhere in the world, or (b) put the supply of essential materials in danger: e.g. oil, gas, uranium and water.
2. The USA should have the most powerful weapons in the world, and these should have the most "lethal" capacity. It is the only country that has the right to such. Any country or countries that try to arm themselves will be considered as terrorists.
3. The USA will submit to the decisions of multilateral organisations when it considers that these decisions are in accordance with its own interests. If this is not the case, the USA believes it has the right and duty to act for itself unilaterally.

4. The USA believes it has the right to judge others, not necessarily according to facts, but rather through the presupposition of their intentions. Any action taken will be considered as legitimate defence, even if there have been no previous attacks. This is the doctrine of preventative war.

The reasoning behind these decisions was explained with insulting clarity by the presidential advisor Robert Kagan in *Power and Weakness* (Barcelona, Taurus, 2003). For example, regarding relations with the UN, Kagan states that the UN and its Justice Tribunals may speak out against the USA, but without any effect. Why? Because the majority of its members are “Communists, not Christians, dictators and anti-market” (!). But the real unspoken reason is because the UN has unforgivable intentions: that of trying to put itself between God and the USA. Or worse, that of trying to take the place of God, or take the place of the USA. For this reason, the UN is in fact the real enemy. The UN does not want people to think that the USA has a monopoly on the legitimate use of power in the world, not because of the USA’s egoism or desire for power, but instead because of the fact that the USA believes it is God’s will that they should have this dominant role.

### 3. THE MORAL ISSUE

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The “fathers” of the USA founded the country talking about a new society, new man, philanthropy, charity, and being sons of the Liberty, Equality and Fraternity of the Enlightenment. These words were the actual slogans and central beliefs of the Independence party in 1776, and remained hallowed words in Europe up until the end of the eighteenth century. Tocqueville speaks of liberty and democracy, of the defence of human rights, and of new forms of political representation. Franklin, along with those who went before him, emphasised the values of work, efficiency, saving money, discipline, austerity, performance, etc., linking these values to a sense of social duty, and in particular to the fulfilment of obligations which came with the exercising of a profession.

#### 3.1. Individual Morality

This is the inherited culture of Scottish and Central European Calvinist Puritanism. Protestant society had introduced a form of radical individualism into the economy and had brought about the destruction of traditional social relationships and networks. For this reason, the anthropology of this new society had individualism as its reference point, in other words, the individual standing alone before God, with no means of intercession for salvation, as well as the individual on his own faced with the duty of efficiency in work, seen as a sacred obligation capable of transforming the world. The new North-American society founded itself on the individual and the idea of individual risk, and not on any community-based sentiment..

Subsequently, these moral principles were taken over by a more utilitarian form of morality, and individual morality and politics became more important than communal or external forms of morality and politics. Weber explained this in his classic thesis on *Protestant ethics and the spirit of capitalism*. For the founding fathers that were building a new society, it became more important to focus on the virtue of their members than to concentrate on the structures that would regulate justice. They believed that real change in society would come about through a change in the individual, because the root of society’s problems was not to be found in the economy, but in a moral and spiritual crisis. If people were virtuous, they would undoubtedly create a virtuous society. They would need to distance themselves from the vices of their old European societies that exhibited such sinful behaviour: collective depravity, personal degradation, the breakdown of the family, licentiousness, promiscuity and profane customs

The whole of society, and especially those who had previously lived sinful and dissolute lives, would have to publicly acknowledge their sinful ways and be “reborn” in Jesus Christ. A form of “positive confession” would make them “reborn”. They would receive a personal revelation of God and would always act as witnesses to the goodness of Jesus who saves sinners. The ex-president Jimmy Carter considered himself to be a “born-again” Christian, as does Bush, who explained many times that it was Jesus who saved him from alcoholism.

At the start of the twentieth century, a group of Professors of Theology at Princeton, under the direction of Lyman Stewart, published a small collection of twelve books under the generic title of *Fundamentals. A testimony of the truth*, proposing a form of Christianity that was extremely rigorous and dogmatically strict, in response to the avalanche of modernity that they saw taking over the USA. The term “fundamentalist” came from them. The movement had many sympathisers, in particular, members of the Republican Party. They supported a more literal interpretation of the Bible. They called themselves creationists because they struggled with the theory of evolution: if Darwin was right, then we could be seen as the equivalent of apes. Their beliefs demanded a traditionalist way of life, restricting one’s sexual life to very strict and private guidelines, and they also pushed for the prohibition of alcohol during the time of Al Capone, among others.

In this way, organisations like the Christian Crusade, League of America, Anti-Communist Christian Crusade or the White Anglo Saxon Protestants (WASP, a group created in the middle of the nineteenth century, in 1865, and an antecedent of the Ku Klux Klan), claimed to represent the values that should be considered respectable by all North-Americans, and they were even prepared to defend themselves with threats and weapons.

Faced with a wave of changing values that was taking over Europe and the western world after 1968 and during the seventies, North-American fundamentalism reacted by becoming more radical. The new model of liberty, the critical attitude towards authority, the normality with which society now tolerated public declarations of atheism, attempts to create a clearer separation between Church and State, the new culture appearing in relation to personal relationships, the open approach to homosexuality, etc., caused reactions of re-affirmation among fundamentalist movements. They were not ready to accept these changes. As well as this, the USA was experiencing strong movements of protest against the war in Vietnam and facing the humiliation of defeat. The youth were beginning to discover the cruelty of the system. It was the era of the *hippy* movement, of massive rock concerts, and of the pacifism of Joan Baez.

But the North-American middle-class, and the fundamentalists of the seventies had also undergone significant changes, and the importance of these cannot be underestimated. They were now much better off in a financial sense and it was becoming very difficult to demand that they lead ascetic lives or follow the moral rigours of Puritans in the past. In short: they were no longer fundamentalists. Protestant ethics, as explained by Daniel Bell (*The cultural contradictions of capitalism*), had been undermined, not by modernity, but by its own capitalist ethics. The system had been transformed by the ethics of mass-production and consumerism, and by the creation of new needs and new means by which to satisfy them. Ultimately, giving up the ascetic way of life was compromising the moral theology of the conservatives. It was giving way to hedonism.

### **3.2. Moral Majority, the Christian Coalition and TV evangelists**

What was left of fundamentalism and conservatism merged together to form the movement known as the New Christian Right. They used new ways of getting people’s attention, a more aggressive form of language and displayed a clear will to intervene in politics. Very soon they became an organised current that ran through the Republican

Party. Jerry Falwell, a renowned fundamentalist preacher from Virginia, founded an organisation known as Moral Majority. The USA is in decline, he said, because it had got rid of the moral and religious values that made their nation strong. People needed to return to these original values and also intervene in politics. With an enormous amount of money available to him, he began to promote moral and political campaigns through meetings, documents and above all, through new television programmes that were extraordinarily effective, in which he portrayed those that did not share his ideas as being enemies of the family, of religion, of the USA, and of God. This was the origin of the so-called TV evangelists. He managed to make the theme of religion the theme for the electoral programme during the campaign that brought Reagan, their republican candidate, to presidency. Falwell was replaced by Pat Robertson, a Pentecostalist, the most famous of all TV evangelists, who stopped using commercial TV channels and created his own channel (*Christian Broadcasting Network*, CBN, later given the name of the Family Channel). In 1989 he founded the Christian Coalition, the most famous of all the ultra-conservative organisations, which had a great influence within the Republican Party: the same Pat Robertson presented himself as a presidential candidate in 1988, Pat Buchanan was their candidate during the 1992 elections, and much of the current Bush administration also formed part of this group

Unlike other similar organisations, the objective of the Christian Coalition was to put pressure on parties to adopt the moral stance of right-wing conservatives, although this struggle for morality often had much baser aims. For example, the media siege that Clinton went through because of something that happened in his private life had a lot to do with Republican Party interests. For James Baker, a Republican and member of the Moral Majority, he found himself to be in a similar situation but with no serious repercussions. Behind the revelations about Clinton were Cheney and Rumsfeld, who demanded a different form of international politics, and above all, an increase in America's military quota and rearmament.

Let's not forget however, that the growing push for neo-conservatism is a phenomenon that is affecting the whole world and all religions, from the split of Léfèvre in Catholicism to Khomeini. Modern man had the futile aim of looking for the universal basis for morality in reason, and he is now suffering the consequences. The conservatives blame modernity for introducing relativism in regards to moral values, and so reject modern society, its functionality and the changes that have taken place in regards to traditional morality. On the other hand, attempts have been made by the likes of Hayek or Novak (*The spirit of democratic capitalism*) who have set themselves the ridiculous aim of looking for the theological and Biblical roots of capitalism. However, these have widespread effects thanks to the growth of neoliberalism and the experiments that the school of Chicago is starting to carry out, in particular since the military coup in Latin America.

In the USA, the far-right is going back to the foundational myth of the Chosen People, as well as the idea of Messiahship in order to reappear in politics and religion. They are using this myth in politics because they want to justify unilateralism in international relations and the use of arms as a strategy; and in religion, with the aim of regaining control of their culture, and eliminating any obstacles that have been introduced over the years of the constitutional separation of Church and State. As Vidal-Beneyto said not too long ago, ("Political fundamentalism in the USA", *El País*, 5<sup>th</sup> June, 2004), it is the reaction to the absence of values caused by secularism or to the values that have been surreptitiously introduced by other cultures, that can put both religious and political

identity in danger. From a fundamentalist point of view, both religious and political identity are inseparable, and each feeds off the other, (see also Amin Maalouf, *Identidades asesinas*, Alianza Editorial, 1999). The plan is very simple: bring religion back into school, protect the family unit, fight against divorce, abortion and homosexuality, and demonise feminists, members of the *New Age* movement, and treat any progressive movement as an enemy of God.

Allow me to quote two preachers that I previously mentioned:

- “The wars of extermination have given a lot of people trouble unless they know what was going on. The people in the land of Palestine were very wicked. They were given over to idolatry; they sacrificed their children; they had all kinds of abominable sex practices; they were having sex, apparently, with animals; they were having sex men with men, and women with women; they were committing adultery, fornication; they were worshipping idols, offering their children up; and they were forsaking God. God told the Israelites to kill them all —men, women and children, to destroy them. And that seems to be a terrible thing to do. Is it? Or isn’t it?”. “Well, let us assume there were 2,000 of them, or 10,000 of them living in the land, or whatever number there was of them. I don’t have the exact number. Pick a number. God said, ‘Kill them all’. “Well that would seem hard, wouldn’t it? That would be 10,000 people who would probably go to Hell. But, if they stayed and reproduced, in 30 or 40 or 50 or 60 or 100 more years, they could conceivably be —10,000 would go to a 100,000— 100,000 could conceivably go to a million. And then, there would be a million people who would have to spend eternity in Hell! And it’s far more merciful to take away a few than to see in the future a 100 years down the road, and say, ‘Well, I have to take away a million people that would forever be apart from God’, because the abomination was there like a contagion. God saw that there was no cure for it. It wasn’t going to change; their hearts weren’t going to change; and all they would do is cause trouble for the Israelites, and pull the Israelites away from God, and prevent the truth of God from reaching the Earth”. “So, God, in love, took away a small number that he might not have to take away a large number”. [Pat Robertson, *The 700 Club*, May 6<sup>th</sup> 1985].
- “There will never be world peace until God’s house and God’s people are given their rightful place of leadership at the top of the world. How can there be peace when drunkards, drug dealers, communists, atheists, New Age worshipers of Satan, secular humanists, oppressive dictators, greedy moneychangers, revolutionary assassins, adulterers, and homosexuals are on top?” [Pat Robertson, *The New World Order*, 1991].
- “The feminist agenda is not about equal rights for women. It is about a socialist, anti-family political movement that encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism and become lesbians.” [Fundraising letter from Pat Robertson, ex-American presidential candidate, president of the Christian Coalition, in *The Washington Post*, 23 August 1993].
- “AIDS is the wrath of a just God against homosexuals. AIDS is not just God’s punishment for homosexuals; it is God’s punishment for the society that tolerates homosexuals. To oppose it would be like an Israelite jumping in the Red Sea to save one of Pharaoh’s charioteers.” [Jerry Falwell, 1993].

The Reverend Billy Graham, who made a call of repentance to the USA, gave the sermon of the religious service in honour of the victims of September 11th. He said that if the USA wanted to regain the protection of the God of Israel, it would have to turn away from sin and continue to defend the right of the State of Israel to exist:

- “We have sinned against the all-powerful God in the highest spheres of our government, we have spat in your very face. The Supreme Court has insulted you time and again. Lord, they have thrown your word out of our schools. They have forbidden children in State schools to say a prayer before they take an exam. They have got rid of everything to do with you the best way they can, and other organisations have gone to the courts trying to prohibit any mention of God in the public arena of the USA. Forgive us!”

In the religious ceremony that took place on September 13<sup>th</sup>, 2001, at the height of people’s emotion in the USA and all over the world, Jerry Falwell uttered the following words:

- “I really believe that the pagans, and the abortionists, and the feminists, and the gays and the lesbians who are actively trying to make that an alternative lifestyle, the ACLU, People For the American Way, all of them who have tried to secularise America. I point the finger in their face and say ‘you helped this happen’...Having thrown God out of the public square, out of the schools. The abortionists have got to bear some burden for this because God will not be mocked... I do believe, as a theologian, based upon many Scriptures... (that the ACLU and other organisations)... have attempted to secularise America, have removed our nation from its relationship with Christ on which it was founded... I therefore believe that they created an environment which possibly has caused God to lift the veil of protection.”

## 4. BUSH AND HIS GOD

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Up to now, I wanted to deal with the context of the moral theology of fundamentalism in the USA not just out of stylistic requirements, but rather to point out that although Bush may appear strange to Europeans, what is more strange is that he is considered by many as a good leader and regarded as such by the majority of the American population, because although he may be the subject of so many jokes, he actually represents the aspirations and way of thinking of the American people. This is what makes it particularly strange and worrying.

Bush has to be taken seriously. We are dealing with a whole ideology here—or should I say, a *boutade*—not in the intellectual sense of the word but instead in a much more important sense. Firstly, we have his ability to personify the foundational mythology of America and—maybe through his simplicity—his ability to appeal to the majority of American people. This is seen in the current trend in American politics of paying homage to President Reagan. What Bush says is not only in keeping with the system but is even an expression of the very powers that built the system. For this reason, it is a mistake to believe that this ideology will disappear when he disappears from the political scene.

The issue is a simple one, the struggle between good and evil, black and white. The incarnation of Good versus the incarnation of Evil. It is probably this tendency to see things in black and white, just as in the “cowboys and Indians” films which is his very strength: he has managed to polarise the forces at work in society into one single enemy. Instead of confusing the nation with a host of enemies, in this way, all the enemies from different camps seem to belong to one single category. For Hitler, the personification of Evil was Zionism. For Reagan, it was communism. The skill of Bush’s team, at a time when after the Cold War there was no visible enemy that seemed to be threatening the USA, was to have found this enemy in the widespread element of terrorism. Using this excuse allowed them to take action in any part of the world in the name of God. That was the ‘gift’ that the Bush administration received on September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001.

### 4.1. The model of social Darwinism

Extreme individualism as a social and economic proposal makes the poor man responsible for his own poverty. There is no room for social reasons or personal circumstances, and so the political aspect is taken out of the economy. The system is only understood through its opportunity for maximum individual gain, and so cannot be questioned. And furthermore, similar to Old Testament mentality, the poor man should probably also be a sinner because his poverty means he did not receive God’s blessing. The model is that of social Darwinism and segregation. I will go through a few examples

*Poverty.* The Dow Jones index for Friday 26<sup>th</sup> September 2003 and the US Statistics Office said that the rate of poverty had increased for the second year running. The level of poverty for the previous year, 2001, was 11.7%, and in 2002 it rose to 12.1%. This means that 34.6 million people, 1.7 million more than the previous year, are living in

poverty-stricken conditions, and out of those, almost 14 million are living in conditions of extreme poverty, 800,000 more than the previous year. 16.7% of children, a total of 12.1 million live in poverty, 400,000 more than the previous year.

These sources also show that the divide between rich and poor has increased: in 1985 one-fifth of the richest people possessed 45% of the nation's wealth, and in 2001 this rose to 55%. On the other hand, one-fifth of the nation's poorest people had 1% less than in 1985. Between 1998 and 2001 the difference between the top 10% of rich people and the bottom 20% of poor people rose by 70%.

Furthermore, poverty fundamentally affects Afro-American immigrants: their poverty rate is more than double the national average, at 22.7%. However, the poverty rate remains stable for white people.

*Disappearance of social support programs.* The multitude of social support programs has disappeared. As regards the problem of drug addiction, Bush stated that he was suspending financial support for addiction treatment, and that programs that facilitate rehabilitation would replace it: "Let us bring to all Americans who struggle with drug-addiction this message of hope: the miracle of recovery through prayer is possible and it could be you". [Presidential speech on the State of the Nation, 2002].

*Waste on weapons.* Contradictorily, the last budget increased spending on weapons to 400,000 million dollars, (let's remind ourselves here that 1 million people in the world live on 1 dollar a day).

*Imprisonment and racial segregation.* The prison population reached a record high in 2002: 2.1 million. Almost 10 in every thousand (10 times higher than in Spain, where the prison population is 1 in every thousand). But while the black population represents fewer than 13% of the total US population, 60% of the prison population are coloured. And while the general unemployment rate is at 6.2%, it is at 10% among the black population.

*Social violence.* In 2002 the delinquency rate continued to rise in the USA. 11.8 million crimes were reported in 2002, which is an increase of 2.1% in relation to the previous year. 15,980 people were murdered, which is approximately 44 people each day, and 90,491 women reported cases of rape. As a result of the 200 million gun-owners in America, the murder rate there is between five and seven times higher than in other industrialised nations.

*Death penalty.* The US authorities confirmed that since 1973 more than one hundred innocent people were mistakenly executed. As governor of Texas, Bush presided over 152 executions. More executions take place here than in any other state. In one third of these cases, the lawyers were expelled from the trial, in 40 cases the penalty was based on one single witness testimony, and in another 30 cases the public prosecutors presented psychiatric evidence from experts that had never even interviewed the accused. Even so, Bush affirmed that everyone executed while he was governor of Texas had full access to the courts. "Everyone had access to a fair trial". He also stated that before each execution he would spend time praying for the eternal salvation of the victim. America is one of the few countries in the world that still imposes the death penalty on adolescents and those with diminished responsibility. America is the country where more than half of all worldwide executions have taken place over the last ten

years. The TV evangelist Reverend R. H. Charles, in support of Bush's campaign, said: "Those who oppose the death penalty and war are moral perverts and degenerates, they have lost the capacity for moral indignation".

*The environment.* America did not sign the agreements made at Kyoto. In Bush's mind, God put Nature at the service of man so that he could make immediate and total use of it: trees, animals, air, water, etc. He believes that "those who insist on resolving the difference between developed countries that cause a lot of pollution and less developed countries that cause less pollution [...] bring people to class war".

#### **4.2. The theology of sin or the theology of suffering**

Bush and his God, this God who abandons all creatures to their fate, who cannot help the two-thirds of the world that live on less than two dollars a day due to the inflexible laws of the economy, and the God who doesn't know how to feel pity, is a God that is linked to a theology of power. But He is not the compassionate and benign God of the Bible, and nor is He the father-figure that shows the goodness and mercy that Jesus was talking about, the God who gives health to the sick and brings the dead back to life, and above all, the God who raised Jesus from the dead.

The latter description is that of the God that Jesus was talking about, the God that caused such a stir among the early Christian communities. However, in a very imperceptible way, from the fourth century onwards, Christianity took Greek philosophy and the legal influence of the Roman Justice system into its vision of the world, and these both look at humanity from the perspective of power. It gradually began to lose its sensitivity towards suffering and took on a greater preoccupation with sin, and sinners. It moved from the morality of pain and suffering towards a morality of sin. The issue of God and suffering became the issue of the salvation of the soul.

Early Christians saw the message of Jesus from the perspective of the victim. Initially, they saw it as a message of liberation from all types of slavery, and then gradually transformed it into a message from the perspective of power. They spoke of a God who would punish any kind of moral transgression with death. God came to be seen as a God of death, who led Jesus to his death in order to rid the world of sin, instead of being seen as a God of life, whose Son Jesus was put to death against his will in order to free us all from the power of death. Salvation was not seen as a message of liberation, life, hope, a statement made in favour of life, but was instead seen through a theology that speaks of sacrifice, death, sin, blame or punishment, and that uses the language of Mel Gibson in the film *The Passion of the Christ*.

This God-of-Death has nothing to do with the suffering of the world. There is no place for Him, and neither is it possible to call or invoke His name. Humanity, independent from God, has become sinful, and is now reaping the consequences of that sin. So God remains subordinate to human liberty and the theory of redemption is thought of exclusively as meaning redemption from sin. The problem of world hunger, and the thirst for justice in relation to God, in other words, the issue of God's justice, is replaced by the anthropological problem of sin.

In some way, these two types of theology are reflected in two translations of the Our Father prayer: “forgive our debts as we forgive our debtors” has been replaced by “forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us”. The “debt” problem, which is both an eschatological and a social one, has been replaced by the problem of “trespass” or sin, an anthropological and moral problem.

Saint Augustine also gives sin enormous responsibility for the existence of evil and suffering in the world. This is also the main problem of fundamentalism. Having determined that the cause of social change is solely due to the good or bad impulses of man, fundamentalism turns social facts into moral ones: bad things happen because there are bad people who caused them to happen, they don't think that bad things can happen because the system is morally unsound.

It seems as though the only way of understanding the political action of Bush would be to accept the Lutheran and Calvinist dogma of original sin and the idea that human nature can be intrinsically corrupt, that the political sphere, as has been explained in this essay, is conditioned by people's hostility towards each other, and that we live in the world as described by Hobbes. For fundamentalism, the Utopian dream of liberalism in which economic conflicts are reduced to mere disagreements and war is wiped out, would mean a sad and boring world, without any major controversial issues that would require self-sacrifice, heroic acts, saving lives or the need for competition. What fundamentalism does bring about is the struggle of individuals against each other.

#### **4.3. The theology of power and of permanent conflict**

Bush's God is a God that expresses Himself through power and through the continuous use of power, as if in an attempt to recreate the Sacred Order of the Middle Ages. This is a model that is very similar to totalitarianism. Along with Ariel Sharon, who calls himself a “man of peace”, this model shares the idea of the “Great Israel”, and makes its own the phrase of Napoleon when he said that “God is with the heaviest battalions” or the idea of Pat Robertson who, instead of calling for a return to theocracy, proclaimed: “All types of media, news, television, radio, cinema, the arts, the government, companies, finances, will be ours. God will give them to his Chosen People. We have to prepare ourselves to rule the world and govern it together with Jesus Christ”.

This is also a God that expresses Himself through punishment, who appears on the worldwide stage in the form of the American military, and on the national stage in the form of the death penalty. In His religious and political expressions He seems to be the western equivalent of that bitter and vengeful God of Khomeini. The current republican administration and Bush are playing the role of the *sheriff*, wielding justice in the struggle between Good and Evil, and considering themselves to be the instrument of just punishment.

This is a God who makes the reason for His presence that of ruling the world and as a consequence, permanent conflict becomes a necessary strategy. But Nietzsche also saw conflict as the strategy of progress. The TV evangelist Buster Dobbs (editor of the magazine Firm Foundation, June 1994) said: “The inability or unwillingness to hate makes a person worthless. If we do not hate detestable things, the quality of our character is suspect. The Bible commands that we hate.” In Nietzsche's *On the*

*Genealogy of Morals*, I recall an extract: “A legal system conceived of as sovereign and universal, not as a means in the struggle of power complexes, but as a means against all struggles in general [...] would be a principle hostile to life, a destroyer and dissolver of human beings, an assassination attempt on the future of human beings, a sign of exhaustion, a secret path to nothingness.”

Today there is a new type of political reflection, (see Carl Schmitt), which makes it seem that we are returning to the old philosophy of power for power’s sake, lacking any principles in our quest.

Words, strategies, the desire for power and the consecration of power makes us recall times that we thought were long gone, for example, national socialism, which has the same theology of power, the same Messianic idea of the Chosen People, the same desire to expand in order to gain “living space”, the same desire for military action, the same demonisation of a particular sector of society, and representation of them as being the incarnation of Evil.

Behind Bush’s calls for peace, it is not possible to hide the link between war, politics, religion and human nature. This is fundamentalism. If we add the idea of the Chosen People to his political and strategical vision, we can easily arrive at a theological justification for preventative war, or the possibility of thinking about attacking the Arab world, for example, as an act of homage to God.

#### **4.4. Millenarism, eschatology, and the apocalypse**

Religious fundamentalism has always been linked to the idea of Millenarism and the apocalyptic idea of the end of the world. It feeds of the apocalyptic literature of the Bible. Isaiah, Ezekiel and Daniel are interpreted in the literal sense: Yahweh struggling against the forces of chaos, personified in Satan.

This is a global interpretation of history in which the enemies of God’s People, those who tried to obstruct the building of Israel, the Promised Land, are also the enemies of God. The story brings with it the continuous conflict of Yahweh against the forces of Evil. Evil will be conquered and the serpent, an incarnation of Satan, will be destroyed. The personification of Evil in the figure of the Antichrist (Matt 24, Mark 13 or Luke 21) links up with the dualist framework of the entire Old Testament, and with the Manicheistic dualism of fundamentalism. They see our lives as being characterised by a conflict between Good and Evil, by devastating wars and by the workings of the Antichrist. We are approaching the Second Coming of Christ, who will bring about the perfect reign, and preparing for His arrival when the faithful will be led into glory and rise from the dead.

The extract from Apocalypse 16:16-21 speaks of Armageddon as this great battle in which Good will triumph forever, and Evil be wiped out. Current events in the world are only a preparation for this momentous final battle. For fundamentalists, this moment should not be feared. For this reason Armageddon has become a constant reference for fundamentalists. It will be a time of destruction and justice, perhaps even a nuclear holocaust, when the just and unjust will be separated. It will be the final moment in the history of God’s relationship with man.

## 5. THE POSSIBILITY OF A DISCOURSE ON GOD WHEN FACED WITH THE WORLD'S GREAT TRAGEDIES

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Fundamentalism is like a sickness attacking both our faith in God, and our religion, resulting from our insecurity and infantile behaviour. However, over-simplistic explanations of fundamentalism should be avoided. It can be too easily demonised, and people may believe that their view is the correct one, while believing that fundamentalism is totally wrong. We might see ourselves as the normal ones, and regard them as the strange ones. Although it may seem surprising, fundamentalism fits in with the logic of the tradition from which it originated. Religious beliefs lead us towards a sense of that which is incomprehensible to the rational mind, towards a sort of mystery that is impossible to explain. If a person believes that God sent us His son so that He would die for us or, as the Shi'ites believe, that the twelfth imam is not dead but is in fact hidden, then everything else is possible..

### 5.1. Christian and Moslem fundamentalism

However, fundamentalism is not linked to dogma, or belief, but is instead looked at in terms of how it can be used and which cause it might serve. Therefore, it is not a theological issue, but a political one. All religions have always had, and still do have fundamentalist believers, extremists who oppose the political status quo, proclaiming that they bear the original foundational message of their faith. For example, from its birth, Protestant radicalism gave way to sectarian fighting in the name of God, like Thomas Müntzer and the Anabaptist revolt of peasants and miners against Luther, but it has also created pacifist groups, as in the case of the Quakers. What seems to be the case in history is that when a religious group comes to power, they become intolerant and will justify crimes and political narrow-mindedness in the name of God. This was the case of Calvin in Geneva, Savonarola in Florence, and in the religious wars and massacres that took place in Europe during the whole of the sixteenth century that ended with the Edict of Nantes. A long time before this, Bartolomé de las Casas gave that terrifying description called *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*. I also recommend the extraordinary historical chronicle *Crusades Through Arab Eyes* by Amin Maalouf as a notable exercise in understanding the way we can manipulate history. We also have to remember that recently, the Church asked forgiveness for both the Crusades and the conquest of America

In the world of Islam, we find exactly the same thing. We accept things without even questioning them, such as the stereotype that Islamic Jihad is synonymous with Holy War, identifying it with violence, and more recently, almost with Bin Laden and terrorism. We don't want to look at the fact that, for millions of Moslems living in poverty, Jihad doesn't mean anything else but faithfulness towards God, prayer, defending one's faith to non-believers, and self-discipline. In other words, the same meaning that these words would have for Christians. Yet there are also stronger currents within Islam, which, in spite of the wave of fundamentalism, are struggling to obtain a more in-depth interpretation of the Koran. Perhaps the clearest example of this would be Mahmud Mohamed Taha, known as "the Gandhi of Sudan", and author of *The second message of Islam* who was executed for defending his ideas.

Christian and Moslem cultures have very different traditions in relation to their links with power. In the first few centuries, Christianity was a dissident movement within Jerusalem and the Roman Empire; it did not recruit followers from the higher classes until around one hundred years after the death of Jesus, and was not authorised until the year 380. It was marginalized for a long time, and led a clandestine existence among the catacombs. Jesus had even said, “give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar”, which could suggest the necessary distinction to be made between the sacred and the political state. Unlike Christianity, Islam gained political power while its leader was still alive and this grew to include military conquests. The prophet and his successors were both spiritual and political leaders. We shouldn't therefore be surprised that Islam has played a decisive role in world politics. Khomeini is no more fanatical than Falwell or Robertson; it is only that this religion is situated in a more troubled region of the world.

## 5.2. The future of fundamentalism

Christian fundamentalism in all its forms is, like Jewish or Islamic fundamentalism, low in theological content. The “return to source” that is offered is more a “step back in time”. There is no ideological source that gives them coherency. They have more desire for power than a desire to explain God. They are social, political and military voices using religious language. For example, sociologists in the USA also say that campaigns asking people to pray in schools or crusades against pornography or alcohol are in reality, more of a pretext used to strengthen the middle class with certain socially acceptable lifestyles. These lifestyles are designed to be different from those of immigrants or marginalized people, rather than being a genuine interest in prayer or moral issues.

There is a chance that western fundamentalism will die out. It does not provide answers to serious questions concerning humanity: unemployment, having enough to eat, debt, ecological issues, etc., and it sees modernity as a threat (feminism, secularism, changes in the traditional family unit, new types of relationships, a lack of rigour). Its battle is already lost, given that it has to fight for its traditions against forms of behaviour that it strongly rejects relating to modernity, family relationships, the world of work, etc

A religion that does not only allow, but in fact promotes the idea of individual conscience cannot act as a justification for theocracy. While there may be strong currents of fundamentalism in right-wing politics and in the military, the idea of theocracy is very frightening to some, for example the *People for American Way* movement, an extreme right group with anti-religious tendencies. American society is quite happy with the separation of Church and State. Fundamentalists may ask for their rights to be respected, but they themselves are not able to affect the rights of others. In a similar way, if the Islamic states were to prosper, its fundamentalists would have to confront the same resistance as faced by fundamentalism in capitalist countries. This is just what happened in communist countries. When in a minority, they cannot survive.

The Republican Party and Bush's team do not approve of the relativist attitude in relation to moral values that has been adopted in today's world, and that has been caused by liberalism. For them, religion alone can fill this void. This in turn must be a form of religion that is linked to politics, and which returns absolute power to the State, a privilege that has since been lost. A single State and a single Religion. This form of

fundamentalism ignores the inherited values from the traditions of liberalism and Christianity, but does not replace them with new ones. So could we compare fundamentalism to nihilism? Or the power-for-power's sake that is fascism? It is a paradox that in Bush, a man who so often refers to God in his speeches, we can recognise characteristics that are similar to nihilism.

### **5.3. The silence of God in the face of the world's suffering**

The fundamental issue is the question of how we can still believe in God when faced with the abysmal history of suffering in the world, in *His* world. This is both a theological and eschatological question, and the question to which theology is always searching for a new way in which to respond. Many theologians, contrary to North-American fundamentalism, have already spoken of God's suffering, or the suffering in God: Karl Barth, Bonhoeffer, Moltmann, etc., or from a Catholic perspective, Rahner, von Balthasar and Metz, among others.

The metaphor of the Chosen People is so deep-rooted that the American citizen finds himself almost forced to accept it. Even those who are non-believers or who want to distance themselves from this idea cannot reject these beliefs, unless they want to be culturally ostracised, as has happened to some well-known intellectuals, (Chomsky, Petras, Susan Sontag, Naomi Klein). This idea is at the backbone of North-American identity. And yet, if the basis of the aggressive form of American politics is a theological one, then maybe the key to changing it would also have a theological root. What is God's place in today's world? How can theology seriously respond to those who are suffering unjustly? What do we understand by salvation? From a theological perspective, how can we offer words of comfort to victims and people who have suffered in our society?

Jean Baptista Metz, a Catholic, and Jürgen Moltmann, a Protestant, who lived during the horror of Auschwitz, asked themselves where God fits in following such a living hell. There, God was silent. Since then, we could give many other examples of when God was silent (Great Lakes, Sudan, Palestine...). We have all seen the photographs of those children in the Iraqi childrens' hospitals suffering from cancer, leukaemia, deformities, and condemned to certain death. Those images speak of God much louder than words. Why should these children suffer? Why should their helpless mothers, young girls, have to see them die? In the name of whose God are they dying? Who put the uranium in the water and in their food? Why Sabra and Chatila? And beyond the word «terrorist», what do we see in the face of a young boy or girl who, laden with explosives, blows himself up in a Jerusalem restaurant? This question on God or on the vision and promise of a greater form of justice, which also affects all suffering that has gone on in the past, is in fact an empty one. The real question on Auschwitz or Iraq should be not only where was God, but more importantly, where was man? What these great disasters did was to lower the metaphysical and moral level of man's respect for his fellow man.

We are living in a world that exists as though it has religion, but doesn't have God, a time of Godless religion. Since religion continues to speak of devotion and feelings, and doesn't tackle the question of human suffering, this will only make it hide the fundamental reason for God's existence, which is salvation. The people of Israel lived in

a land full of eschatological warnings, a land of memories and hopes, just like the early Christians did. Older traditions of theological teaching were familiar with the cry of lament, the cry of help and prophesying from their sapiential literature, etc. They answered questions on God from an eschatological point of view.

#### **5.4. The issue of morality and culture in a society full of so many religions, and yet faced with silence from God**

Jesus' first thoughts were not to people's sins, but to people's suffering. This is the metaphor of absolutely every single miracle: the paralytic, the crippled man, the blind man, the leper, and raising the dead to life. In his eyes, sin meant causing the suffering or turning one's back on the suffering of others. Unfortunately, Christian discourse became more and more focussed on power, so much so that today they can sometimes be made to seem the legitimate source of political fundamentalism.

On the other hand, Biblical teachings on God reveal a God that is sensitive to people's suffering. Suffering is constantly present in the Bible, although no explanations for it are offered. It is a discourse on God that tells a story not of conquerors, but rather a story of suffering. Biblical traditions deal more with eschatology than they do with the question of ethics. They are not primarily moral teachings, but also talk of hope and the future. The fact that murderers and those who rob people of hope use the name of God in their actions shows just how far God's teachings can be manipulated and distorted.

We have made the forgotten suffering of victims the key to the success of their persecutors. Modern-day culture, and in particular the television, is designed to cause us to forget. This goes against the Biblical idea of the Covenant and also against the idea of our solidarity with the past. Biblical mysticism is also the mysticism of God's pain; it is the mysticism of God's suffering. Jesus' cry on the cross is the cry of someone believing himself to be abandoned by God.

The memory of other people's suffering is not a priority in the modern world where man believes that anything can be conquered with weapons of mass destruction, or worse, by being able to forget periods of suffering from history. He looks the other way when confronted with new stories of suffering in the world: Auschwitz, Rwanda, Bosnia, Afghanistan... But casting such memories into oblivion is not without its consequences: despair, moral degradation and decay, among others. Few people link the crises and collapse of moral values happening in today's world with the tragedies mentioned above that are gradually disappearing into a general culture of amnesia. The history of the human species is very vulnerable.

We are moving towards forgetting our past, its culture, values, and suffering, and now tend to adopt the culture of the market, believing that everything can be bought and sold. This is the only culture that Bush can visualise, and this is where his vision of power has come from.

The Biblical discourse on the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who is also the God of Jesus, is not just any type of monotheism, but rather a monotheism that is weak and vulnerable. Biblical monotheism has an eschatological character and situates all types of power in an eschatological context. It makes the absoluteness of political power relative,

given that it proceeds from God. But what significance did the existence of this monotheism have for the Christian community? Is the Christian community a group that is still sensitive to suffering? Are other monotheistic religions not the same, (in the former Yugoslavia for example, or in Ireland, or the conflict between Jews and Palestinians, in Lebanon, India, etc.), in that they use the name of God when fighting against the suffering of others?

### **5.5. What valid type of language exists in the modern world, and how can it be made comprehensible to God?**

What is theology's function? What can and what should we do?

1. Make contact with God. This is the mysticism of the experience of God. Here we are talking about prayer as a universal language, one that is both dramatic and tense, and more rebellious and radical than theology, for all victims: for the innocent victims on both sides and for that poor American soldier who, in the name of God, was sent by Bush to kill others and who will end up dying at the hands of others who are also fighting in God's name
2. Make contact with the poor. The mysticism of our experience with victims of suffering. Being able to reach out without patronising the victim. This means abandoning our mentality of helping others. Christianity that wants to remember the past and all its suffering, is a hard religion to handle. We could say that it is not a religion, but instead an experience of God. The defensive imagination of Christian traditionalism and fundamentalism is not enough. The Christian has to take on less the role of the receiver and more the role of the subject of God's memory.

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<sup>1</sup> These words were the basis for the introductory lesson of the 2003-2004 academic course at the *Institut Superior de Ciències Religioses de Vic*. It was since published in a limited edition in the *Col·lecció Textos* of this same Institute