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The most controversial book in the Bible

Maureen Fiedler | Mar. 16, 2012 NCR Today

This week on Interfaith Voices, I had a great conversation with Elaine Pagels, professor of religion at Princeton University and author of a new book on what is certainly the most controversial book in the Bible: the Book of Revelation. (It's called *Revelations: Visions, Prophecy and Politics in the Book of Revelation* [1].)

She talks about the Book of Revelation as "wartime literature," a polemic against the Roman Empire in the decades after the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple and scattered the Jewish people. Its violent and often horrifying images, however, have been assigned to various "enemies" over the centuries by different people. Named enemies have included such figures as Elizabeth I, the pope of Rome, Martin Luther and Hitler.

I always thought this book was written by John the Apostle, but -- almost certainly -- I had the wrong John! According to Pagels, the author was John of Patmos, a second-generation Jewish follower of Jesus. He would not have called himself a Christian because a distinctive sect called Christianity had not yet separated itself from Judaism. John of Patmos also believed that converts to Jesus should be strict Jews. He was not a fan of St. Paul, who did not want to "Judaize" his Gentile converts.

After this discussion, we explore the world of Christian Zionism, that part of evangelical Christianity that works to preserve the state of Israel because its "end times" prophecies demand it. But since Christian Zionists believe everyone must either become a born-again Christian or perish in a fiery death, we explore how and why Jewish Zionists have made an alliance with them.
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Finally, we analyze the increasingly public presence of religion in the world of professional sports, especially the presence of evangelical Christianity. Think Tim Tebow and Jeremy Lin.

Want to listen? You can hear the show here [2].

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Links:
[1] http://www.amazon.com/Revelations-Visions-Prophecy-Politics-Revelation/dp/0670023345
[2] http://www.interfaithradio.org/