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PUBLISHER
The Rockford Institute

A publication of The Rockford Institute.
Editorial and Advertising Offices:
928 North Main Street, Rockford, IL 61103.
Website: www.chroniclesmagazine.org
Editorial Phone: (815) 964-5054.
Advertising Phone: (815) 964-5813.
Subscription Department: P.O. Box 800,
Mount Morris, IL 61054. Call 1-800-877-5459.

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Chronicles: A Magazine of American Culture
(ISSN 0887-5731) is published monthly for
\$39.99 (foreign subscriptions add \$12 for
surface delivery, \$48 for Air Mail) per year by
The Rockford Institute, 928 North Main Street,
Rockford, IL 61103-7061. Preferred periodical
postage paid at Rockford, IL and additional
mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address
changes to *Chronicles*, P.O. Box 800, Mount
Morris, IL 61054.

The views expressed in *Chronicles* are the
authors' alone and do not necessarily reflect the
views of The Rockford Institute or of its directors.
Unsolicited manuscripts cannot be returned
unless accompanied by a self-addressed stamped
envelope.

Chronicles

Vol. 29, No. 7 July 2005
Printed in the United States of America

POLEMICS & EXCHANGES

On Letters and Guns

In a letter to the editor (*Polemics & Exchanges*, May) Henry Heatherly says that, in my March *Sins of Omission* column, "A Hero Among Heroes," I refer to Audie Murphy firing a .50 caliber machine gun from "a German tank destroyer" and thus made a mistake, because the caliber of German machine guns on their tank destroyers was 7.9 mm. For the record, I said only that Murphy climbed onto a "burning tank destroyer" and fired its .50 caliber at the oncoming Germans. I thought that it was clear that the tank destroyer was one of ours. If not, my mention of the tank destroyer's .50 caliber should have made it obvious.

—Roger D. McGrath
Thousand Oaks, CA

On Enlightenment Critics

It is always enjoyable to read the perceptive Dr. Paul Gottfried. I have just one correction, though, to his review of Christopher Olaf Blum's edited anthology of French counterrevolutionary thought, *Critics of the Enlightenment* ("Counterrevolutionary Light," *Reviews*, April). The French political philosopher Philippe Bénétou, not Blum, is the author of the Foreword to the book which Dr. Gottfried finds so problematic. It would be a mistake, I think, to assume that Blum and he are of one mind regarding the prospects for, or desirability of, a "conservative liberalism." The feasibility of such a cultural project, of course, is well worth debating, and I am grateful that Dr. Gottfried, as one might expect, does not shrink from that task.

—Jeremy Beer
Editor in Chief, ISI Books

On Millennial Misrepresentations

Once again, Church historian Aaron D. Wolf slanders evangelicals with his essay "The Christian Zionist Threat to Peace" (*Views*, May). Using the classic ploy of

quoting from a dictionary-type source in his introduction allows him to set up his own dispensationalist straw man to knock down in the rest of his polemic.

Mr. Wolf does not really tell the reader what dispensationalism or premillennialism means, but he does get to employ the word *apocalypse* a few times and act highbrow by denigrating the *Left Behind* series—all to marginalize evangelicals.

I'll try to offer such a definition in two sentences. Premillennialism comes from a literal interpretation of Scripture and entails a belief that Jesus Christ could return at any moment. When taken in its literal, historical, grammatical sense, God's Word declares that Jesus Christ's return is imminent and that, following His return for His Church, He will return seven years later to establish His literal millennial kingdom on this earth.

Mr. Wolf even goes so far as to say that this evangelical eschatology must be flawed because—Heaven forbid—it is not taught in the Episcopalian or Roman Catholic Churches! Well, maybe that fact alone proves that evangelicals are on to something or have been for quite some time. Mr. Wolf should be more worried about a belief system that says nothing when people venerate images in the efflorescence of leaky water pipes in cement on the wall of a Chicago expressway viaduct than about pro-family, Bible-reading evangelicals.

Don't worry—I still look forward to your magazine each month.

—Suzie Tinaglia
Park Ridge, IL

Chronicles is the only magazine that will even mention Christian Zionism, much less shed some light on this heresy. I am amazed that the whole Arminian side of the professing Christian church is "bewitched" by this fable.

You would think that one of their evangelists would have stumbled across the third chapter of Galatians, which says (verse 16): "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ."

Then, in verse 29, Saint Paul adds, "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." It is pretty clear that the promises ("great

nation"; "I will bless them that bless thee"; "in thee shall all the nations be blessed"; *etc.*) were made to a *spiritual* seed, through Christ, and not to the carnal seed.

—Lionel Ledbetter
Adamsville, AL

Mr. Wolf Replies

The goal of my article was not to define dispensationalism, nor to slander my evangelical friends, nor to explain why I am a Lutheran and not a Roman Catholic or an Episcopalian (all of which hold that "Jesus Christ's return is imminent"), but to offer criticism of Christian Zionist leaders, who do not present serious, Bible-believing Christians with any other option than to give their undying support to the Likud government. Entire ministries are built around keeping Christians convinced that they must support Israel or else God's wrath will fall on America. Why else would the Christian Coalition encourage American Christians to spend thousands of dollars in order to spend a day with the Israeli Defense Force instead of giving that money to their own local churches in order to support the preach-

ing of the Gospel?

Mrs. Tinaglia seems to confuse dispensationalism with premillennialism, which might explain why she found my use of Charles Ryrie's definition of *dispensationalism* to be unsatisfying. Premillennialism simply holds that, after the Lord returns, He will rule the Earth for 1,000 years, before enacting a final judgment and recreating a New Heaven and a New Earth. It is only when dispensationalism is added to the mix that we get the seven-year Tribulation, the "rapture," and the restoration of "Israel." Even still, there are three varieties of dispensationalism: "pre-Trib" (those who believe Jesus will conduct the rapture before the Tribulation); "mid-Trib"; and "post-Trib." Nonetheless, the most common position among evangelicals (reflected in the *Left Behind* series and by Mrs. Tinaglia) is the dispensational, pre-Tribulational, premillennial position. Historic premillennialists, on the other hand, do not hold that Scripture requires the restoration of the nation or state of Israel.

It is important to note that even if the relatively new theology of dispensationalism (it dates to the mid-19th century) were the proper "literal" interpretation of Scripture, dispensationalists need not

lend their financial and political support to the secular state of Israel. In other words, dispensationalists need not be Christian Zionists.

Mr. Ledbetter's interpretation of Saint Paul's Letter to the Galatians is a reflection of the Church's traditional—and literal—understanding of "Israel" in Scripture. Interpreting the Bible "to the letter," the grammatical-historical approach championed by Martin Luther (certainly no dispensationalist) does not require us to take every word at face value, something that even dispensationalists do not do (else they would be looking for a "literal" seven-headed dragon to emerge from the sea). Rather, the theologian, in Luther's words, "should take pains to have one definite and simple understanding of Scripture and not to be a wanderer and vagabond, like the rabbis, the Scholastic theologians, and the professors of law, who are always toiling with ambiguities." There is nothing ambiguous about the passages quoted by Mr. Ledbetter, especially for those of us who approach the text with the firm conviction that the subject of every page of Scripture is Christ—crucified, risen, and (literally!) coming again. As for the word *apocalypse*: It's Greek to me.

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The Real Issue With the *Newsweek* Koran Fib

The obvious moral of the *Newsweek* affair is that journalists, and leftist journalists (the common type) in particular, are habitual liars unworthy of respect. To those of us interested in Balkan affairs, the whole Koran to-do elicits a wry smile. Front-page stories from the 1990's, including countless fact-free accounts of "Bosnian rape camps," "Kosovo genocides," and "Racak massacres," were far more pernicious inventions, but they remain largely unchallenged to this day. *Newsweek's* fib caused a dozen or two overexcitable Muslims to die rioting against the Great Satan; those Balkan lies, by contrast, caused a country to be bombed and a Christian nation to be demonized. Yes, *Newsweek* is a bad magazine; journalists are riff-raff—so what's new?

Three generally overlooked points still need to be made, and I will present them in ascending order of importance.

The first point is technical: The Koran cannot be flushed down a regular toilet. That much should have been obvious from the outset. It is a book of at least 400 pages, and a bilingual Arabic-English edition—which is, presumably, the general-issue Koran used in the alleged proceedings—may have over 1,000 pages. (If there isn't a G.I. Koran, I'd recommend Marmaduke Pickthal's excellent bilingual edition, which is some 900 pages long.) Tearing the Koran into just a few thick chunks of, say, 100 pages each and trying to flush it that way would cause an instant clog on the first attempt. The torturer would require a motorized snake to continue the procedure, likely causing the suspect to become even more contemptuous of the infidel and, therefore, more intransigent.

Tearing two, three, or four hundred individual leaves from the book and flushing them methodically one by one would be more refined as a torture technique (I can visualize it as the key scene in Michael Moore's *Guantanamo!*), but it is still an almost impossible task. You would have to crumple them first—uncrumpled, they would cause a clog in no time—but even if you reduced them to a small ball and flushed them individually, after a dozen, you would need a plunger, and, after 30 or 40, you would

have the Mother of All Clogs. By the time you were done, the suspect would be in tears—not of pain or sorrow, but of laughter. Devout Muslims may not be renowned for their sense of humor, but a farce is universally funny.

It does not take a Sherlock Holmes to smell a rat. The hoax is transparent, on par with Jimmy, "8 years old and a third-generation heroin addict, a precocious little boy with sandy hair, velvety brown eyes and needle marks freckling the baby smooth skin of his thin brown arms," according to the memorable front-page story from the *Washington Post* of September 28, 1980. As any inner-city dweller could have told you, Ron (Jimmy's mother's drug-dealing "live-in-lover") would never waste ounce upon ounce of expensive powder—readily convertible into hard cash—on his girlfriend's son's habit, and he would not have encouraged the boy to develop the habit unless the kid was old enough to go out and beg, steal, or borrow enough money to keep the habit funded.

The second neglected point with regard to *l'affaire* Koran is that we take Muslim outrage for granted when their scripture is allegedly desecrated, yet we fail to be moved, let alone outraged, when Muslims routinely kill Christians and other non-Muslims and destroy their heritage, their sacred books, and their shrines. Over the past two decades alone, Muslims have put to torch some 200 Christian churches in Kosovo, including the entire library of the Prizren Seminary with its thousands of volumes, including precious illuminated manuscripts 700 years old. They have blasted those Buddhas in Afghanistan with 155 mm artillery. They have attacked Christian churches and killed worshippers in Pakistan, Indonesia, the Philippines, Sudan, Egypt, and Bosnia, and they have decapitated Christian priests in Chechnya. For Muslims to gloss over an endless stream of outrages committed by their coreligionists against others, and promptly to work themselves into paroxysms of rage over the toilet story, takes some nerve. For the West to tolerate this is indicative of a decayed spirit.

The third and most significant point

is that the Koran is a vile book. It has caused more death, suffering, and misery over the centuries than any other book, *Mein Kampf* and *The Communist Manifesto* included. It is well deserving not of some ugly and meaningless act of "desecration" but of a careful reading and somber analysis. It breathes the air of the desert; it enables us to hear the battle cries of the Prophet's followers as they rushed to conquer, kill, enslave, and rob millions of Christians in Asia, Africa, and Europe; and it helps us understand what makes Muslims tick and why there can be no truce with *jihad*.

To a Muslim, as Allah's direct and unadulterated word, the Koran cannot be subjected to textual analysis and critical evaluation. From the point of view of orthodox Islam, the claim that a quotation is taken out of context (e.g., "do not take the Jews and the Christians for friends," or "fight and slay the pagans wherever ye find them") is incongruous because there is no "context." Looking for one in the word of Allah would be blasphemous.

For a non-Muslim, it is hard to see how the Koran is an improvement over, or advancement on, the moral teaching, language, style, and coherence of the Old and New Testaments. It reads like a construct entirely human in origin and intent, clear in its earthly sources of inspiration and the fulfillment of the daily needs of its author. The Koranic "revelation" that non-Muslims are not allowed to understand the book sits especially oddly with Allah's countless commands regarding the unbelievers: "[S]trike off their heads; then when you have made wide slaughter among them, carefully tie up the remaining captives."

The violent message of the Koran is a problem for us as well as for the Muslims. We cannot solve it for them, and we should not be asked to deem the problem solved by pretending that the book is a pacifist tract. Humans are capable of reinterpreting scripture when absolutely necessary, but, until the oil dollars support a line of Islamic exegesis that can renounce the ideals of *jihad*, terror, murder, *dhimmitude*, and slavery, we must have the guts to call a religion of war by its right name.