

# **Rumours of war**

**Written by Father Michael Harper**

Even as I am writing war may be breaking out in the Middle East. When Jesus spoke of “wars and rumours of wars” He told his disciples not to be afraid, and not to see them as signs of the Return of Christ. Many have fallen into the trap of making unfounded predictions, especially as Iraq is where the ancient Babylon stood. Western Protestantism has for a long time held views about the end times which have no foundation in either the Scriptures or the later teaching of the Church. For example there is no mention in the New Testament of the return of the Jews to the Promised Land, yet so many Protestants see the modern State of Israel as the fulfilment of prophecy.

As members of the Patriarchate of Antioch we are bound to have a personal concern about war in the Middle East. Iraq is part of President George Bush’s declared war on terrorism, and we have a number of parishes in that country.. But his shopping list not only includes Iraq and North Korea, but also Syria and Lebanon, home to many terrorist organisations. If that is so, a day could come when cruise missiles will be seen over Damascus, and flying up the street called Straight.

George Bush is certainly being egged on by the Christian Zionist lobby in the United States, including figures like Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell and Oral Roberts. But, in spite of denials, the major factor is oil. The western world is very dependent on the major oil suppliers, Saudi Arabia and Iraq. To lose one would be devastating; to lose both would be earth shattering. Saudi Arabia is the homebase of Osama bin Laden, and Iraq is in the hands of a megalomaniac, who has some scores to settle with the United States. This must account for America’s nervousness.