

American Fundamentalism and the Threat to Democracy and Faith



In 1990 Los Angeles artist Joel Pelletier first saw James Ensor's classic 1888 Belgian pre-expressionist masterpiece "Christ's Entry into Brussels in 1889" hanging at the Getty Museum in Los Angeles, CA. This over 8x14 foot painting depicted a giant parade down the streets of Brussels in honor of the return of Jesus, barely visible in the middle of the crowd, while in the foreground Belgian's elite congratulate themselves and celebrated the fact that Jesus' chose Brussels for his second coming, rather than the second coming itself. Ensor so insulted the Belgian art and business community with his commentary and satire that the painting was never shown in public in Belgium during his lifetime.

Pelletier saw immediate parallels to today's American political and business culture, especially in it's use of religion and religious terminology to gain and hold power. After the selection of George W. Bush in 2000, more and more walls between church and state have been destroyed, along with further consolidation of corporate and media power. Joel realized that Ensor's fable could easily be transported to Washington DC in the near future, with some of the same (and many new) conclusions to be drawn from the spectacle.

In 2004, after a year of research and 5 months of full-time painting, Joel created "American Fundamentalists (Christ's Entry into Washington in 2008)." This full-size acrylic adaptation depicts current American religious, corporate and political fundamentalists and their lackeys whooping it up in a big parade celebrating the return of Jesus, as 2008 Washington burns, the sky is a permanent nuclear red, and everywhere snipers and military aircraft stand guard. Designed to roll up and be easily transported, he is touring the United States showing and discussing the painting, it's depicted event, the depicted participants, and the ramifications to American democracy and freedom of faith.

One major addition to Joel's version of Ensor's painting is the lack of spectators in the parade: the current popular interpretation of the second coming of Christ follows a disastrous World War and genocide of most of the population on the planet. In this interpretation of the Armageddon myth most of the planet's cities, culture, animals and people are lost in a firestorm which ends in the few, chosen leaders ruling over the what's left for a thousand years, with Jesus as King. To a skeptical freethinker, the idea that some within the current American political and military establishment, and many who vote or financially support them, actually believe in this "happy ending" is beyond worrisome. More than the freedom to choose or not choose faith is threatened by these current political and cultural movements - ALL life on this planet, based on a dangerous modern interpretation of an ancient myth, is endangered in the real world by real people with the power to act.

The rise of American political, economic and religious fundamentalism is unique to world history, with foundations in the Pilgrims and the Virginia Colonies, "Manifest Destiny," free market capitalism and the rise of corporate media. Although each movement has its own goals, they have formed bonds and coalitions to achieve and dominate power, money and cultural influence today. No one person or movement can ever totally agree with the others, but (when necessary) they use each other's power and money to help achieve their goal - of "winning", once and for all, ideological, economic or political struggles that have characterized American history.

This desire to "win", to KNOW that only their plans and ideas are RIGHT, is the definition of Fundamentalism, and is by its very nature anti-democratic, anti-pluralistic and anti-American, threatening the very strength of American culture and civic life. The freedom to think, choose and disagree is the foundation of our shared cultural "bible", the Constitution of the United States of America, the very document a President swears to protect and defend. The unique convergence of modern political, economic and religious American Fundamentalism has no interest in what we, as Americans, have in common - our diversity.

Images, essays, booking information, tour schedules and resources are at

<http://www.americanfundamentalists.com>

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