

By Yonoson Rosenblum

Harav Yaakov Weinberg, *zt"l*, the late Rosh Yeshiva of Ner Israel, was wont to say that Jews are better off in a Christian America than in an atheistic America. That dictum struck me with a certain prophetic force while contemplating President Bush's speech on the first anniversary of Sept. 11.

Rav Weinberg would certainly have had *nachas* from that speech, which revealed that we are truly living through what might be termed a Christian moment in modern American political history. President Bush has closer personal ties to the evangelical community than any previous president, and his Sept. 11 speech was permeated with religious imagery.

"G-d, motherhood, and apple pie" oratory has long been an American political staple. The president's speech, however, was something entirely different. There was nothing pro forma or superficial about his repeated references to "G-d," "the Creator," "the Giver of life." Those references were central to the president's message.

The sincerity and depth of his religious belief was palpable to anyone listening to the speech. Referring to the tragedy of more than 60 babies born this past year who were fathered by men killed in the Twin Towers and the Pentagon, the president mourned for those children "who will never know their fathers *here on earth*." Only someone for whom the afterlife is a constant reality would have thought to add the last three words.

Rather than viewing Sept. 11 as a random, meaningless event, President Bush insisted that tragedy of such magnitude must engen-

der soul-searching on the part of all Americans, and that by causing Americans to examine their lives and focus on those things that ultimately give life its greatest meaning, the catastrophe had made America a better, stronger nation. Among the lessons to be learned, he listed "gratitude for life and the Giver of life."

In contrasting the American vision to that of the perpetrators of Sept. 11, Bush again resorted to explicitly religious terminology. "Our deepest national conviction," he said, "is that every life is precious, because every life is the gift of a Creator, who intended us to live in liberty and equality. ... We value every life; our enemies value none — not even the innocent; not even their own."

The president's unveiled religiosity naturally resonates with religious Jews. But our admiration for the president's words is not limited to his oratorical prowess.

When Rabbi Weinberg spoke of his preference for a Christian America over an atheistic one, he was referring primarily to the moral climate of the country. In a similar vein, Harav Shimon Schwab, *zt"l*, argued that the personal morality of candidates for high office should be the primary criterion when voting, since the actual policies they will follow once elected is a matter of *lev melachim beyad Hashem*.

Yet a strong case can be made that it is precisely President Bush's religious sensibility that has led him in the right direction at a time when the threats to the peace and security of the planet are as clear as they have ever been.

Nowhere has this been so evident as with respect to American policy on the Middle East. Believing American Christians provide Israel with its bedrock support. And it is sure-

ly no accident that an American administration headed by a born-again Christian has consistently displayed the greatest appreciation of Israel's security needs of any administration in history.

Bush's religious worldview has immunized him against the moral and cultural relativism that characterizes wide swaths of today's academia and the intelligentsia. "To understand all is to forgive all," might well be the motto of the moral relativist. In Bush's moral universe, however, not every human impulse needs to be understood; some must simply resolutely be thwarted. Thus, not once has the president shown a trace of the trendy "understanding" of the root causes of the homicide bombings, which are the ultimate rejection of the view that life is G-d-given.

Nor has he shown any sympathy for the view that no culture may claim superiority over any other, and that any intervention by one nation in the affairs of another is the greatest crime of all: cultural imperialism. That attitude has effectively consigned hundreds of millions around the globe to lives lacking any of the freedom that we take for granted.

How ironic the outlook of many of the avatars of women's liberation, who were students in the '60s and '70s. As professors today, they make a fetish of the cultural autonomy of Islamic societies, in which women are denied any access to health care, as in Afghanistan under the Taliban. Different cultures for different folks — at least as long as those folks are conveniently far removed from one's immediate purview.

Bush's view that all mankind has a single Creator, Who did not consign any group of human beings to lives of unrelieved suffering — a view that hearkens back to the Declara-

tion of Independence's assertion that all men are self-evidently "endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights" — renders him impervious to those who opposed the war against the Taliban or the upcoming one against Sadaam Hussein as cultural imperialism.

The president's critics ridicule him for his simplistic talk of an Axis of Evil, just as they ridiculed Ronald Reagan for terming the Soviet Union an Evil Empire. But the "simple-minded" have consistently shown a sensitivity to actual human suffering that eludes those who view themselves as the "simple-minded's" intellectual and even moral superiors.

Hundreds of millions of people today enjoy a level of freedom that would have been unthinkable 20 years ago as a consequence of Reagan's decision to confront that Evil Empire. Removal of the Taliban, as *The New York Times'* Nicholas Kristoff has pointed out, literally saved the lives of hundreds of thousands of Afghan women. And the elimination of Saddam Hussein will liberate over 20 million Iraqis from the claws of a blood-thirsty, cruel tyrant, who has no more compunction about killing his own citizens than those of neighboring countries, while simultaneously removing a threat to millions of lives around the globe.

As moving as I found President Bush's speech, it did, however, arouse one disconcerting thought: How sad that this devoutly Christian president of the most powerful country the world lives with such a constant awareness of G-d's presence, while the leaders of the "Jewish state," locked in a life and death struggle with evil, so studiously eschew any mention of Hashem, without Whom we have no hope.