

Book Review: 'American Fascists - the Christian Right and the war on America'

by Arthur Salm

"American Fascists: The Christian Right and the War on America" by Chris Hedges; Free Press; 255 pages; \$25.

The chords Hedges pounds out in "American Fascists: The Christian Right and the War on America" might have rung more clearly and carried further before the results of the Nov. 7 elections were in. Still, the problems with this book are more than a case of unfortunate timing: Hedges has constructed a slippery slope and then gone and flung himself down it headfirst.

THE FASCISTS ARE COMING - Author Chris Hedges worries about the future of America in his new book 'American Fascists: The Christian Right and the War on America.' CNS Photo.His thesis: "A group of religious utopians, with the sympathy and support of tens of millions of Americans, are slowly dismantling democratic institutions to establish a religious tyranny, the springboard to American fascism."

These religious utopians, he explains, follow a radical Christian movement called Dominionism, which "seeks to redefine traditional democratic and Christian terms and concepts to fit an ideology that calls on the radical church to take political power. ...

"Dominionism ... seeks to politicize faith. It has, like all fascist movements, a belief in magic along with leadership adoration and a strident call for moral and physical supremacy of a master race, in this case American Christians."

Hedges, a former seminarian and a graduate of Harvard Divinity School, expounds persuasively, at some length and then some more, about the anti-rational nature of Dominionism and what he sees as its betrayal of true Christian values.

Still, while granting him, if you will, that all is neither well nor good among some of these folks, his claim that there are "tens of millions" of true believers who are prepared to chuck whatever they retain from their high school civics classes into that increasingly overstuffed dustbin of history in favor of a hard-line fascist United States of Christian America seems rash.

Not that there aren't those who would sign on in a rapturous moment; for that matter, there's no shortage of people with aluminum-foil headgear in contact with the Pleides. And not that the nuts and bolts on the superstructure of some of our democratic institutions haven't been loosened a few unnerving turns in the last few signing-statement years.

But there is simply no evidence that any significant number of Americans are willing to go any measurable distance down the path that leads to Hedges' slope, much less take a header down it.

After 9/11, for example, there were horrifying stories of foreign-looking people being singled out and persecuted. There was even a murder or two.

From this, however, we should all take heart: The stories were remarkably few. In a nation of almost 300 million people, savagely attacked by an identifiable enemy with recognizable co-religionists scattered throughout the land ... nothing, essentially, happened.

Hedges, best known as the author of the powerful and affecting "War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning," eventually wanders slightly off his own track and onto a more frightening one.

Corporations, he writes, are turning America into an oligarchy, and "have little interest in Christian ethics, or anyone else's ethics. ... This new ethos seeks to reduce the American working class to the levels of global serfdom. After all, anything that drains corporate coffers is a loss of freedom - the God-given freedom to exploit other human beings to make money. The marriage of this gospel of prosperity with raw, global capitalism, and the flaunting of the wealth and privilege it brings, are supposedly blessed and championed by Jesus Christ."

Hedges' linking corporatism and mass-market Dominionism to form a freedom-threatening tag-team, however, - mansion- and limo-flaunting megachurch evangelists notwithstanding - is more than a stretch. If anything, these radical Christians seem, in comparison, like small-timers, chumps; the big boys will let them hang around, run a few errands, but it's not as if homegrown, American-style fascism-with-a-human-face needs them to get a toehold.

"Fascism," someone once said, "should more properly be called corporatism because it is the merger of state and corporate power." That someone was Benito Mussolini - a guy who knew a thing or two about the subject.