

Latest neocon target: The Vatican

The neocon strategy to ensure their candidate is selected pope

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The international neoconservative movement, already giddy over their bloodying the nose of the United Nations and Secretary General Kofi Annan in the overhyped Iraq “oil for food” brouhaha, the nomination of anti-UN wacko and Jesse Helms sycophant and racist John Bolton as the next US ambassador to the UN, and the comb-licking and dandruff-munching Paul Wolfowitz’s selection as World Bank president, is now involving itself in the internecine politics that will highlight the selection of the next pope.

It is clear that Bolton’s major task at the UN will be to dump the African Annan as Secretary General and replace him with someone European and white. Polish President Alexander Kwasniewski’s (whom George W. Bush affectionately calls “Alexander”) leads the list of neocon candidates.

The dream candidate of the neocons for the next pope is the Archbishop of Vienna, Cardinal Christoph Schoenborn. According to a major neocon media outlet of convenience, The Jerusalem Post, Schoenborn, on a recent visit to the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, echoed the Christian Zionist line of George W. Bush, Tom DeLay, Newt Gingrich, and neocon Catholic and New American centurion Michael Novak. Schoenborn referred to Israel as “God’s chosen land” for the Jewish people. Responding to the comments of a clearly pained Palestinian priest, who questioned the cardinal on his support for Israel’s usurpation of Palestinian lands and homes, basically said that as a refugee from war time Czechoslovakia he understood the pain of refugees. Commenting further, Schoenborn said that was a matter of international law while the Jews’ inheritance of the Holy Land trumped international law because it was prophesized in the Bible and that all Christians should embrace Zionism as the fulfillment of that Biblical prophecy.

Although Pope John Paul II established diplomatic relations with Israel and was the first pope to visit a synagogue, he was also cognizant of the Holy See’s responsibility to Catholicism’s flocks in Palestine and other Arab lands. For example, he maintained close links to the late Palestinian President Yasir Arafat.

John Paul II was not only strongly opposed to George W. Bush’s unprovoked invasion of Iraq but came out vocally against Bush’s father’s Desert Storm invasion. Speaking to ABC’s This Week on April 3, Jim Nicholson said that during his last meeting with the pope in March, before he departed his post as American ambassador to the Vatican to take up the position as secretary of Veterans Affairs, the pope wanted to know where Bush intended to take America in the world with its awesome temporal power. It is no secret that the late pope had no time for Bush and his bellicose and aggressive ways and, according to well-placed journalists for Catholic Italian newspapers whom I spoke to in 2003, the pope commented to some of his closest assistants that what he feared most in Bush was the coming of the

Antichrist as prophesized in the Book of Revelation. It was the fear of the arrival of the Antichrist during his priesthood that plagued John Paul II since his earlier years in Poland.

It will now be in the interests of Bush's extreme right-wing evangelical base (and Bush's Svengali, Karl Rove) to ensure that someone like Schoenborn assumes the papacy. They are looking for someone who, unlike John Paul II, will support the death penalty and more actively oppose family planning and stem cell research. The evangelicals will also want a pope who will, unlike John Paul II, permit right-wing Catholic clerics to involve themselves in politics. John Paul II strictly enforced his order that priests not engage in politics. It was that order that cost Massachusetts liberal Democratic Representative Father Robert F. Drinan his House seat. The evangelicals will want to see that Vatican order lifted to permit conservative Catholic priests to try and gain even more Senate and House seats for the Republicans in heavily Catholic and Democratic states like Massachusetts, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania, California, and Michigan. An absolute majority in both chambers would give the Tom DeLays, Bill Frist, and Karl Roves a virtual free hand in the appointment of anti-abortion and anti-gay judges.

For the neocons, Schoenborn would become a rubber stamp for America's plans for global domination. Like Pope Pius XII who gave a wink and a nod to Adolf Hitler's conquests, Schoenborn would see Washington's continued wars as fulfillment of his interpretation of biblical prophecy. In that respect, Schoenborn would complement Bush's other religious supporters—Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, James Dobson, and Sun Myung Moon—and bolster the neocon movement with the might of the Vatican. The result of such a power shift would help bring Latin America, Catholic Europe, Francophone Africa, and parts of Asia firmly within the American sphere of influence.

Bush's key Catholic officials, policy makers, and political allies to keep an eye on during the conclave of the College of Cardinals who will select the next pope are Veterans Affairs Secretary Nicholson, a member of the Republican evangelical movement and the person who, as chairman of the Republican National Committee, cemented the ties between the GOP and the religious Right; former Democratic mayor of Boston and ambassador to the Vatican, Ray Flynn, who endorsed Bush for election in 2000 and failed to endorse John Kerry in 2004; Catholic lay leader and American Enterprise Institute denizen and Project for a New American Century advocate Michael Novak; the National Review's Rod Dreher, a vehement opponent of John Paul II's antiwar policies; Richard John Neuhaus, a Lutheran minister who converted to Catholicism; Elliot Abrams's ally George Weigel of Project for a New American Century infamy; Catholic "moralist" and wild Las Vegas party man William Bennett; columnist Robert Novak, failed Supreme Court nominee Robert Bork (shilling for Associate Justice Antonin Scalia), and Opus Dei member Senator Sam Brownback of Kansas. These and their fellow travelers will be all over the corporate media outlets pushing their favorite papal candidates, Schoenbron, Cardinal Francis Arinze, and as yet unnamed "dark horse" ultra-conservative candidates.

The nightmare pope for the neocons, their fellow travelers in the Israeli Likud regime, and the evangelical right is both a Frenchman and a Jew. He is the recently retired Archbishop of Paris, a veteran of the faculty of the Sorbonne, and a very close confidant of John Paul II. Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger, whose See was the Cathedral of Notre Dame on Paris's Seine River, was born Aaron Lustiger in 1926. At the age of 13, Lustiger was placed in safekeeping with a French Catholic family by his Polish Jewish immigrant parents. Lustiger's mother and father later perished at Auschwitz. At the age of 14, Lustiger converted to Catholicism.

Lustiger remains a powerful member of the College of Cardinals and John Paul II considered Lustiger to be his personal liaison to the French government and people.

Although Lustiger is a supporter of Israel, his unique viewpoints and very office and religion are anathema to the Orthodox rabbis who dictate religious policy in Israel. Lustiger is an enigma to the Orthodox religious figures in Israel: for them Lustiger is an apostate and a potentially dangerous proselytizer.

Unlike Schoenbron, Lustiger would not only continue John Paul II's policies of opposing Bush and the neocons but would ratchet things up a bit. His abhorrence for Bush's preemptive warfare policies stem from his own bitter experiences with Hitler's similar policies that ravaged his native France and all of Europe.

It is no secret that Lustiger, like Schoenbron, has traveled around the world to increase his visibility with the Catholic faithful. Lustiger impressed John Paul II with revitalizing the Catholic Church in what had become a very secularist France. John Paul II was also keenly aware that Lustiger's mother and father perished in a concentration camp in the pope's native Poland. After his success in reversing the fortunes of the Catholic Church in France, Lustiger engaged in his own public relations campaign.

According to the Sydney Morning Herald, during a visit to Australia in 2001, Lustiger charmed his audiences, Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish with his sense of humor. Rejecting those who believe the Catholic Church should bend to popular will, Lustiger, said, "I'm sorry Jesus Christ did not have a good public relations office because maybe he wouldn't have had the bad problem of being crucified." But on other subjects, Lustiger demonstrated flexibility. On feminism and sexuality, Lustiger's Gallic view of the world was apparent, "These are problems of society, not the church . . . When you look at the issues around feminism, it's not going so good. When you look at the issues of sexuality, it's not going so good." Lustiger also laid down the gauntlet for the neocons and their policies of corporate control and consumerism. Criticizing the wealthy elites who control society, he said, "Citizens are being turned into units of an all-pervasive consumption". He sees society drifting toward "new forms of conformism, of unfreedom . . . I think Dr. Goebbels would be happy with some of the advertisers of today. He would think, 'If I'd had this agency I might still be in power.'" Lustiger continued, "Democracy needs citizens not consumers. When people are merely consumers of politics, they are more easily manipulated. And in our time conformism is stronger than in the past." A strong defender of human rights, Lustiger challenged Indonesia on the plight of East Timor. That puts him at loggerheads with the incoming World Bank President Wolfowitz, whose admiration for the Indonesian military genocidaires has never known any bounds.

In a rare departure for a cardinal, Lustiger also criticized a former pope, Pius XII for his failure to confront the Holocaust. "I think of the silences of [Pope] Pius XII; his intercessions with Third Reich authorities were restricted to converted Jews. Only those mattered to him," Lustiger lamented. He also criticized past Christian leaders for their support for the Inquisition, Crusades, pogroms, and public humiliations. And in one area that would be certain to inflame the neocons, Lustiger has demonstrated his environmental credentials. He told his Australia audiences that the "human species [was] behaving like locusts, clustering in giant cities that cover Earth in concrete and suck[ing] in enormous amounts of energy from the countryside."

It is truly amazing to suggest to some rabid right-wingers that the next pope could be

Jewish. Many of these religious dilettantes scoff and bellow, "A Jewish pope! That'll be the day!" Showing their extreme ignorance of history and even the Bible, these intellectual paupers fail to realize that Lustiger would be the second Jewish pope, the first having been the first pope, Peter. Others say that Lustiger is too old, not realizing that at the age of 78, Lustiger is in his prime as far as many past popes are concerned. As a transition pope and modernizer, Lustiger's term of office would not be critical. After all, John Paul II's predecessor, the Italian John Paul I, lasted only 33 days in office before he died.

Not waiting for John Paul II's burial, the neocons are already working behind the scenes to ensure that the next pope will be as compliant with their global agenda as Pius XII was with the National Socialists and Fascists. It is up to Catholic leaders like Lustiger and his fellow likeminded Cardinals who believe in John Paul II's views on human rights and global survival to confront the machinations of the neocons and their favored candidates, Schoenbron and Nigerian Cardinal Francis Arinze.

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