

Farewell Israel: Bush, Iran and The Revolt of Islam

by Arsenio Orteza, World Magazine

Despite the dozens of bestsellers and non-stop talk-radio and television-news coverage devoted to the topic during the last six years, the "war on terror"--a.k.a. the war against radical Islam--still generates more heat than light. Joel Gilbert's fascinating new documentary, enticingly titled Farewell Israel: Bush, Iran, and the Revolt of Islam, represents an important act of redress.

Part historical documentary and part multi-media survey course, Farewell Israel is ultimately a call to reason, painstakingly detailing both the origin of Islam and its subsequent rise and fall, with particular attention to the religion's first millennium and definitions of its most important yet often most misunderstood terminology. Because the theology and philosophy, modern-day Islam has changed little since Muhammed's death left the religion at the mercy of his followers, Gilbert's attention to their roots and evolution is more essential than ever to a meaningful (as opposed to a merely expedient) response to the present crises posed by Ayatollahs, the PLO, Al-Qaeda, and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

The fact remains, however, that, for whatever reason, most Westerners, from the man on the street to the movers and shakers, are as oblivious to the history and ideology of Islam as they are passionate about either combating or appeasing it.

Gilbert has not only skillfully condensed this information into a swiftly moving script (euphoniously delivered via voiceover by the veteran narrator Lance Lewman) but also made it visually arresting, supplying the film's latter half with ample footage of the relevant 20th and 21st century people, places, and events while illustrating the first half with a clever, and at times ingenious, combination of Islamic art, stock Crusader-movie footage, and computer graphics. As for the original Middle Eastern-sounding soundtrack, performed by Gilbert and a trio of musicians best known for their past association with Bob Dylan, its effectiveness is such that it calls attention less to itself than to the historical parade at the heart of the story. The result is an artful mixture of quick-edit form and thought-provoking content that will hold the attention of MTV-generation channel-surfers and reflective intellectuals alike.

Farewell Israel is so absorbing, in fact, that one will not only want to watch it repeatedly but also to weigh its fundamental premise: that neither the stereotypical conservative nor liberal reactions to 9/11, based as they are on Westernized misperceptions of Islam's nature, bodes well for the future of Israel or the West.