

At War with the Mystics

The Death of Jerry Falwell

Clyde Cass

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No discussion of end-of-the-world imaginings would be complete without some reference to wacky conservative Christian dispensationalism. Dispensationalism is a school of Protestant theology that favors a millennial interpretation of history—all roads lead to God cracking open a cataclysmic can of whup-ass on humans.

A central part of this mystical humbug involves close scrutiny of the current state of affairs involving the Christians' love/hate relationship with Jews, since, according to some rather feverish Biblical prophecy, Christians need to ally with, convert, and then help destroy Jews in order for Jesus Christ's Second Coming.

Some of the more successful end-of-the-world entrepreneurs in the dispensationalist market include Jack Chick, Jack and Rexella Van Impe, Hal Lindsey (some of you oldsters will remember his *The Late Great Planet Earth*) and best-selling novelist Tim LaHaye. Another big wheel was the late Jerry Falwell, who insisted that the Anti-Christ who would usher in the End Times would be a Jew, but who nevertheless (or, better yet, "and so subsequently") urged absolute loyalty for the State of Israel from his followers. Falwell, you may recall, met his own personal apocalypse back in mid-May. It was an event that I am embarrassed to say I greeted with the wild joy of one of his Rapture-ready fanatics.

For the first time in my life, I lustily cheered the death of another human being. I gloated over the fact that Falwell died scared and alone on the floor of his office far from medical help, his family, and his friends. My behavior was grotesque. I poured out shots of straight, chilled vodka for friends and toasted his extinction. I called people on the telephone and tried to get a party started for that night. I had been too young to throw a bash when Franco and Mao died; the passing of Nixon cheered me a bit, and I had hoped that someone would try to drive a stake through Reagan's carcass while it lay in state inside the U.S. Capitol Rotunda (just as some Serbian vampire hunters did to Milosevic's grave back in March), but none of these deaths elicited such spleen from me as had occurred when I had learned that Falwell had croaked.

I tried creating a rationale for why I was wallowing in such dark and evil exhilaration over Falwell's death: his blind greed bilked people out of millions of dollars; he supported segregation in the US and actively defended South Africa's fascist apartheid regime; he had the greasy ability to pander to the worst excesses of both anti-Semitism and far right-wing Zionism at the same time; he propagated brutal and very dangerous homophobia for decades; he aspired to install a sick, authoritarian American Taliban theocracy; he sanctified free-market capitalism; and he celebrated anti-intellectualism with his bogus university. But I quickly gave up the idea of accumulating excuses and explanations for my behavior—simply put, the man was a foul, exploitative, fear-mongering bloodsucker who preyed on people's confusion, emotional instability, and loneliness for his own personal benefit.

Maybe my blistering revulsion for him was rooted in his fraudulent persona of a spiritually-advanced holy man. These days, it seems, more and more of what's so ugly in the world is a direct by-product of some hypocritical fake mystic peddling some especially sour and fetid flavor of religious miserabilism. It's hard to imagine a time when puritanical parasites have threatened the species more than they do now; these charlatans and their cults become more posterous, more violent, and more powerful every day. And Falwell was a textbook example of this awful

infection. He cultivated and sustained a kind of hate among his followers and his allies that could be manipulated and mobilized into an abominable ideology of pro-USA Christian fundamentalist self-righteousness, prescriptive moral coercion, pathological heterosexism, and hierarchical obedience to authority. He made hate into a political commodity and erected a vast business empire out of it.

But what it comes down to is that I hate Falwell for making me hate him so much. And by abhorring him so thoroughly, I know I have become absolutely complicit in what he did best. In a sense, I have become an integral part of his twisted sect.

I can almost see Falwell mocking me from some dark corner, cackling like the Emperor in that old *Star Wars* movie, *Return of the Jedi*: "The hate is swelling in you now. Give in to your anger. Let the hate flow through you. With each passing moment, you make yourself more my servant..."

When I read Dante's *Inferno* in high school, I thought that it was sad that the author's bitterness towards his enemies was so zealous that he had to compose an epic poem about Hell for them all to get it out of his system. Dante's poem always struck me as one of those classic examples of what Nietzsche diagnosed as "ressentiment"—that toxic blend of frustration, anger, and resentment that consumes losers to the point of having to create some sort of private moral value system in order to feel better.

In the first ten seconds of learning about Falwell's death, I found myself doing just what Dante did. I imagined some sort of supernatural afterlife where Falwell's soul spends all of eternity in a pool of boiling brimstone realizing just how wrong he had been while being tag-team skull-fucked by Pol Pot and Roy Cohn. I stopped believing in Heaven and Hell when my pet dog died when I was eight years-old and a neighborhood nun told me that animals don't have souls, and yet news of Falwell's death sent me digging deep into some psychical sediment to find some half-forgotten, atavistic notion of the Life Hereafter. It's embarrassing what I have let Falwell do to me, what I have done to myself on the account of Falwell.

The fact that I continue to take such unmitigated joy in that repulsive toad's demise shames me. I can't stop hating him with the fury of a dozen imploding suns even as his worthless cadaver molds and rots in the dirt, and this is solid proof that I am just as malicious, poisonous, and spitefully close-minded as he ever was. Falwell's death forced me to face up to some pathetic realities about myself. Many anarchists, of course, have adopted Gandhi's dictum about working hard to become the change they want to see in the world, but I am an utter failure in this most basic and fundamental objective. I vigorously applauded the end of his world. I can't stop hating Falwell for his hate. What's more, I lovingly savor my black-hearted hatred for him.

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