# NEW BOUNDARIES -- EVANGELICALS AND ISLAM AFTER 9/11

By Richard Cimino

Throughout 2002 and early 2003, evangelical Protestant leaders had shown themselves to be among the most caustic critics of Islam in the U.S. In separate instances and within a few months, evangelist Franklin Graham called Islam a "very wicked and evil religion", while Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell criticized Islam and its founder violent and sympathetic to terrorism. In a similar manner, Southern Baptist leader Jerry Vines created headlines by preaching that Mohammed was a "demon-possessed pedophile" (Plowman 2002). At the February, 2003 meeting of the National Religious Broadcasters, an important base of the New Christian Right, Islam was called a "pagan religion." A news report noted that what was unique about the wave of anti-Islamic fervor was how "many Christian commentators are pushing these views in broader, secular formats," such as talk radio and TV (Caldwell 2002). Muslims vigorously protested these remarks and actions, claiming they represented a dangerous wave of prejudice and discrimination against Islam in the U.S. The comments were also ridiculed and criticized  by more liberal Christians and other religious and political leaders. The Bush administration on several occasions distanced itself from these anti-Islamic statements, maintaining its public stance that Islam is a religion of peace.

The anti-Islamic statements were often portrayed as just one more example of prejudice by evangelical and fundamentalist leaders who had long made controversial statements on a wide range of subjects--from the necessity of evangelizing Jews and Hindus to "culture wars" issues (abortion, gay rights, etc.). Some of these public statements by evangelical leaders may have

been sensationalized by the media; evangelicals critics claim they were baited into making these remarks by journalists that were then taken out of the contexts of their legitimate concerns about terrorism or the dilemmas of interfaith cooperation. Both Falwell and Robertson retracted their statements. But these statements did reflect a pattern of anti-Islamic polemics that is found in much of the literature of evangelicals and charismatic Christians in the period after September 11. This article examines anti-Islamic polemics in evangelical literature from 2001 to 20003, discussing how they are related to new patterns of encounter, competition and conflict between evangelical Christianity and Islam both in the U.S. and abroad and to wider cultural developments in the U.S. during the last decade. In sum, I find that the events of September 11 and its aftermath tended to drive home the reality of religious pluralism in the U.S. among evangelicals, intensifying their concerns about the threat of syncretism, or the mixing of Christianity with other religions. This concern has led evangelicals to reassert and sharpen the differences between the teachings of Christianity and Islam.

Recent surveys have found that American evangelicals are more likely than other Americans to be opposed to Islam and to believe there is little common ground between the two faiths . In a Pew Survey shortly after 9/11, 62 percent of evangelicals said they believed their religion is very different from Islam, compared to 44 percent of non-evangelicals (Pew 2001). A Beliefnet/ Ethics and Public Policy survey in 2003 found that 77 percent of evangelical leaders had an overall unfavorable view of Islam. Seventy percent also agreed that Islam is a "religion of violence." Yet 93 percent said it was very important (52 percent) or of "some importance" (41 percent) to "welcome Muslims into the American community." Seventy nine percent said it was very important to "protect the rights of Muslims "(Beliefnet, EPPC 2003). This seeming contradiction between condemning Islam while accepting Muslims in the U.S. suggests that much of the anti-Islamic rhetoric is based on issues of religion and values rather than in racial and ethnic prejudice. Another study by Pew in July of 2003 found that most Americans continue to rate Muslim-Americans favorably, though the percentage is inching downward. A declining

number of Americans say their own religion has a lot in common with Islam -- 22 percent in 2003, compared with 27 percent in 2002 and 31 percent shortly after the terrorist attacks in the fall of 2001. White evangelical Christians and political conservatives hold more negative views of Muslims and are more likely than other Americans to say that Islam encourages violence among its followers (Pew 2003).

A Diversity Survey conducted in 2003 found that 47 percent of respondents agreed that the word "fanatical" applied to the religion of Islam, and 40 percent said the word "violent" described the religion. Nearly one quarter (23 percent) said they favored making it illegal for Muslim groups to meet in the U.S. for worship. The impact of such diversity may be evident in the finding that 54 percent of the American public thinks all religions are equally true, though in the same survey, 58 percent also agreed that "Christianity is the best way to understand God" (Wuthnow 2003). Aside from survey research, there has been little qualitative research about evangelical attitudes on Islam. A recent content analysis (Hoover, 2004) of the two primary evangelical magazines, *Christianity Today* and the newsweekly *World* does reveal the growth of anti-Islamic attitudes after 9/11, at least among a segment of evangelicals. *Christianity Today* magazine, representing more moderate or "mainstream" evangelicals, was found to downplay the idea of inevitable conflict between Islam and the West in its coverage in the two years after 9/11. Articles about evangelizing Muslims and religious persecution of missionaries were the most prominent kinds of articles in the magazine during this period.  In contrast, *World*, which more closely reflects the positions of the Christian Right, adopted a harder line, stressing the violent nature of much of Islam and criticizing news coverage that was viewed as favorably biased toward the religion. While acknowledging the presence of a moderate approach toward Islam among evangelicals, this article argues that the more critical and negative discourse has gained the ascendancy in popular evangelical literature, largely due to new tensions caused by religious pluralism and interfaith relations.

In this article evangelical anti-Islamic discourse is examined through a content analysis of popular evangelical apologetic and prophetic literature in the 10 year period before September 11, 2001, and in the three years following that event. The 10-year span previous to 9/11 was chosen in order to have a large enough sample to analyze (there were very few evangelical books written on Islam before 2001). The impact of 9/11 on evangelical attitudes on Islam is most evident in the apologetic books, while the anti-Islamic themes in the prophetic and charismatic literature emerged a decade earlier (although popularized and intensified after the terrorist attacks), which is another reason why the 10-year time frame was used.

The books selected for analysis in this study were taken from the online listings and catalog of the Family Christian Bookstores, one of the largest evangelical Christian bookstore chains in the U.S. An attempt was made to collect all of the evangelical books on Islam that have been published and distributed to these bookstores Family Christian Bookstores tends to exclude academic evangelical publishers and books, although I located several of such titles and have included them in the analysis and comparisons, arriving at a total of 18 books, 12 of which were written or reissued after 9/11. I examined these books according to the criteria established by the evangelical public statements on Islam discussed at the beginning of this article. Each book was analyzed for its discourse on the nature of Islam, which is related to the question of whether the religion is inherently violent, and on the relationship of Islam to Christianity and Judaism, which is related to the question of whether Muslims worship the same God as Jews and Christians.

In addition to these issues, the prophetic and charismatic books were analyzed using more specific criteria, including the role of Islam in the end times and the concept of "spiritual warfare" in the charismatic critique of Islam. Finally, a content analysis of the conservative evangelical newsweekly *World* was conducted between the years 1996-2002 to explore the context of anti-Islamic discourse and how it may be related to concerns over interfaith involvement and syncretism.

## Evangelicals On Islam Before-9/11

There is a long history of American Protestant polemics and antagonism toward Islam, as the religion has traditionally been viewed as inferior to Christianity both culturally and theologically (Kidd, 2003; 766-790). But by the closing decades of the 20th century, most of the evangelical literature on the relationship between Muslims and evangelicals took place within the context of missions and world evangelization. There was little written on the encounter between American evangelicals and Muslims outside of the need to develop strategies and other resources to bring the Christian message to Muslims on the mission field. Because Muslims were few in number and their communities were often located on the margins of society, interfaith encounters between the two groups was unlikely.

It is not the case that evangelical missions literature was unsophisticated. Although Islamic regions have traditionally been unreceptive to Christian mission work, evangelical missions have undergone a noticeable process of reevaluation and refinement. The trend of missions among Muslims has moved from one of confrontation and condemnation of Islam as a false religion that must be totally forsaken by the potential convert to one of contextualization. This approach teaches that the missionary must meet the Muslims on their own ground and that their culture and religious sensibility should be affirmed, even if ultimately "fulfilled" through the Christian gospel. For instance, missionaries would speak of God as Allah and use Islamic prayer and worship practices (which, it should be added, Muslim critics view as deceitful). Because of the dearth of books and theological treatment of Islam in the U.S., missions scholars filled part of the vacuum with scholarly writings that stressed this contextual approach. Yet such writings were issued from an evangelical academic elite that did not find wide reception among the evangelical rank-and-file.

It is within the evangelical apologetic movement that one finds a distinctively anti-Islamic thrust. The idea that evangelical Christianity can be reasonably defended against its critics and rival philosophies and worldviews has long been a staple of the movement. While evangelism

was part of apologetics, its main task was comparing Christianity with these rival thought systems and showing where they were in error. Apologetic literature covers a wide range of movements and worldviews; in most Christian bookstores there is a special section devoted to Christian treatments of Eastern religions, the Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormonism, Roman Catholicism, the occult, New Age, "cults" or new religious movements such as Scientology and the Unification Church. As mentioned above, up until the late 1980s and early 1990s, the literature on Islam was very sparse and those books that did treat the religion included little on the new Islamic resurgence expressed in the rise of the Ayatollah Khomeini. Since apologetic books are usually aimed at the ordinary layperson in their everyday encounters with those of other faiths, the need for this literature targeted to Muslims was not especially pressing prior to this religion's greater visibility and growth in the 1990s.

One of the most popular of these apologetic books is *Answering Islam* by Norman Geisler and Abdul Saleeb (1993). The book is still used by many evangelical seminaries and colleges in their apologetics courses, though the more recent anti-Islam apologists have criticized. it. The book is a straight-forward polemic against Islam, distinguishing Islamic from Christian doctrine. Islam's disavowal of the Trinity, the incarnation of Christ, and the sufficiency of the Bible as God's word, as well as its teachings on the importance of performing good works in attaining salvation are all critiqued from a standard evangelical perspective. Although written well after the growth of Islamic fundamentalism and the religion's general resurgence in much of the world, there is surprisingly little involving terrorism, violence, jihad or Islamic militancy in general. Most importantly for the purposes of this article, Geisler and Saleeb state that the God that Muslims address and worship as "Allah" is the same God of the Old and New Testaments that Jews and Christians invoke. Of course, the authors hold that the Islamic view of God as taught in the Quar'an is seriously distorted and marred by non-biblical sources, but they do give, if grudgingly, a place to Muslims in the monotheistic family of Jews and Christians. This is not to say that all other pre-9/11 apologetic literature takes a moderate approach toward Islam. One of

the books that foreshadows many elements of the more recent post 9/11 literature is *Islam Revealed* (1988) by Anis Shorrosh. But while this book sees armed Jihad and violence as central to Islam, it also views Muslims as fellow, if flawed, monotheists along with Christians and Jews, a view that stands in sharp contrast to the post-9/11 literature.

It should also be noted that those with a more fundamentalist orientation have long expressed more negative views concerning Islam. Apologists such as Dave Hunt and Robert Morey virulently attack Islam on their web sites, with the latter using the imagery and language of the Crusades to battle the Islamic threat (Hunt 2003; Morey 2003). Popular radio broadcaster and prophecy teacher John Ankenberg's booklet *The Fact On Islam* (1991) is a fiery expose of the religion, touching on the familiar nerve points of Islam's essential violence and evil nature. It is not only fundamentalists and evangelicals that hold anti-Islamic views, as fairly similar positions can be found in the conservative wings of Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy (Spencer 2002, Trifkovic 2002).

## Evangelical Apologetic Literature On Islam After 9/11

The books and articles that were published--or re-issued-- after September 11 share a number of similar characteristics. Like the Shorrosh book, they are often written by ex-Muslims who converted to Christianity (usually after a period of living in the West) The books are usually publicized as revealing the "real truth" about Islam that has been hidden or obscured by the media and other elite segments of American society. But the two principle themes that distinguish these books from that of the pre-9/11 literature is the dual emphasis on Islam's inherently violent nature, a fact revealed by the September 11 attacks, and most importantly, that Muslims worship a false god distinctly different than the God of Christianity and Judaism. One of the most popular of these books is *Unveiling Islam*, written by ex--Muslims Erg and Emir Caner (2002: 104-108), which was the source Vines cited when he made the remark about Muhammad.

The book, reported to have sold over 100,000 copies, seeks to dispel the position of Geisler and Saleeb that Allah is the same God (Jehovah) that Christians and Jews worship, writing that Muhammad himself viewed followers of Moses and Christ as "children of Satan, not separated brethren." They also assert that violent jihad and armed conflict is an "essential and indispensable tenet" of Islam. "The [September 11] terrorists were not some fringe group that changed the Quar'an to suit political ends. They knew the Quar'an quite well and followed the teachings of jihad to the letter." This polemic against Islam is not only directed at Muslims; a good part of the book also takes aim at liberal American society itself. Thus, the Caners write that establishing the difference between the true God of Christianity and the false God of Islam is "neither popular nor welcome [in a] politically correct, politically charged, postmodern culture...But [it] is essential to an effective witness." In fact, a concern over syncretism, which is the blending of faiths, and relativism, holding that no one particular faith is right or wrong, frames much of the Caner's and other polemicists' arguments-- a point that will be returned to later in this article.

Through much of the post 9/11 evangelical literature there is a rethinking of formerly held views in the light of new realities. A vivid example of this is found in the book *Secrets of the Koran* by popular evangelical missionary Don Richardson (Staub 2003, Richardson 2003) He is most well-known for his book *Peace Child*. The book is an account of his missionary experience in Indonesia where he developed what he calls the "redemptive analogy" thesis. This is the idea that each culture has some story, ritual or tradition that be used to teach or illustrate the Christian message. After 9/11, Richardson studied the Koran to see if the redemptive analogy could be used to build bridges to Islam but came to the conclusion that it would not work. He writes that Islam has so redefined biblical teachings and concepts (such as concerning Christ, and God) that it is impossible to find common ground. In an interview, Richardson says that the Koran and Islam are essentially violent, claiming that if Mohammed was alive today he would support Osama bin Laden rather than moderates because he wanted to create a theocracy on earth. Even

in the more moderate popular book *Answering Islam*, the updated post 9/11 edition (2002: 328) leaves its strictly theological approach behind to include a  section on "Islam on Violence." Geisler and Saleeb write that there is a "religious foundation for violence deeply embedded within the very worldview of Islam...Such violence [goes] to the very roots of  Islam, as found in the [Koran] and the actions and teachings of the prophet of Islam himself." Saleeb, in another co-authored work with evangelical theologian R.C. Sproul (2003; 83-100) reiterates the view that the source of violence among contemporary Muslims has its roots in the Qur'an.

It should be added that most of these writers attempt to avoid the charge of anti-Islamic prejudice by stating that most Muslims in the U.S. are not violent and that one shouldn't stereotype. For instance, in his new book *Islam and the Jews*, Mark Gabriel (2003), an Egyptian and former Muslim professor, writes that most American Muslims are "ordinary Muslims," meaning that they do not really practice Islam as laid down in the Koran and are Muslim because of their culture and tradition. It is the "committed"  and "fanatical" Muslims who are most likely to support or engage in terrorism.


## Islam As A Player In The End-Times

Another area where evangelical anti-Islamic polemics have flourished in recent years is in the biblical prophecy movement. This movement gathers together pre-millennial evangelicals and fundamentalists who interpret the Bible as providing a blueprint of the end-times and the return of Christ. An important part of the premillennial prophecy is the strategic role that Israel will play in gathering together the Jews of the world and rebuilding the temple, thereby hastening the return of Christ to earth. The significant place given to Israel in such prophetic scenarios has made a significant segment of the evangelical and fundamentalist communities to be steadfast friends and supporters of Israel. The tilt toward Israel, at least in contemporary times, implies a critical and at times adversarial  view toward the Islamic Palestinian community which occupies

much of the historical biblical territory. But it is actually only in the last decade that Islam has assumed a central role in biblical prophecy.

In his book *The Last of the Giants* (1991) charismatic missions strategist and futurist George Otis, Jr. writes that since the fall of communism Islam has become the main protagonist in the invasion of Israel from neighboring countries to the north--the "most important end-time events" allegedly prophesied in the Bible. The "standard assumption" among prophesy teachers was this invasion would be communist-led or inspired, but it had always been a puzzle why communists would be in alliance with the Arab nations to the north of Israel. The fall of communism solved that problem, leaving Islam (especially now that the religion is active and growing in former Soviet republics) as the main antagonist in prophetic end-time scenarios. Otis goes on to speculate that an ultimate "jihad" will be waged against Israel by the Islamic nations While these nations will be defeated, there will emerge a miracle-working false prophet known as the anti-Christ, who Otis identifies as the "Mahdi," a messiah-like figure in Shi'ite Islam. This anti-christ will demand that everyone wears a sign of his or her allegiance to him (identified in Revelations as the numbers 666), without which they will be unable to buy or sell anything, which Otis interprets as the Islamic identification system in many countries that allows for discrimination against non-Muslims. The rise of the Mahdi will signal the beginning of the war of Armageddon, the last battle that will usher in the final return of Christ.

The close connection made between Islam and the unfolding of biblical prophecy is evident in other evangelical prophetic works, though not always to the extent found in Otis' writings. Since 9/11 there have been several prophetic works that are based almost completely on the central role of Islam in end-time events. Hal Lindsey author of the prophesy best-seller of the 1970s, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, recently wrote, *The Everlasting Hatred: The Roots of Jihad* (2002: 10), where he chronicles the ancient enmity between Muslims and Jews that is leading up to the end-times, adding that "Islam represents the single greatest threat to the continued survival of the planet..." In *The Coming Islamic Invasion of Israel* by Mark Hitchcock (2002), the "final jihad"

between Israel and the Islamic nations takes center stage. *War On Terror: Unfolding Bible Prophecy*, by Grant R. Jeffrey (2002), has a photo of the burning World Trade Center on its cover and focuses more on how terrorism itself--from the Taliban and Al Queda to even Sadaam Hussein in Iraq (in restoring the biblical empire of Babylon)--ushers in the end-times. Jeffries names actors in his apocalyptic scenario that are familiar in biblical prophecy, such as a one world government led by the UN, but he locates the final battle taking place between Jews and Muslim Arabs, particularly over the rebuilding of the Jewish Temple on the Dome of the Rock, a Muslim holy site.

## Charismatic Literature And The Demonization of Islam

The next grouping of charismatic and Pentecostal anti-Islam books and articles are somewhat similar to the apologetic books but are more extreme in that they tend to literally demonize the religion. In this literature there is an emphasis on what Pentecostals and charismatic call "spiritual warfare," that is battling demonic influence through the use of deliverance practices (similar to exorcism) and performing "signs and wonders" or miracles to demonstrate the power of God over such forces. This perspective has been evident in the decade before 9/11, though such a critique has been popularized to a much larger extent since 2001. The spiritual warfare perspective animates much of Refa Safa's (1996: 18-20) popular book *Inside Islam* (which was updated and reissued after 9/11). Safa touches all the familiar bases of the above books-- that Islam is inherently violent and that there is a wide chasm between the God of the Bible and Allah, but he introduces new elements. He writes that Allah is not only a false god distance from the true God of the Bible; but he is actually a pre-Islamic pagan deity who is identified with worship of the moon. The association of the occult with Allah and Muslim worship and practices is prominent in most of the charismatic literature. Safa, a convert from a "radical Shi'ite" background, writes that Islam is more than a religious and a political system; it is a "spiritual force, an antichrist spirit manifested to oppose the work and the plan of God." It

opposes God's plan by hindering an "end-time revival" of the world (especially since Muslim countries are closed to Christian missionaries) as well as opposing the Jewish people and taking over "their God-given land." The only way to conquer Islam is through "binding the strongman;" in other words, taking authority over this spiritual force through prayer and fasting, Safa concludes. Spiritual warfare teachings have become entrenched in charismatic Christianity and the new anti-Islamic polemic seems to be spreading through these same networks.

It is particularly the leaders, groups, websites and publications that consider themselves as part of the "prophetic" movement, calling for the restoration of biblical forms of leadership (such as apostles and prophets) in establishing the "dominion" of Christ in the world, that are most likely to traffic in these teachings. Setting much of the tone is C. Peter Wagner, a former Fuller seminary professor who trains pastors and missionaries in prophetic and spiritual warfare teachings through a school in his name and his organization Global Harvest Ministries. In a recent issue of his newsletter, he writes that "one billion Muslims worship a high-ranking demon who has gone by the name of `Allah' since long before Mohammed was born," and that the "deeper dimension of the war on terrorism is not Taliban vs. America, but Allah vs. God the Father" (Wagner 2003: 4-5).

To understand why spiritual warfare teachings among charismatics has targeted Islam, it is necessary to return to a source that many of the above authors and leaders cite: George Otis Jr.'s' book, *The Last of the Giants* (1991). Aside from being the work of prophesy discussed above, the book sought to devise a new map and strategy for world evangelization. A new map was necessary because "As the spiritual balance of power in the world shifted steadily away from Marxist-atheism in the 1980s, it became increasingly clear that a new order of powerful competitors was vying for preeminence." Otis identifies these competitors as materialism, Hinduism and Islam, but it is the latter that represents the most serious challenge This is especially the case because Muslims make up much of the 95 percent of the world's non-Christians who reside in what is called the 10/40 window. 10/40 is a missionary term (coined by

Argentinean charismatic evangelist Luis Bush in 1989) meaning the geographical region between the tenth and fortieth latitudes, including North Africa, the Middle East, as well as parts of India, China and Central Asia. Otis sees the 10/40 Window as the "primary spiritual battle ground of the 1990s and beyond" and identifies two of the region's "powerful strongholds"-- Iran and Iraq. Iran is targeted for generating and exporting militant Islam into the rest of the Middle East. When Otis writes of "strongholds" he is not referring to geopolitical strategy. He actually means that demonic spirits have resided in Persia since biblical times and have attached themselves to the structures, religions, and regimes of this territory. This tendency to view demonic and even Satanic forces as influencing a territory, a group of people, a government or an institution was conceptualized by C. Peter Wagner as a way to locate and then expel influences that may block the reception of Christianity by an unreached population in a new region.. Otis is not necessarily saying that original Islam itself was evil, but that the religion served as a carrier for pre-Islamic pagan deities and "demons" that were present in the lands where Islam developed.

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## An Evangelical Counter-Response

It should be noted, however, that there have been evangelical books that argue against viewing Islam as an essentially violent and evil religion, but they are in the minority and often exist outside the mainstream of the evangelical apologetic movement (Poston, Ellis 2000; George 2002; Mallouhi 2002).. Evangelical missionaries have been among three most critical of these anti-Islamic views. In January of 2003, a group of missionaries from the Southern Baptist Convention sent a letter to its church leaders pleading for a cessation of anti-Islamic statements as they only hamper mission work among Muslims, not to mention threaten the safety of missionaries. (Buettner 2003). Lynn Green, the director of Youth With A Mission, a charismatic missions group taking a more liberal position than other agencies (as seen in their close cooperation with Roman Catholics), called on Western Christians to refrain from "collectively demonizing" Muslims after 9/11. He said the church cannot hope to have any impact in the

Muslim world by "trying to convince them that they are all demonized by their religion." Green called on Christians to engage in the work of reconciliation and peace between Christians, Jews and Muslims. (Dixon 2002). Dudley Woodberry (2003) of Fuller Seminary likewise urged that Christians become involved in a new reconciliation  ministry with Muslims and added that terrorism is due more to the injustices perpetrated in the Muslim world than to an essentially violent nature of Islam. The leadership of the National Association of Evangelicals along with the influential conservative think tank, the Institute on Religion and Democracy (IRD) issued a joint statement of guidelines to calm the evangelical-Islamic tensions and initiate dialog. The guidelines condemn stereotyping Islam and Muslims and even affirms that both groups share a concept of "natural law" or "common grace" in morality and theology. Yet the statement does not challenge the anti-Islam polemics that hold that Islam is inherently violent nor in the common view that Allah is not the God which Christians and Jews worship. The statement views dialogue mainly a vehicle for evangelism and warns against interfaith worship of the kind David Benke was involved in at Yankee Stadium. It is uncertain what effect such a statement will have on the independent and decentralized worlds of American evangelicals (NAE Guidelines 2003). Interestingly enough, the new president of the NAE, Ted Haggard, is the pastor and close colleague of C. Peter Wagner,  who is the chief proponent of the anti-Islamic spiritual warfare teachings. Haggard was among those evangelical leaders protesting a 2003 speech made by President George W. Bush, where he said that Muslims and Christians worship the same God. (Cooperman, 2003)     .

## Evangelicals, Pluralism and Syncretism

The growth of anti-Islamic discourse among evangelicals takes several different forms and emerges from varying sources. The non-charismatic evangelicals, particularly those in the apologetic movement, take a strongly doctrinal, theological stance, comparing biblical and Koranic teachings and drawing clear lines between Christianity and Islam, both as religions and

as social-cultural systems (viewing Christianity as peaceful and democratic and Islam as violent and despotic) . The prophetic works look at current events through a premillennial and eschatological grid and conclude that Islam is the most likely candidate to usher in the return of Christ through its opposition to Israel. The Pentecostals and charismatics come to their particular form of anti-Islam less through theological speculation and more through experiential and emotional encounters. They discern spiritual forces at work behind the facade of a traditional religion and geopolitical structures and seek to reconquer such territory through the demonstration of "signs and wonders" and other spiritual gifts.

The anti-Islamic polemic in the charismatic  literature is more closely connected to global competition for influence and dominance between Christianity and Islam. This is most closely seen in a country such as Nigeria where Pentecostals have demonized Islam in a similar manner to that of their  American counterparts, although they face the actual threat of the imposition of Islamic Sharia law. An account of the way Nigerian Pentecostals link evil spiritual forces to Islam suggests the development of a Pentecostal discourse that is increasingly global (Western Pentecostals and charismatics have interacted with African Pentecostals and  charismatics through such American and European evangelists as Derek Prince and Reinhart Bohnke). The approach of Wagner bears some similarities to the African discourse in which "face-to-face everyday relationships are reinterpreted such that everyday certainties about  `others' are subverted, and one's Muslim neighbor or brother-in-law suddenly becomes a dangerous agent of the devil. At the level of national politics, state decisions and activities are likewise interpreted in terms of larger conflicts" (Fratani 2001: 80-205).

What these different forms of anti-Islam hold in common is that they reveal new patterns of competition and confrontation with Islam both as a global force and an American presence. The fact that these anti-Islamic polemics are frequently stronger among American evangelicals  than among missionaries or Arab and Middle Eastern Christians (even if the books examined in this study reveal a new generation of ex-Muslim evangelists finding prominence in Western

evangelical circles) who have extensive contact with Muslims suggests that this phenomenon has as much to do with conflicts and changes within evangelicalism as with interfaith relations. Much of the evangelical anti-Islamic polemic is a response to pluralization, as world religions find a place in American society. One can understand the linkage this literature often makes between Islam and violence, especially since surveys show other Americans have increasingly come to a similar position since 9/11. But the evangelical tendency to deny any common ground between Christians and Muslims, including a belief in the same God, requires more exploration. A recent issue of *Christian News*, a conservative Lutheran newspaper, strongly praises the book *Unveiling Islam*, the book by Ergun and Emir Caner, and recommends it to leaders of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod "and the Roman Catholic Pope who assert that Jews, Muslims, etc., all believe in the same God..."(Reising 2003).

The reference to the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod is important because this church body has been embroiled over a controversy involving interfaith relations. One of its leaders, David Benke of New York, participated in an interfaith prayer service with Muslims and other non-Christian groups at Yankee Stadium a few days after 9/11 and was immediately disciplined by the synod under the charge of engaging in syncretism and promoting a false unity with non-Christian religions (though he was later cleared by the denomination). Although the Missouri Synod is not in the mainstream of evangelical Christianity, the incident has served as a case study for evangelicals on the growth of relativism and syncretism in the churches; even the moderate *Christianity Today* magazine took an editorial position favoring, with some qualifications, the position of the denomination.. The evangelical concern was that the many of the services held and public religious voices heard in the media, and even the response of respected political leaders after 9/11 (stating that Islam is a religion of peace) was close to promoting the view that Christianity is no different from other faiths and that all religions should be viewed as equally valid.

The relationship between the negative critique of Islam discussed above and the alarm over religious pluralism and relativism is evident in the coverage of the conservative evangelical news weekly *World*, which is among the most critical of Islam among evangelical magazines. In analyzing *World's* coverage of Islam, one finds that before 9/11, references to Islam were generally sparse: From 1996 to 1999, for instance, there was a total of 25 references to Islam in articles, mainly having to do with the persecution and restrictions against Christians in Islamic nations. That number increased dramatically in 2001 (as is the case with every other news publication) and in 2002 alone, there were 91 references to Islam (usually full articles)  What is more noteworthy is how these articles frequently address Islam within the framework of a critique of pluralism and syncretism in American religion and society. This is most starkly seen in a controversial  editorial just after September 11 in *World* where it laid much of the blame for the attacks on the "gods of nominalism, materialism, secularism and pluralism"(Belz 2001: 5)..

The magazine later gave its annual "Daniel of the Year Award" (named after the Old Testament prophet who faced a lions' den) to Franklin Graham  for "telling the hard truths about Islam" as well as for standing up for Christian convictions in the face of a religiously and culturally relativistic society. "In a world of religious relativism, the very suggestion that any one belief might be superior to another is precisely the kind of heresy that will get a preacher tossed to the lions of political correctness," stated the article (Jones 2002: 1-6).. In *World*'s editorials Marvin Olasky frequently editorialized that Muslims and Christians do not worship the same God, and that the violent tendencies of militant Islam are deeply embedded in the Qu'aran. (Olasky 2002). But he often stated these views within a broader critique of the American media as being biased against conservative Christians but tolerant and uncritical of Islam and other non-Christian faiths. (Olasky 2003).

## Conclusion

The numbers of Muslims in the U.S. are in dispute, but their very presence, like the earlier presence of Jews, challenges older establishments and ways of doing things.  Wuthnow's Diversity Survey cited above found that 48 percent of the public claimed to have had at least some personal contact with Muslims; 35 percent, with Hindus; and 34 percent with Buddhists. Eight percent of the public claims to have attended a Muslim mosque, ten percent at Buddhist center or temple, and six percent at a Hindu temple.

Wuthnow notes that these figures are considerably larger than the percentages of Americans in the 1970s who experimented with Eastern new religions. "In short, there is a kind of  cultural awareness, undoubtedly forged as much by television and motion pictures and by international travel and cultural mixing as by recent trends in immigration, which far exceeds and transcends the actual numbers of Muslim, Hindu, or Buddhist adherents," he added (Wuthnow 2003). A growing symbolic influence of Muslims in American society could be seen in the appointment of a Muslim chaplain to the Senate and even in the fact that a Muslim led the benediction during the Republican Convention in 2000.

But it took September 11 to bring these changes home to many other Americans and to evangelicals in particular, many of whom had already developed negative views of Islam (through prophetic teachings, for instance).  It is not that evangelicals simply came to the conclusion that the attacks revealed the "true" violent nature to Islam and its incompatibility with Christianity. It is rather that September 11 and the events surrounding it rendered Islam and pluralism in general as a much more visible and immediate presence that demanded a response. It was only after September 11 that interfaith worship and prayer became a pressing reality and concern in most communities  The media and Government efforts to portray Islam as a peaceful religion and to draw parallels between this faith and others became almost a civic necessity after the terrorist attacks. National Muslim groups such as the American Muslim Council, the Council on American-Islamic Relations and the Muslim American Society, along with liberal Christian

groups attempted to popularize such terms and concepts as "Judeo-Christian-Islamic" or "Abrahamic" (referring to Abraham as the father of monotheism) to include Islam as an American religion on par with Christianity and Judaism. The change in terminology was viewed to be of symbolic importance for Muslims trying to find their role in the U.S. after September 11 and the Iraq war, yet the strongest opposition came from evangelical groups and leaders

All of these developments were viewed as a new threat in maintaining the boundaries of evangelical identity. Pluralism means that those holding specific truth claims are regularly confronted with rival truth claims, running the risk that all faiths could be relativized or that different elements of each faith are sampled and borrowed by uncommitted consumers. Doctrines and practices that have served as boundary markers in maintaining the distinction between theological conservatives and liberals, such as biblical inerrancy and creationism, have given way to new concerns about the blurring of lines between Christianity and other faiths. Recent charges and disciplinary measures against theologians by evangelical seminaries and theological associations suggest that such issues as universalism (that one may be saved without faith in Christ), syncretism (as demonstrated in the Benke case) and relativism represent the new battlegrounds over heresy as well as the prime boundary markers for evangelical identity in today's pluralistic society (Hunter 1987, Olson 2003). This does not mean that such pluralism inevitably weakens evangelicalism. But the new pluralism is not necessarily a weakening and destabilizing factor in terms of maintaining evangelical identity, even though such a scenario is regularly cited to sustain these polemics. As Smith (1998: 107) argues, a "sacred canopy" of unified, shared meaning on religion is not necessary to ensure a faith's survival. "In the pluralistic, modern world, people don't need macro-encompassing sacred cosmoses to maintain their religious beliefs. They only need `sacred umbrellas,' small, portable, accessible relational worlds--religious reference groups--`under' which their beliefs can make complete sense." In fact, finding and maintaining "enemies" to the faith tends to have the "unwitting result of maintaining unity and internal cohesion."

It is obvious that Islam is as opposed to relativism and syncretism as is evangelical Christianity. On this point, the conservative evangelical polemics are addressed not so much toward American  Muslims but rather toward secularists and religious liberals who are viewed to be using religious pluralism to dismantle normative and biblical values and establish relativism in American society. What has been called the "third disestablishment," where religious pluralism and personal autonomy in belief replaces a collective Protestant ethic or "American way of life" is most keenly felt by these conservative evangelicals, particularly those of a Reformed or Calvinist background, such as *World* magazine  (Hammond 1992; Casanova 1994).. Just as the inclusion of Jews and Catholics into this once-Protestant system generated earlier conflict, the entrance of Muslims into the public sphere is a new source of dissonance for conservative Protestants. The case can be (and has been ) made that conservative Muslims share a consensus on several moral/social issues with their Protestant counterparts. In the mid-1990s, there were several calls from Muslims and evangelicals to bring both groups together to work on family and other conservative moral issues. (The Minaret 1997). But the concern of evangelicals to protect the boundaries of their faith in an increasingly pluralistic and globalized society will likely overshadow any such coalitions--not to mention interfaith prayer efforts-- in the near future.

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