

Rachel's Environment & Health News #796 -- Fiery Hell on Earth, Part 5: A Marriage Made in Heaven July 22, 2004

We began this series seeking an explanation for America's contradictory and self-defeating nuclear policies. We end by seeking explanations for larger -- but equally perplexing -- U.S. environmental policies.

The stated goal of U.S. nuclear policy is to keep weapons-grade nuclear materials out of the hands of terrorists and hostile, unstable nations.

Yet in actual fact the U.S. (1) is failing to sweep up weapons-grade nuclear materials that are lying around loose in 40 countries, and (2) has opened "a second nuclear age" by creating a new generation of smaller, "more usable" A-bombs, and (3) despite the terrors of 9/11 the U.S. government is still peddling Westinghouse nuclear power plants to countries like China that have announced plans to pass along the latest nuclear technology to countries like Pakistan. (See Rachel's #792, #793, #794, #795.) In the hands of any willing nation, nuclear power equals nuclear weapons, as we know from India, Pakistan, North Korea and Iran, among others.

As I said in Rachel's #795: It's as if U.S. leaders -- or the political supporters to whom they are beholden -- believe that the rogue detonation of a nuclear device in some key city like Jerusalem or even New York is inevitable and can't be stopped, or perhaps might even be beneficial in some way and therefore should be enabled.

I'd prefer to explain these bizarre U.S. nuclear power policies as ordinary corporate/politico shenanigans -- the Vice-President hawking Westinghouse's nuclear wares in return for a generous campaign contribution. I'd like to believe that U.S. nuclear weapons policy is nothing more than the muddled work of neoconservative eggheads who think the world will be safer for democracy if theater commanders can call up a small nuclear strike against any enemy at any time.[1] In this view, the fanatics in Falluja might think twice about shooting at our soldiers (and thumbing their noses at us) if they really believed we were ready to nuke their children.

But these "rational" explanations aren't persuasive to me. If such rational considerations are really controlling U.S. nuclear policy, why aren't we scooping up all the weapons-grade uranium and plutonium from around the world as quickly as possible? What is to be gained by allowing a "black market" in weapons-grade nuclear materials to continue? And how "rational" is it for the U.S. to continue spreading atomic power plants and nuclear know-how into a post-9/11 world? Here I have to wonder whether something else might be at work. Could the spiritual beliefs of the people who control the U.S. be influencing U.S. nuclear policies and, indeed, the nation's other environment-related policies?

As we saw in Rachel's #795, we do know that a small number of fundamentalist Christian leaders now controls the Republican Party. We also saw that Republican political operatives believe they can only keep their electoral

majorities by retaining the support of evangelicals. To hear them tell it, Republicans have now put most of their electoral eggs in this particular Easter basket. This gives fundamentalist leaders decisive political influence over the Republican agenda.

Furthermore, we know that these same fundamentalist leaders believe that a cataclysmic battle of Armageddon is required to pave the way for Christ's return to Earth. These particular Christian leaders find nuclear war foretold in Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39. So for 20 years they have been preaching, promoting, and selling Americans on the idea of building more bombs and using them to fulfill God's plan. In this "end times" scenario, these particular Christian leaders believe they will not personally experience Armageddon because they will be "raptured" (physically transported) to heaven before it happens. The formal name for this rapture theology is "premillennial dispensationalism." (See Rachel's #795.)

This dispensationalist "end times" scenario is an abstract idea with real consequences. For example, leading members of the U.S. Congress work hard to derail peace negotiations between Arabs and Israelis because they believe Israel must expand its territorial control to fulfill God's plan for the Second Coming of Christ. In this dispensationalist reading of Genesis 15:18, God made a "covenant" giving land to the children of Abraham, and Jews must occupy those "covenant lands" before Christ can return to Earth. So, for example, Senator James Inhof (R-Ok.) says, "I believe very strongly that we ought to support Israel -- because God said so. Look it up in the Book of Genesis. This is not a political battle at all. It is a contest over whether the word of God is true." [2] If you think an uncompromising Biblical interpretation of the Arab-Israeli conflict can't have real consequences, read the 9/11 Commission Report. [3]

Leaders of the conservative Likud Party in Israel [4] and U.S. fundamentalist Christian leaders have different reasons for wanting to drive Muslims from the "covenant lands" but they work effectively together toward that goal. [5]

It is worth noting that fundamentalist Christian support for Israel's territorial expansion is not quite the same thing as support for the Jewish people. According to Biblical prophecy, as interpreted by fundamentalist leaders like Hal Lindsey, when the "end times" scenario unfolds, at least two-thirds of all Jews will be killed and will be resurrected into an eternal agony of fire. In his best-selling book, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, Mr. Lindsey describes this holy pogrom in a section titled, "A bright spot in the gloom." [6, pg. 167, citing Zechariah 13:8,9.] Before he was President, Mr. Bush himself told a newspaper reporter that no Jews can enter heaven. [7] And in fundamentalist theology there is only one other place to spend eternity -- in a lake of fire.

If the return of Christ and the battle of Armageddon are prophesied in the Bible and are therefore inevitably going to happen, how should individual Christians respond? Should

they obey Christ's Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chapters 5-7; Luke 6:20-49) and work for peace, justice, and mercy in this world, even though this could be interpreted as working against the "end times" prophecy? Or should they try to provoke chaos and violence, hoping to accelerate the "end times" calendar, even at the risk of igniting nuclear World War III? Fundamentalist Christian leaders are divided on this question but many --perhaps a majority -- say that preaching peace is heresy because God's plan requires an endless battle against evil, culminating in World War III.

The Reverend John Hagee, a televangelist and pastor of the 17,000-member Cornerstone Church in San Antonio, Tex. is typical when he says the current wave of Palestinian and Israeli terrorism in the Middle East will "produce a third world war. And that will be the coming of the End Times. That will be the end of the world as we know it," he says.[8] He sees this as a good thing. Such views are mainstream among fundamentalist Christian leaders, including those who are consulted on a regular basis by the White House.[9]

The Reverend Billy Graham's son, the Reverend Franklin Graham, says he believes Christians and Muslims are destined to do battle against each other until the Second Coming of Christ.[10] The Reverend Mr. Graham believes Christians have an obligation to battle Muslims because, he says, Islam is a "very evil and very wicked religion." [11] The Reverend Mr. Graham is widely respected within the Republican hierarchy. He led the prayer at President Bush's inauguration in 2001,[12] and last year, just as the Iraq war was getting under way, the Pentagon selected him to deliver a Good Friday message to the world.[12]

In a recent radio interview, Wayne Slater, Austin (Tex.) bureau chief for the Dallas Morning News, explained how such fundamentalist views play out in the real world: "I was down in Georgia the other day talking to some pastors and when I talk to them about the war in Iraq they understand fundamentally in ways that George Bush does not talk about that this is part of a millennial crusade. Bush got in trouble using the word crusade. You talk to some pastors in suburban Atlanta, they understand that this war is against the Muslims, against the infidel, in a way, fundamental ways, that hasn't changed in a thousand years. They see that this is, the president is, engaged in something bigger than just this moment." [13]

It was President Ronald Reagan who first brought Armageddon theology deep into the White House. Mr. Reagan said in 1976 that he had had a "born again" experience, and while he was President he said publicly on a half-dozen occasions that he believed that nuclear Armageddon was imminent. His close friend and adviser, the Reverend Billy Graham, agreed with him.[14, pg. 28] President Reagan's Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger affirmed, "I have read the Book of Revelation, and, yes, I believe the world is going to end by an act of God, I hope but every day I think time is running out." President Reagan's Secretary of the Interior, James Watt, questioned the need for environmental protection because, he said, "I don't know how many future generations we can count on until the Lord returns." [8]

If you think -- even hope -- that the world will soon end, then it may seem logical to conduct policy as if there's no tomorrow.[15] Within a millennial framework, fiscal conservatism -- or any other kind of real conservatism -- may appear foolish or simply irrelevant. What does it matter if we bequeath a mountain of debt to our children? The Reverend Jerry Falwell believes that the Second Coming is so imminent that, "I don't think my children will live their whole lives out." [14, pg. 35] Such a view may clarify the Republican Party's environmental agenda.

The current administration's environmental goals and policies have been thoroughly cataloged in a new book by Robert S. Devine.[16]

Since taking office in 2000, Mr. Bush has reversed hundreds of regulations intended to protect the environment and human health. For example, a plan to reduce toxic mercury emissions from power plants has been delayed by 10 years or more. The Kyoto Protocol to limit global warming has been abandoned. The cost of cleaning up chemical "Superfund" dumps has been shifted from industry to taxpayers, and cleanup funds have been drastically cut. Mr. Devine's list of Bush administration regulatory reversals and rollbacks is detailed and long.

Mr. Devine summarizes three effects of Republican environmental rollbacks: (1) to favor private industrial activity over protection of the commons (the natural resources that we all inherit together and none of us owns individually, like air and water), (2) to favor the interests of the wealthy over those of the middle and working classes, and (3) to "favor the present over the future." [16, pg. 18] Among Republican leaders, the future counts for little.

The Bush administration's most inventive and pioneering environmental policies derive from a unique perspective on science. As many scientists have noted, within the Bush administration science is routinely manipulated until it gives the desired answer. Last month 4000 scientists, including 42 Nobel laureates, complained publicly that the administration has been distorting science for political purposes.[17] Even the editor of Science magazine, voice of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, has complained publicly about Mr. Bush's misuse of science.[18]

However, it is important to note that the Bush administration's approach to science is not whimsical. It has real philosophical roots.

Traditionally, policies to protect the environment are based on environmental science. The bedrock of environmental science is evolutionary biology, the concept of ecosystems that are constantly evolving.

Fundamentalists like Republican House Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R-Tex.) deny the basis of modern environmental science. Mr. DeLay argues that evolution does not occur -- and has never occurred -- because there has been no need for it. He reasons that, "God is perfect, so He would not make something imperfect" that needed to change via evolution.[19] This is a logically consistent and essentially irrefutable position, if one accepts the initial premises.

Of course science is not the only way of knowing about the world, and spiritual knowledge is very important. The great value of science as a way of knowing is that it allows people of different cultures to reach agreement about important aspects of reality. No matter where you live, no matter what your spiritual beliefs, water at sea level boils at 212 degrees Fahrenheit. When one's commitment to science as a way of knowing is weak or non-existent, then agreement is all but impossible to achieve on complex problems like environmental deterioration and associated threats to human health.

For his part, President Bush says "the jury is still out" on evolution,[20] so it seems safe to say that the President is not fully committed to environmental science as the basis for policy. Within such an uncertain intellectual framework, verifiable facts of a scientific nature have little persuasive power, and the uncertainties inherent in all scientific inquiry may be used to "prove" that scientists cannot be trusted. In contrast, to those who accept its premises, fundamentalist theology offers absolute certainty.

Many fundamentalist Christian leaders have been taught -- and now teach -- that there cannot ever be any environmental problems because "Christians know that God has made the earth sufficiently large, with plenty of resources to accommodate all the people He knew would come into existence... Our world has plenty of room and plenty of natural resources." [21] In such a world, there's no need to fret. If one place seems depleted, crowded, or contaminated, there's always a sparkling new place just over the horizon. "...[T]he Christian knows that the potential in God is unlimited, and that there is no shortage of resources in God's earth. The resources are waiting to be tapped." [21]

So, within dispensational theology, as interpreted by political leaders, we find four separate rationales for Bush administration environmental policy:

- (1) Humans have a God-given duty to "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it" (Genesis 1:28) And after the Flood, God said to Noah and his family, "The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; unto your hand are they delivered." (Genesis 9:2) Taken literally, such language seems to invite -- even demand -- domination and exploitation, not stewardship.
- (2) The world is already perfect because God would not create an imperfect world;
- (3) Resources, including places needed for discarding wastes, are inexhaustible because God made the world abundantly adequate for all human needs; and
- (4) Environmental problems, if any were to appear, wouldn't matter because the Second Coming of Christ will sweep away this corrupt world.

Rational debate and a few more facts are not going to overcome arguments like these. Against the self-assured certainty expressed by our fundamentalist political leaders, traditional "environmentalist" arguments are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.

Notice, too, that all four fundamentalist Christian arguments support basic laissez faire "free market" economics and the kind of "hands off" environmental policies favored by the corporate leaders who make up the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and who form the other major constituency within the Republican Party. To some, this confluence of interests between worldly corporate leaders and their fundamentalist counterparts will seem a cynical marriage of convenience; to others, it seems a marriage made in heaven. --Peter Montague

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** My thanks to Jim Compton-Schmidt for providing me during the past two years with numerous E-mails, citations, and copies of articles about premillennial dispensationalism and its consequences in the real world.

[1] The neoconservative Project for a New American Century has been advocating U.S. nuclear rearmament for several years. See their web site, <http://www.newamericancentury.org/> and read criticisms of their ideas at <http://www.pnac.info/> .

[2] Senator Inhof quoted in Allen C. Brownfield, "Strange Bedfellows: The Jewish Establishment and the Christian Right," Washington Report on Middle East Affairs (August 2002), pgs. 71-72. Available at <http://www.rachel.org/library/getfile.cfm?ID=389>

[3] Thomas H. Kean and other, The 9/11 Commission Report (Washington, D.C. July 22, 2004). Full report (7.5 megabytes) available at <http://www.rachel.org/library/getfile.cfm?ID=423> . For example, on pg. 147, the Commission describes the motivation of Kahlid Shaikh Mohammed [KSM], the man who dreamed up the 9/11 attacks and then persuaded Osama bin Laden to organize them: "By his own account, KSM's animus toward the United States stemmed not from his experiences there as a student, but rather from his violent disagreement with U.S. foreign policy favoring Israel."

[4] See Ian S. Lustick, For the Land and the Lord; Jewish Fundamentalism in Israel (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1988). ISBN 0876090366. Lustick describes pugnacious ultraconservative Israelis who share the "covenant land" territorial goals of Christian fundamentalists, though the two groups have little else in common.

[5] Margot Patterson, "Will fundamentalist Christians and Jews ignite apocalypse?" National Catholic Reporter Oct. 11, 2002. Available at

<http://www.rachel.org/library/getfile.cfm?ID=383> . See also, Margot Patterson, "Hebron: A West Bank Magnet for Trouble," National Catholic Reporter Oct. 18, 2004. Available at

<http://www.rachel.org/library/getfile.cfm?ID=384> . And see Margot Patterson, "Americans in every aspect of Mideast conflict," National Catholic Reporter April 12, 2002.

<http://www.rachel.org/library/getfile.cfm?ID=386> And see Jeffery L. Sheler, "Odd Bedfellows; Evangelicals support Israel, but some Jews are skeptical," U.S. News & World Report August 12, 2002. Available at <http://www.rachel.org/library/getfile.cfm?ID=424>

[6] Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1970); ISBN 031027771X.

[7] Tom Hamburger and Jim VandeHei, "Chosen People: How Israel Became a Favorite Cause of Christian Right," *Wall Street Journal* May 23, 2002, pg. A1.

<http://www.rachel.org/library/getfile.cfm?ID=425> And Howard Fineman, "Bush and God," *Newsweek*, March 10, 2003. Available at <http://www.rachel.org/library/getfile.cfm?ID=419>

[8] Nancy Gibbs, "Apocalypse Now," *Time* July 1, 2002. Available at <http://www.rachel.org/library/getfile.cfm?ID=394>

[9] Rick Perlstein, "The Jesus Landing Pad," *Village Voice* May 18, 2004. <http://www.rachel.org/library/getfile.cfm?ID=426> And: Elizabeth Bumiller, "Evangelicals Sway White House on Human Rights Issues Abroad," *New York Times* Oct. 26, 2003.

[10] Andrew Gumbel, "Evangelical Crusaders Prepare to Fight Islam with Aid and a Bible," *The Independent* (UK) April 22, 2003. <http://www.rachel.org/library/getfile.cfm?ID=427> And be sure to read Nicholas Kristof, "Jesus and Jihad," *New York Times* July 17, 2004. <http://www.rachel.org/library/getfile.cfm?ID=434> .

[11] David Rennie, "Bible Belt Missionaries Set Out On a 'War for Souls' in Iraq," *London Telegraph* (UK) Dec. 27, 2003. <http://www.rachel.org/library/getfile.cfm?ID=428> And see Maureen Dowd, "A Tale of Two Fridays," *New York Times* April 20, 2003.

[12] Martin E. Marty, "The Sin of Pride," *Newsweek* Mar. 10, 2003. <http://www.rachel.org/library/getfile.cfm?ID=429>

[13] Terri Gross's "Fresh Air" radio program, "The Jesus Factor," on WHYY (Philadelphia) April 29, 2004. Available for listening at http://freshair.npr.org/week_fa.jhtml

Recently two leading neoconservatives acknowledged that the Iraq war has religious as well as "geopolitical" motivations. Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, and Daniel Pipes, whom President Bush appointed to the board of directors of the US Institute for Peace, have both said the ultimate purpose of the "war on terror" is an "Islamic reformation," the "modernization" of Islam, or "religion-building" rather than "nation-building," as they put it. See Jim Lobe, "US: From nation-building to religion-building," *Asia*

Times April 9, 2004.

<http://www.rachel.org/library/getfile.cfm?ID=435>

[14] Grace Halsell, *Prophecy and Politics; Militant Evangelists on the Road to Nuclear War* (Westport, Conn.: Lawrence Hill & Co., 1986). ISBN 0-88208-210-8. Essential reading.

[15] Economist Paul Krugman has noticed that the Bush administration "governs like there's no tomorrow" but he makes no theological connection to this observation. See "Looting the Future," *New York Times* Dec. 5, 2003. <http://www.rachel.org/library/getfile.cfm?ID=430>

[16] Robert S. Devine, *Bush Versus the Environment* (New York: Anchor Books, 2004); ISBN 1400075211.

[17] Andrew Buncombe, "The defiance of science," *Independent* (UK) June 29, 2004. <http://www.rachel.org/library/getfile.cfm?ID=431>

And see *Scientific Integrity in Policymaking; Investigation into the Bush Administration's Misuse of Science* (Cambridge, Mass.: Union of Concerned Scientists, February 2004). And see *Scientific Integrity in Policymaking; Further Investigation...* (Cambridge, Mass.: Union of Concerned Scientists, July 2004), both available at http://www.ucsusa.org/global_environment/rsi/page.cfm?pageID=1449 .

[18] Donald Kennedy, "Editorial: An Epidemic of Politics," *Science* Vol. 299 (Jan. 31, 2003), pg. 625. <http://www.rachel.org/library/getfile.cfm?ID=432>

[19] Peter Perl, "Absolute Truth," *Washington Post Sunday Magazine* May 13, 2001, pg. W12. <http://www.rachel.org/library/getfile.cfm?ID=433>

[20] Nicholas D. Kristof, "The God Gulf," *New York Times* Jan. 7, 2004.

[21] Mark A. Beliles and Stephen M. McDowell, *America's Providential History* (Charlottesville, Va.: Providence Foundation, 1989), pg. 197. ISBN 1887456007. This is a textbook aimed at teenagers that falsifies American history to make it appear that the founding fathers intended the U.S. to be a Christian theocracy, despite the absence of evidence in the Constitution.

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