

Iran leaders pave way for messianic 'Mahdi'

5th annual confab brings together politics, religion, apocalyptic endtimes visions

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Iran last week held a multi-day conference, bringing together politicians, mullahs, students – Shiite and Sunni alike – to plot what can be done on this earthly plane to hasten the coming of the anointed one, a messianic, endtimes personage known as the Mahdi.

It wasn't a conference covered by the western press.

But Joel Richardson, author of the new book, "[The Islamic Antichrist](#)," [reported today](#) on the conference, which have been held for the last five years – all in a bid to lay the groundwork for an apocalyptic vision of the day Muslims will rule the world.

"For the past five years, the Iranian religious and political leaders have annually gathered together for two days in the city of Qom for what is called 'The International Conference of Mahdism Doctrine,' sponsored by the Bright Future Institute," explains Richardson in a WND commentary today. "The purpose of the Bright Future Institute, according to their website, is 'to introduce Imam Mahdi to the world' and 'to pave the ground for his reappearance.' After attending last year's conference, Dr. Timothy Furnish, in an article entitled 'the Importance of Being Mahdist,' [featured in the Weekly Standard](#), also cited President Ahmadinejad describing the purpose of the conference as helping to 'bring all of humanity to the knowledge of the true savior of mankind, Imam al-Mahdi.'"

Each year a growing number of Sunni Muslims and Christians join the predominantly Shiite hosts. This year, 400 articles were presented and 40 were selected for presentation. After the completion of the conference each year, the conference papers are published in book form and also placed on the [Bright Future website](#).

"The theme of the conference this year was 'the Society and government which prepares the ground for the appearance [of the Mahdi]: Missions and Strategies,' explains Richardson, whose controversial book has skyrocketed up the best-sellers list since it debuted last week. "Each year, a special tribute is also paid to 30 key individuals who are recognized as being particular bright lights in the ongoing effort to spread the knowledge of the Mahdi worldwide. These 30 are known as 'the Helpers of the Mahdi.'"

Says Savyon and Y. Mansharof, an Iranian scholar: "From the establishment of the Islamic Regime in 1979 to Ahmadinejad's rise to power in August 2005, Mahdism had been a religious doctrine and a tradition that had no political manifestation. The political system operated independently of this messianic belief and of the anticipation of the return of the Mahdi. It was only with Ahmadinejad's presidency that this religious doctrine has become a political philosophy and taken a central place in politics."

"Mahdism is now increasingly being used as a political tool by appealing to the religious and nationalistic tendencies of various Muslims groups," says Richardson, who believes the striking similarities between Quranic and traditional Muslim depictions of the Mahdi suggest he could well be one in the same as the one known in Christian circles as "the Antichrist."

A presenter at last year's conference, Dr. Mariam Tabar, asserted that the "military capabilities of the future Mahdist state depend on Islamic governments in the here and now acquiring abilities to stand against the enemies of the imam [al-Mahdi]." Iran, of course, is attempting to become a nuclear power.

While some involved in Mahdism see the figure as a peace-loving global world leader, others within the movement reveal another side.

According to Dr. Furnish, last year, for instance, Ali Larijani, the chairman and speaker of the Iranian Parliament quoted Imam Muhammad Baqir, a famous Muslim scholar, as saying, "there must be bloodshed and jihad to establish Imam Mahdi's rule." Ayatollah Ibrahim al Amini, professor at the Religious Learning Center at Qom affirms Larijani when he states, "The Mahdi will offer the religion of Islam to the Jews and Christians; if they accept it they will be spared, otherwise they will be killed."

In "[The Islamic Antichrist](#)," Richardson, a student of Islam, exposes Western Christians to the Muslim traditions. He says most Christians have no idea of the stunning similarities between biblical Antichrist and the "Islamic Mahdi."

Richardson's book stands in stark contrast to most other popular prophecy books of the last 40 years.

The student of the Middle East says that after decades of reading popular prophecy books and even best-selling fiction like the "Left Behind" series, millions of evangelical Christians around the world are expecting the Antichrist to emerge from a revived Roman Empire, which many have assumed is associated with the Roman Catholic Church and the European Union.

Not so, argues Richardson. His book makes the case that the biblical Antichrist is one and the same as the Quran's Muslim Mahdi.

"[The Islamic Antichrist](#)" is a book almost certain to be greeted in the Muslim world with the same enthusiasm as Salman Rushdie's "The Satanic Verses." The author, Joel Richardson, is prepared. He has written the book under a pseudonym to protect himself and his family.

"The Bible abounds with proofs that the Antichrist's empire will consist only of nations that are, today, Islamic," says Richardson. "Despite the numerous prevailing arguments for the emergence of a revived European Roman empire as the Antichrist's power base, the specific nations the Bible identifies as comprising his empire are today all Muslim."

Richardson believes the key error of many previous prophecy scholars involves the misinterpretation of a prediction by Daniel to Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel describes the rise and fall of empires of the future, leading to the endtimes. Western Christians have viewed one of those empires as Rome, when, claims Richardson, Rome never actually conquered Babylon and was thus disqualified as a possibility.

It had to be another empire that rose and fell and rose again that would lead to rule of this "man of sin," described in the Bible. That empire, he says, is the Islamic Empire, which did conquer Babylon and, in fact, rules over it even today.

Many evangelical Christians believe the Bible predicts a charismatic ruler, the Antichrist, will arise in the last days, before the return of Jesus. The Quran also predicts that a man, called the Mahdi, will rise up to lead the nations, pledging to usher in an era of peace. Richardson makes the case these two men are, in fact, one in the same.

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