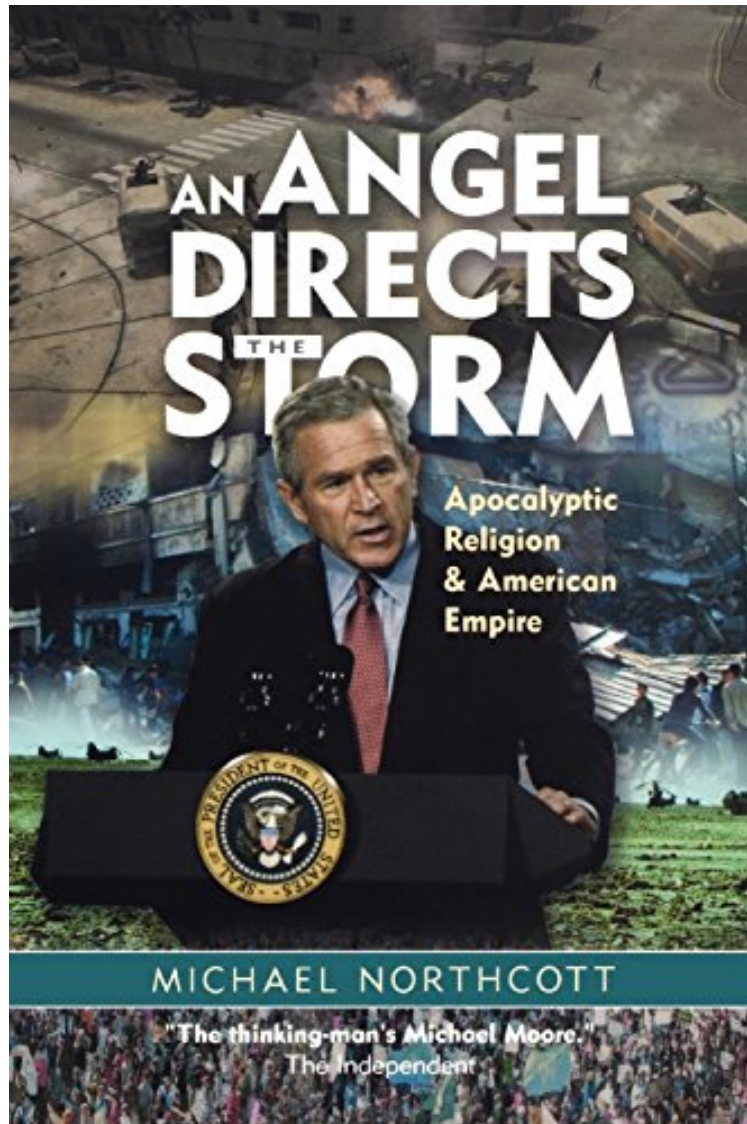


An Angel Directs the Storm: Apocalyptic Religion and American Empire

Michael S. Northcott

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Michael S. Northcott : An Angel Directs the Storm: Apocalyptic Religion and American Empire before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised An Angel Directs the Storm: Apocalyptic Religion and American Empire:

0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. An Angel Directs the StormBy Deona Lillywell written, and

thoughtful. These are difficult times, the book helps with clarification. 10 of 14 people found the following review helpful. The theological rationale for American imperialism

By Dennis Littrell

The strength and purpose of this book by Christian theologian Michael Northcott of the University of Edinburgh is to provide a history of conservative Christianity in its varied forms as it relates to the apocalyptic vision shared by George W. Bush and his evangelical supporters. An irony that Northcott explains is how the Christian right came to their unequivocal support of Israel against the Arab Muslims. Considering the appalling history of how Christians have behaved toward Jews in Eastern and Western Europe, in Russia, in the United States, and elsewhere it is difficult to understand why they should now be championing the Jewish cause. The answer is as simple as it is stupid. The evangelicals think that by establishing and maintaining a Jewish state in Palestine they are helping to usher in the Rapture, Armageddon and the return of Christ and his 1,000-year reign of peace. They believe this because it is prophesied that the Jews will return to Palestine and resettle the biblical lands, rebuild Jerusalem "and in particular the Third Temple on the site currently occupied by the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque" before the apocalypse. (p. 61) Evangelical Christians have little interest in helping the Jewish people. Their real motivation for supporting Israel is to further their delusive sense of history. Not so incidentally it is further prophesied that this will be a horrific time for the Jews in Israel because of "fierce resistance" and "dreadful wars"; but those who survive "will ultimately recognize Christ as the true Messiah and so greet him at his Second Coming." (p. 61) In other words, what they think they are helping to usher in is a time of slaughter of the Jews and then the eventual ending of the Jewish religion as such. Amazing. Northcott calls this "dispensational" thinking from those Christians who are following the teachings of Biblist Charles Scofield, the Pentecostal Edward Irving, the dispensationist, Brethren leader John Nelson Darby and others. "According to Darby there are seven dispensations in human history, the first being the paradise of the Garden of Eden, and the last being the 1,000-year reign of saints referred to in Revelation 20.1 - 7." (p. 58) The "angel" directing the storm, the "angel invoked by George W. Bush in his Inaugural Speech in 2001," Northcott advises us, "is more like a prideful fallen angel than a humble servant of God." (p. 178) Northcott's position is certainly a giant step removed from that of the evangelical right in the United States. And it is always good to hear someone from within Christianity in opposition to the preemptive unilateralism of the Bush administration. However, I don't think the cause of humanity and this planet is furthered much by making distinctions between angels, good or bad. In a larger sense we are told to choose between the good angels of the West and the bad angels (or "devils") of the Middle East. Indeed radical Muslims call Westerners "devils" while conservative Christians term radical Muslims "evil." What is needed is a foreign policy based on an empirical assessment of options directed not by supernatural powers but by rational, educated, experienced and hardworking human beings who love their children and their grandchildren and who recognize that they have a stake in the future of this planet. The fact that Northcott does a masterful job of exposing the apocalyptic underpinnings of the Bush administration's foreign policy and its desire for empire does not address the more general problem brought about by government in the throes of any religious foreign policy. True, a president with a true Christian ethic would be loathe to intentionally cause the death of tens of thousands of people by an unprovoked invasion of another country or to deliberately enrich his most wealthy supporters at the expense of the poorest people both at home and abroad. And it is true that a Christian president who eschews the premillennialist mumbo jumbo of apocalypse, rapture, hellfire and such would take better care of the environment. But the real essence of the American experience and the American political and governmental way of life is the separation of church and state. I would hope that in his next book the very articulate and learned Mr. Northcott would emphasize the need to keep those who believe in angels and devils away from the reigns of state. My criticism aside, this book is a most impressive and devastating critique of the Bush administration's imperial designs written in a way that rivets the reader to the page. Let me quote a passage from the beginning of the chapter entitled, "The 'War on Terror' and the True Apocalypse" to give you a feel for the power of Northcott's prose: When George W. Bush was invited in 2003 to be the first US President to make a full State visit to the United Kingdom, he travelled with an entourage of 700 people. The streets through which his entourage processed were cleared of all ordinary people so that they could not wave an American flag or hold up a placard of protest as he drove through London behind 5 inches of plate glass in the Cadillac Deville flown over for the purpose. His limousine drove in the midst of a procession of dozens of black cars and jeeps containing US secret service, armed militia, Presidential staff, and the keeper of the nuclear button that the President carries with him at all times in case of a sudden need arising for him to rain America's vast arsenal of nuclear weapons on a miscreant state. This was truly an imperial procession, the like of which London had never before witnessed throughout its long history. (p. 103)

14 of 16 people found the following review helpful. A Flawed Text of Intriguing Ideas

By Michael Stoil

From the international relations perspective, Michael Northcott has offered an intriguing theory on the impact of Protestant religious culture on US foreign policy. The core assumption is that "After the Civil War, evangelical pietists sought a new model of society to replace the traditional Puritan conception of a covenantal and separated church and they found it in the nationalistic enterprise of a 'civil millennialism' or a 'Christian republicanism.' ... This partnership involved a religious embrace of the doctrine of liberty, of America as the 'land of the free', which celebrated possibility and potency in politics and economics, science and religion." Northcott provides logical links between the implications of this religious culture and US policies, ranging from President McKinley's

annexation of Hawai'i through President Wilson's advocacy of the 14 Points to the second Gulf War and US support for Israel. He also makes a strong theological argument against the "premillennialist" concepts of The End Time, the Rapture, and the Apocalypse as a future event, stating that Jesus is clear that the Apocalypse has been ongoing since the beginning of His ministry. Given the importance of his theory (at least for international relations), it is unfortunate that Northcott undercuts his position with limited scholarship. For example, nearly all of Northcott's references regarding the Middle East policy and actions of the US since 1992 are from a single source: Andrew J. Bacevich's 2002 text, *The American Empire*. No citation or evidence at all is provided for such comments as "identification of Russia as a key actor in the end times fuelled the Reagan administration's full-on engagement in the Cold War, and that of some of his predecessors." The well-documented role of European colonial powers in fostering conflict between Native Americans and English-speaking settlers is ignored entirely...the list goes on. Most significantly, Northcott doesn't explain how US Presidents and Secretaries of State who have not been adherents of evangelical Protestantism (about 40 per cent have been Episcopalians, Unitarians, and members of the Society of Friends) are influenced by "civil millennialism." Has it become an all pervasive ideology that affects Orthodox Jews like Senator Lieberman and Roman Catholics like President Kennedy? That seems to be Northcott's argument...in which case, it isn't clear why an apocalyptic vision is central to US foreign policy. This book clearly provokes more questions than answers. As a supplemental reading, it is an important reminder that faith matters for the international relations behavior of Christians as well as Islamacists, but Northcott's central point is more provocative than convincing.

This passionate and powerfully argued book takes its title from President Bush's inaugural speech, when he quoted 18C statesman John Page, who enquired if it were not 'an angel who directed the storm' within which America came into being. Michael Northcott appraises two visions of religious freedom: the apocalyptic vision of George W. Bush and the Christian conservatives who back his policies, particularly in relation to Iraq and the so-called war on terror; and the peaceable vision of a Christian majority elsewhere who resist what they view as American neo-imperialism with an overlay of Christian apocalyptic rhetoric. Northcott suggests that Americans urgently need to recover a Christian critique of 'Empire' if their religion is to avoid the charge of idolatry.

"I would hope that this book will be read widely in both Great Britain and America. It shows with skill and perspicuity that the nature of the US reaction to 9/11 had been long prefigured by the American subversion of Christianity. [It is] a mature, historically informed and passionate analysis of the current American psyche, that tells Americans things ... of which they urgently need to take heed." Stanley Hauerwas "The thinking man's Michael Moore." *The Independent*
About the Author Michael Northcott is Reader in Christian Ethics at the University of Edinburgh. He is author of *The Environment and Christian Ethics*, (1996, CUP) and of *Life After Debt: Christianity and Global Justice* (1999, SPCK).