

**THE BLOG**

I Believe for Every Drop of Rain That Falls, A Flower Grows

By Marty Kaplan

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“I wouldn’t ask a mother or a dad — I wouldn’t put their son in harm’s way if I didn’t believe this was necessary for the security of the United States and the peace of the world. I strongly believe it, and I strongly believe we’ll prevail. And I strongly believe that democracy will trump totalitarianism every time. That’s what I believe. And those are the belief systems on which I’m making decisions that I believe will yield the peace.”

— George W. Bush, Cleveland, July 10, 2007

Who gives a flying fig for what you believe, Mr. President? You believed trading Sammy Sosa to the White Sox was a good move. You believed Saddam was making nukes from Nigerien yellowcake. You believed Senators of both parties would acclaim Harriet Miers as a “superb choice” for the Supreme Court,” an American of “unwavering devotion to the Constitution and laws of our country.” You said you had faith in General Casey (until you fired him). You keep telling us you have faith in Alberto Gonzales. We know you believe in a Higher Power, Mr. Bush — hey, if AA works for you, you go, guy — but why should any American mother or dad let you put their son in harm’s way just because you “strongly believe” that his being wasted by a roadside IED in an Islamic civil war makes the world more peaceful and the United States more secure?

This “belief” thing runs alarmingly deep. In his Cleveland speech, he said “I believe” 75 times. Here are some of the other things he said he believes:

He believes “it’s in this nation’s interest to give the commander a chance to fully implement his operations,” that “Congress ought to wait for General Petraeus to come back [in September] and give his assessment of the strategy that he’s putting in place before they make any decisions.... And that’s the way I’m going to play it, as the Commander-in-Chief.” (Tell that to the swelling ranks of Senate Republicans scared witless that they’ll be booted from office if the play-in-chief doesn’t immediately change course.)

He believes in “rule of law.” (Tell that to Valerie Plame Wilson and the fired US Attorneys.)

He believes that the economy is “robust.” (Tell that to the people whose real wages haven’t risen since he’s been President.”)

He believes that “we can balance the budget without raising taxes.” (Tell that to the fuzzy math fairy.)

He believes the best way we can improve health care is “to enable more people to have private insurance.” (Tell that to the people weeping and cheering at *Sicko*.)

He believes “in information technology” (you know, the internets and the Google).

He believes that “some Americans don’t believe we’re at war, and that’s their right” (you know, Americans in a persistent vegetative state).

“That’s what I believe.” Six times, to punctuate a point, he said it; “that’s what I believe.”

I can’t help thinking that it’s not just a rhetorical tic. In Bush’s faith-based epistemology, the strongest possible justification for any action he takes is that he believes in it. Not that it’s true; not that it’s supported by evidence; not that it’s consistent with the Constitution; not that it enforces the law; not that it’s desired by the vast majority of the American people — but that, like the Nicene Creed, he believes it.

Republicans often complain that Democrats want to criminalize policy differences. The truth is that the President has aggressively theologized policy differences. “*Un roi, une loi, une foi*” was the French monarchy’s formulation of this anti-democratic idea: one king, one law, one faith.

It would be too generous to call Bush an ideologue; his beliefs (unlike Cheney’s, or the Project for the New American Century) don’t aspire to the poisonous coherence of neoconservatism. Instead, what Bush possesses is a narcissism that he markets as a civic religion. He believes he was elected as the Defender of the Faith, and that it is we who are accountable to him, rather than he who is accountable to us.

It was Thomas Jefferson who best described what’s most pernicious about belief-based leadership: “It is always better to have no ideas than false ones; to believe nothing, than to believe what is wrong.”

That’s what I believe.

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