Evangelicals, Islamists and the globalisation of apocalyptic discourse

Gribben, Crawford

Abstract:
After 9/11, it has become increasingly obvious that strongly held religious convictions about the end of the world cannot be dismissed as the predictable consequences of deprivation, as several generations of social scientists once claimed. Instead, it has become clear that these kinds of ideas, having a life of their own, may establish discourses which may have extraordinary capacity to cross nations, cultures and even religions, encouraging passive withdrawal from the political world as well as inspiring vicious and sometimes violent attempts at its subjugation, underwriting the ‘war on terror’ as well as inspiring some of those intent on the destruction of the United States. This article describes one of Ireland's most successful intellectual exports – a very specific system of thinking about the end of the world known as 'dispensational premillennialism.' And the article will move from county Wicklow in the early nineteenth century, through the troubled decades of American modernity, to arrive, perhaps unexpectedly, in the company of the soldiers of radical jihad. The article will describe the globalisation of a discourse which was developed among the most privileged classes of early nineteenth-century Ireland to explain and justify their attempt to withdraw from the world, and which has more recently been used to explain and justify sometimes violent political interventions by both prominent Western politicians and some of the most marginalised and desperate inhabitants of our broken twenty-first century.

Files in this item

Name: CG_EvangelicalsPV...
View/Open

Size: 172.1Kb
Format: PDF
Description: Published Version

This item appears in the following Collection(s)


Their political orientations vary considerably: some are deeply conservative (US Protestant evangelicals), some are reformist or revolutionary (many Islamist groups), some are essentially moralistic (Protestant evangelicals in Latin America), and some are xenophobic or racist (such as the banned Kach and Kahane Chai groups in Israel). In addition, there has been a strong growth in several Latin American and African countries of popular Protestant evangelical churches. What all these groups have in common is that local self-help groups are formed to improve qualitatively communities' lives at a time when central and local governments are unable to satisfy popular developmental needs. Liberal Christianity's global decline has helped Christian evangelicals spread their political message in more assertive, faster and active manner in the Americas, Asia and Africa. At the moment, liberal Christianity represents a mere minority within their societies who no longer share their assumptions and are experimenting drastic socio-economic changes as a result of globalization (Stahl 350).