



## Is Prophecy Motivating Fundamentalists to Vote?

Does anxiety over what some fundamentalists believe is the coming “biblical apocalypse” motivate Republicans to vote for a particular candidate?

According to a recent [op-ed](#) published in the *New York Times*, the answer is yes. The author of the piece, Matthew Avery Sutton, is an associate professor of history at Washington State University and is the author of *Aimee Semple McPherson and the Resurrection of Christian America*. In his article, Sutton claims that a “small but vocal minority” of Republicans associate the recent economic crises, the rise of “radical Islam,” and diverse natural disasters with the “last days” of the earth and as such they are searching for the candidate they believe will lead them safely through this eschatological maelstrom.



How does religion, particularly the branch of Christianity called “fundamentalism,” influence presidential politics? According to Sutton:

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Christian apocalypticism has a long and varied history. Its most prevalent modern incarnation took shape a century ago, among the vast network of preachers, evangelists, Bible-college professors and publishers who established the fundamentalist movement. Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Pentecostals and independents, they shared a commitment to returning the Christian faith to its “fundamentals.”

A fundamentalist Christian, says Sutton, will read the Bible and find therein various prophecies of “Daniel, Ezekiel and Revelation” predicting the moral collapse that will presage the return of Jesus Christ to the earth. “The return of Jews to the Holy Land, evolutionary science and World War I” convinced some evangelical Christians (see: “[Dispensationalism](#).”) that the Second Coming was nigh and that meant so was the coming of the Antichrist.

This evil personage would come to the earth, gaining power and popularity as a “benevolent leader promising world peace.” The administration of the Antichrist, so the author insists, would promote the “growth of strong central governments and the consolidation of independent nations into one superstate....”

This powerful personality would “lead humanity through a great tribulation” that would culminate in the ultimate battle of good versus evil — Armageddon. As described in certain passages of the Old Testament (see Ezekiel 39:11 and Zechariah 12:11), as well as the book of Revelation (16:14-21), this locale whose name in Hebrew is Har Megiddon, meaning the “mountain of Megiddo,” there will be a



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great and final battle near this locale sometime before the second coming of the Lord.

While such stories as the one written by Professor Sutton are provocative, they are nothing new and seem to proliferate every four years around the time of the presidential campaigns. In 1999, the Reverend Jerry Falwell [told](#) a conference of evangelical Christians meeting in Kingsport, Tennessee that the Antichrist was alive and was “of course” Jewish and that he would “pretend to be Christ” and although no one knew the precise hour of the return of Jesus Christ, it would likely occur “within 10 years.”

That same year, George W. Bush, the Republican candidate for President, was declared by the media to be the choice of fundamentalist Christians.

Is there a relationship between some Christians’ understanding of the denouement of this earth and the popularity of particular politicians? Is Professor Sutton correct in his assertion that:

Fundamentalists’ anticipation of a coming superstate pushed them to the political right. As the government grew in response to industrialization, fundamentalists concluded that the rapture was approaching. Their anxieties worsened in the 1930s with the rise of fascism. Obsessed with matching biblical prophecy with current events, they studied Mussolini, Hitler and Stalin, each of whom seemed to foreshadow the Antichrist.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt troubled them as well. His consolidation of power across more than three terms in the White House, his efforts to undermine the autonomy of the Supreme Court, his dream of a global United Nations and especially his rapid expansion of the government confirmed what many fundamentalists had feared: the United States was lining up with Europe in preparation for a new world dictator.

The combination of fundamentalism, the rise of cults of personality surrounding Hitler, Mussolini, FDR, and others, and the establishment of the United Nations worked to convince many Christians that the pace of the descent toward the millennium was accelerating and that worldwide upheaval was to crescendo until Jesus Christ came to set all things in order and usher in one thousand years of peace.

While many of Professor Sutton’s assumptions are wrong and demonstrate a typical adherence among certain parties to the notion of a monolithic fundamentalist Christian doctrine, he strays further off track in his description of the “troubling” administration of Barack Obama.

The world in 2011 resembles the world of the 1930s in many respects. International turmoil and a prolonged economic downturn have fueled distrust of government, as has the rise of a new libertarianism represented in the explosive growth of the Tea Party.

For some evangelicals, President Obama is troubling. The specious theories about his place of birth, his internationalist tendencies, his measured support for Israel and his Nobel Peace Prize fit their long-held expectations about the Antichrist. So does his commitment to expanding the reach of government in areas like health care.

In 2008, the campaign of Senator John McCain, the Republican nominee, presciently tapped into evangelicals’ apocalyptic fears by producing an ad, “The One,” that sarcastically heralded Mr. Obama as a messiah. Mr. McCain was onto something. Not since Roosevelt have we had a president of charisma and global popularity, who so perfectly fits the evangelicals’ Antichrist mold.

There is, of course, a substantial and influential bloc of Republicans who can rightly be described as



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“fundamentalist” or “evangelical” Christians. Many of these devout followers of Christ view the exercise of the franchise as a sacred duty and feel an obligation to prayerfully choose someone from among the field of candidates who they believe will “preserve, protect, and defend” the Constitution of the United States and defend the God-given liberty of the United States.

Some among these believers sense that there is a “leadership vacuum” in the Republican party and that the proffered presidential contenders are less than enthusiastic about their piety and the importance thereof on their potential political and policy decisions.

Evidence of the electoral might of this section of the GOP’s famous “big tent” is found in the attendance of candidates at events such as the Faith and Freedom Coalition Rally held in concert with the Florida GOP convention last week.

The appeal of the event was described in an [article](#) published by the *Business Insider*:

The Faith and Freedom Coalition, one of the most powerful conservative voices in the Republican party, works to energize both Tea Partiers and Evangelical social conservatives, combining Christian “family values” with the a message of limited government and fiscal conservatism.

The event is considered so critical by candidates that “even decidedly non-evangelical, non-Tea Party candidates like Mitt Romney and Jon Huntsman can’t ignore today’s rally.” According to the story, Michele Bachmann and Rick Perry are actively advertising their attendance at the Rally and hoping to cement their support among that segment of the conservative base who share the values promoted by the rally.

Professor Sutton evaluates Bachmann and Perry’s presence at the event with language typically dismissive of those who sincerely hold traditional Christian doctrine regarding the end of the world (i.e., “[eschatology](#)”) sacred. Says Sutton:

Barring the rapture, Mrs. Bachmann or Mr. Perry could well ride the apocalyptic anti-statism of conservative Christians into the Oval Office. Indeed, the tribulation may be upon us.

Students of the Bible and modern disciples of Christ know that the scriptures teach us that “But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only” ([Matthew 24:36](#)). Such readings tell us that no man knows when the Lord will make His triumphant return to the earth. But Americans from the time of the writing of the Declaration of Independence, throughout the founding era, and beyond have recognized that God has made this country free and has placed upon all those who enjoy that freedom a sacred and unalienable responsibility to see that those chosen to lead us are committed to the Constitution.

As John Adams said: “Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”



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